

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 44/02/98

UA 16/98 Fear of torture or ill-treatment / Medical
Concern / Prisoners of conscience

16 January 1998

NIGERIA Batom Mitee, former prisoner of conscience and younger brother
of Ledum Mitee, exiled Acting President of the Movement for
the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP)
Tombari Gioro, member of the Ogoni community
and some 30 other members of the Ogoni community

On 3 January 1998 Batom Mitee, Tombari Gioro and some 20 members of the Ogoni community were arrested in Bori, the main Ogoni town, by armed troops from the Internal Security Task Force. This a joint military and paramilitary force set up in April 1994 to repress peaceful protests against the multinational petroleum company Shell by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). Batom Mitee and Tombari Gioro are reported to have been beaten with rifle butts and electric cables and to have subsequently been denied food and medical attention for their injuries. At least one woman, a young member of staff at Batom Mitee's hotel, was reportedly assaulted, raped and detained when soldiers looted and ransacked the hotel on 3 January.

In total, at least 30 members of the Ogoni community are reported to have been arrested on 3 and 4 January 1998 to stop them organizing activities or commemorative events to mark Ogoni Day - 4 January. Early on 4 January, troops reportedly drove out the occupants of Kegbara Dere and Zaakpon villages with gunfire. In Bori, **Beatrice Nwikipasi** (f) is reported to have been shot and subsequently carried away by soldiers after troops fired into a crowd of protesters. Troops apparently dispersed church-goers with gunfire at Assemblies of God churches in Bori and Bo-ue, and broke up a funeral in Kanni.

Among those arrested were **Mary Sunday** (f), **Saturday Zorasi** and **Eebu Nkeh**. It appears some detainees may have since been released; in previous years, detainees not perceived to be leading members of MOSOP have been released after days or weeks in detention after their families have paid bribes to soldiers. However, further arrests are said to have since been carried out in Kegbara Dere and Kaani.

The crackdown appeared to begin on 16 December 1997 when soldiers reportedly arrested 17 people in the villages of Lewe and Bo-ue, apparently for planning peaceful activities for Ogoni Day. They were detained without charge or trial at detention centres in Bori and Kpor until 5 January 1998 when 11 of them were released without charge. It is not clear whether one of those detained, **Chief Innocent Nador**, has yet been released.

On 6 January 1998 two people based in Port Harcourt were arrested, apparently for reporting on the detentions in Ogoniland. **Anyakwee Nsirimovu**, Executive Director of the Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, and journalist **Tokunbo Awoshakin** of *This Day* newspaper, are reported to have been released without charge after a few days.

On 7 January 1998 soldiers reportedly ransacked and seized property from homes of members of the Mitee family, including the home of Batom Mitee; the home in Port Harcourt of Ledum Mitee, his elder brother and exiled Acting President of MOSOP since the execution of MOSOP President Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni in November 1995; and the home in Kegbara Dere village of their mother, Lydia Mitee.

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

- expressing concern at reports of the arrests of Batom Mitee, Tombari Gioro and some 30 members of the Ogoni community to prevent them participating in non-violent political activities on Ogoni Day;
- expressing particular concern at the reports of torture or ill-treatment, including rape, of detainees, and that Batom Mitee and Tombari Gioro have been denied food and medical care after being severely beaten;
- seeking assurances that any people still held will be immediately safeguarded from further torture or ill-treatment and given access to their lawyers and families and to appropriate medical care of their own choice;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of any detainees still held, whom Amnesty International considers to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely on account of their non-violent political activities.

APPEALS TO:

General Sani Abacha
Chairman, Provisional Ruling Council
State House, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Faxes: c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs +234-9-523 0394 / 0210
Telegrams: General Abacha, Abuja, Nigeria
Salutation: Dear General

Colonel M. Shehu
State Military Administrator
Government House
91000 Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
Telegrams: Colonel Shehu, Government House, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Salutation: Dear Colonel

Major Obi Umahi
Commander, Internal Security Task Force
Bori Military Camp
Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
Telegrams: Major Umahi, Bori Military Camp, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Salutation: Dear Major

COPIES TO:

Chief Tom Ikimi
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maputo Street
PMB 130, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Faxes: +234-9-523 0394 / 0210

Mr Justice P.K. Nwokedi, Chairman
National Human Rights Commission
National Assembly Complex, Maitama
PMB 444, Garki, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

The Editor, *This Day*, PO Box 54749, Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *The Week*, PO Box 11333, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *The Guardian*, PMB 1217, Oshodi, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Daily Sunray*, 220 Aba Road, Port Harcourt, Rivers 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 March 1998.