

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Nigeria: Amnesty International delegates say prison conditions 'appalling'**

Amnesty International researchers, recently returned from Nigeria, have expressed shock at the prison conditions they witnessed and the protracted delays in Nigeria's justice system.

"The circumstances under which the Nigerian government locks up its inmates are appalling. Many inmates are left for years awaiting trial in filthy overcrowded cells with children and adults often held together," said Aster van Kregten, Nigeria researcher for Amnesty International. "Some prisoners are called 'forgotten inmates' as they never go to court and nobody knows how much longer their detention will last, simply because their case files are lost."

The Amnesty International delegation spent two weeks in Nigeria, visiting 10 prisons in the states of Enugu, Kano and Lagos, and in the Federal Capital Territory.

In the wake of its findings, the organisation called on the Nigerian government to properly fund urgent prison improvements and ensure all inmates are tried within reasonable time.

Inmates in many prisons routinely sleep two to a bed or on the floor in squalid cells. Toilets, often little more than holes in the floor, are generally overflowing by the end of each day. Disease is rampant in the filth and close quarters.

Three out of every five people in Nigeria's prisons are awaiting trial, often for years. Amnesty International researchers spoke to several detainees who reported that they had each spent eight years or more waiting for their cases to conclude. Protracted pre-trial detention is so commonplace in Nigeria that periodic presidential and gubernatorial amnesties are routinely extended to those who have spent more time in prison awaiting trial than the maximum sentence they could receive if eventually convicted.

Children under the age of eighteen were held together with adults in four of the largest prisons Amnesty International visited. In Kuje Prison, located in the Federal Capital Territory, 30 boys—some as young as 11 and 12—shared a dormitory with over 175 adult men.

By law, Nigeria's prisons are tasked with inmates' rehabilitation. Some facilities visited by Amnesty International offered schooling or work opportunities to a limited number of prisoners, but even these centers lacked sufficient books, instructional supplies, and vocational training materials.

All facilities had medical staff and "welfare" officers, personnel charged with safeguarding the well-being of inmates, but prisoners commonly reported that access to staff or medication was available only to those who could afford bribes.

Such extortion may be explained in part—but in no way excused—by the economic hardships guards face. Underpaid as a rule, prison guards had just received their June paychecks at the end of July, they told Amnesty International.

Amnesty International's finding confirm those of various Nigerian presidential working groups and committees as well as other national and international organisations over several years.

"Our findings should not come as any surprise to the Nigerian government since the dire situation in the

country's prisons has already been highlighted by numerous experts and organisations. What is needed now is urgent government action to tackle the enormous human misery and injustice of this situation, said Michael Bochenek, Amnesty International's Director of Policy and a member of the delegation to Nigeria.

Amnesty International will release a full report of its findings later this year.

#### Public Document

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