

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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NIGERIA General (Retd) Olusegun Obasanjo, former head of state Brigadier-General Lewan Gwadabe, 46, General Officer Commanding 23rd Armoured Brigade, Yola, northern Nigeria
Major-General (Retd) Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, former deputy head of state Bayo Onanuga, editor-in-chief, *The News* newspaper group and about 28 others

Amnesty International is concerned at the detention, incommunicado and without charge or trial, of a former head of state as well as other civilians and serving officers of the armed forces. The reason for the arrests is not clear, but is believed to be in connection with an alleged plot against the military government. However, Amnesty International believes that some are probably prisoners of conscience, imprisoned for the non-violent expression of their political views.

Following press reports of widespread arrests of armed forces officers on 3 and 4 March 1995, the military authorities announced on 10 March that 29 civilians and officers had been arrested in connection with a plot to overthrow General Sani Abacha's government. On 13 March the authorities said an investigation panel would recommend who should be brought before a special tribunal on the capital charge of attempting to overthrow the government. The 29 detainees were not identified but were reported to include Brigadier-General Lewan Gwadabe.

On 9 March Major-General (Retd) Shehu Musa Yar'Adua was arrested in the capital, Abuja; former Chief of Staff in the 1976-79 military government and previously detained briefly in February 1994, he was a presidential candidate in 1992 and has been a critic of the present military government as a member of the consultative Constitutional Conference which has recommended the government hand over to a civilian government by January 1996. On 10 March, Bayo Onanuga was reportedly arrested; he and his staff at *The News* newspaper group have previously been detained for publishing criticisms of the government.

On 13 March General (Retd) Olusegun Obasanjo was arrested by police at his home in Ota, near Lagos, the day after his passport was seized on his return to Nigeria from a visit abroad. Head of the military government after the assassination of General Murtala Mohammed in 1976, he voluntarily handed over power to an elected civilian government in 1979 and has been critical of the present military government. He has been taken to an unknown location and his family have not been informed of his whereabouts.

The detainees are probably being held under the terms of the 1984 State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree, which provides for the indefinite detention without charge or trial of any person considered by the government to threaten the security of the state. Political detainees have been held for months and sometimes years under this decree. In 1994 the government ignored several court orders to produce political detainees before the courts, and in October amended the State Security Decree specifically to prohibit such court orders, whether made under the human rights provisions of the constitution or by writ of *habeas corpus*.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The political crisis in Nigeria remains unresolved with the continued imprisonment on treason charges of the undeclared winner of the annulled 1993 presidential elections, Chief Moshood Abiola, and the continued detention without charge or trial of several others opposed to the continuation of military rule. Among those arrested in recent weeks is Sylvester Odion-Akhaine, General Secretary of the Campaign for Democracy, arrested on 17 January 1995 and still detained without charge or trial.

Following an alleged coup plot in 1986, 10 armed forces officers were executed after a grossly unfair and secret trial by special military tribunal in which their rights of defence were denied. A coup attempt in 1990 was followed by the execution of 69 officers after equally unfair trials, and at least 11 soldiers remain in administrative detention under the State Security Decree.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express and airmail letters either in English or in your own language:

- expressing concern at the detention without charge or trial of those named above and about 30 others reportedly held in connection with an alleged plot to overthrow the government;
- seeking assurances that all those detained are being held in accordance with international standards for detention conditions and urging that they all be given immediate access to lawyers, families and appropriate medical care;
- expressing concern that some are probably prisoners of conscience, imprisoned for the non-violent expression of their political views, and appealing for all such prisoners of conscience to be immediately and unconditionally released;
- calling for the other detainees to be released immediately and unconditionally if they are not to be promptly charged with recognizably criminal offences and fairly tried in open court.

APPEALS TO

General Sani Abacha
 Chairman, Provisional Ruling Council
 State House,
 Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Telegrams: General Abacha, Abuja, Nigeria
Faxes: +234 95 232138
Salutation: Dear General

Major-General Abdulsalam A. Abubakar
 Chief of Defence Staff
 Provisional Ruling Council
 State House
 Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Telegrams: Chief of Defence Staff, Abuja, Nigeria
Salutation: Dear Major-General

Alhaji Aminu Saleh
 Secretary to the Government of the Federation of Nigeria
 State House
 Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Telegrams: Secretary Saleh, State House, Abuja, Nigeria
Salutation: Dear Secretary

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Baba Gana Kingibe
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Maputo Street
PMB 130, Abuja
Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

The Editor, *The News*, PMB 21531, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Tell*, PMB 21749, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Daily Times*, PMB 21340, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Vanguard*, PMB 1007, Apapa, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Nigerian Observer*, PMB 1334, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria
The Editor, *Nigerian Tribune*, POB 78, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

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 1 May 1995.