

**PUBLIC**

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**07 March 2007**

**UA 56/07**      **Fear for safety/Death threats**

**NIGERIA**      **Anyakwee Nsirimovu (m), human rights defender**

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Anyakwee Nsirimovu, Executive Director of the Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (IHRHL) in Rivers State, in the Niger delta, was attacked on 4 March, a week after an apparent threat to kill his family if he did not stop his human rights activities. Amnesty International believes that his life may be in danger.

IHRHL works to promote human rights, democracy and social justice in local communities of the Niger delta region. Last month, IHRHL published a document analysing the Rivers State budget expenditure, and questioning the state government's allocation of funds. In addition, a newsletter published by IHRHL included the text of a report by the international organization Human Rights Watch, entitled *Chop Fine: The Human Rights Impact of Local Government Corruption and Mismanagement in Rivers State, Nigeria* (see link: <http://hrw.org/reports/2007/nigeria0107/> ).

On 2 March, Anyakwee Nsirimovu received an anonymous text message on his mobile phone, threatening him and his family. The message said: "Did I steal your money?", apparently referring to IHRHL's recent exposure of alleged corruption in the state government. The message also said "Did I kill your wife? Did I kill your children? Stop doing what you are doing". The next day, when Anyakwee Nsirimovu tried to telephone the sender's number, he received a second text message warning him not try to contact the number again, saying, "We don't want to talk to you, you either repent or not".

On the evening of 4 March, Anyakwee Nsirimovu was driving back from a meeting, during which he referred to the threats that he had received. Anyakwee Nsirimovu's car was attacked by a group of unknown assailants near the city of Port Harcourt. The group shouted at him to stop the car, but Anyakwee Nsirimovu drove away. As he passed the group, there was a loud noise and the rear windscreen smashed. He managed to drive to a safe place, where he confirmed that neither he nor his passenger was harmed. He said that there were other cars in the road but none of them was stopped by the group of assailants. He believes that the group knew that his car would be passing in that direction, and that he was deliberately targeted as a result of his human rights work.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The political climate in Nigeria, and especially in the Niger delta states in the south of the country, is becoming increasingly violent, in anticipation of the state and general elections due to take place in April 2007. Political office is often sought as a means to get rich, and violence is used by most political parties as a means to retain or acquire power or support. Parties and candidates are reportedly involved in arming supporters and inciting violent clashes.

The wealthiest states in Nigeria are found in the Niger delta. The area is rich in natural resources, making the country one of the world's top oil exporters, but little of this wealth is shared by the population of the area or the rest of the country. In September 2006, the head of the Nigerian federal Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) announced that 31 of 36 State governors could face corruption charges when their terms expired. According to the EFCC, more than US\$380 billion has been stolen or wasted since independence in 1960.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:**

- expressing concern for the safety of Anyakwee Nsirimovu, Executive Director of the Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (IHRHL);
- urging the authorities to take immediate and effective action to protect Anyakwee Nsirimovu in accordance with his wishes;
- calling the authorities to order a thorough and independent investigation into the threatening phone messages and the attack on his car, with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- reminding the authorities that human rights defenders have the right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Promote Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

**APPEALS TO:**

Governor of Rivers State

His Excellency Peter Odili

Governor of Rivers State,

Office of the Governor

Government House

Port Harcourt

Rivers State, Nigeria

**Email:** [gov@riversstatenigeria.net](mailto:gov@riversstatenigeria.net)

**Salutation:** Your Excellency

Ministry of Justice of the Federal Government

Chief Bayo Ojo (SAN)

Minister of Justice

Federal Secretariat Complex

10<sup>th</sup> Floor, Shehu Shagari Way

PMB 192, Abuja, Nigeria

**Fax:** +234 09 5235208 (it may be difficult to get through)

**Salutation:** Dear Minister

**COPIES TO:**

The Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law

2B, Railway Close, Behind NITEL Garrison.

P. O Box 2292, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

**Fax:** + 234 084 231716 (it may be difficult to get through)

**Email:** [ihrhl@ihrhl.org](mailto:ihrhl@ihrhl.org)

and to diplomatic representatives of Nigeria accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 18 April 2007.