

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Please organize up to 20 appeals per section

UA 434/91 Prisoners of conscience/legal concern

11 December 1991

NIGERIA

Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu, former leading member of National Party of Nigeria, the ruling party from 1979 to 1983, in Oyo State

Chief Bola Ige, former Governor of Oyo State

Alhaji Lateef Kayode Jakande, former Governor of Lagos State

Alhaji Lawal Keita, former Governor of Kaduna State

Chief Francis Arthur Nzeribe, former Senator, previously detained without charge or trial from March to April 1991

Chief C.C. Onoh, former Governor of Anambra State

Alhaji Mohammed Abubakar Rimi, former Governor of Kano State

Dr Olusola Sariki, former leader of the National Party of Nigeria in the Senate

Dr Paul Unongo, psycho-pathologist, former Minister of Steel, previously detained incommunicado and without charge or trial, April to June 1990

Maj-Gen (Retd) Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, former Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, and senior member of the military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo (1976-79)

Alhaji Bello Maitama Yusuf, former Minister of Commerce

The 11 former government officials and political leaders named above have been imprisoned for being involved illegally in political activity. Although another former government official was detained without trial from May to October 1989 on similar charges, this new wave of arrests comes just before elections for state governorships. Amnesty International is concerned that there may be further such arrests leading up to the return to civilian government in 1992. It considers the 11 to be prisoners of conscience who have been imprisoned for the expression of their non-violent political views and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release.

Most of the prisoners were government ministers, state governors or politicians during the 1979 to 1983 period of civilian government, and one was a leading member of the military government in power from 1976 to 1979. On 2 December 1991, 11 of them were arrested and charged: nine of them were remanded in custody until 16 January 1992 and two were subsequently released on bail on grounds of ill-health - Chief Solomon Dwashep Lar, a former Governor of Plateau State, and Chief Jim Ifeanyichukwu Nwobodo, a former Governor of Anambra State.

Two others - Alhaji Lawal Keita and Dr Paul Unongo - were arrested shortly afterwards, charged and remanded in custody. They were charged before the Transition to Civil Rule Tribunal, a special court established in 1987 to try offences under the military government's program for the transition to civilian government in 1992. The court's five members are appointed by the head of the government, General Ibrahim Babangida; they are presided over by a serving or retired judge.

The 13 accused were charged under the Participation in Politics and Elections (Prohibition) Decree, No. 25 of 1987, which prohibits former government officials from involvement in politics during the transition to civilian rule even if they have not been convicted of committing any offences while previously in office. They are reported to have been accused of sponsoring candidates for the forthcoming elections for civilian state governorships which take place on 14 December 1991. Offences under this decree, as amended, are punishable by up to five years' imprisonment or a fine or both.

Page 2 of UA 434/91

Many senior officials in the civilian Federal and State governments in office between 1979 and 1983 were convicted of corruption and embezzlement after the military seized power again at the end of 1983. To encourage the emergence of a new political leadership, former government officials who had been convicted of offences were banned from holding government or political posts in the future. Also, former civilian government officials who had not been convicted of any offence were disqualified from office during the period leading up to the restoration of civilian government in 1992.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the imprisonment of 11 former government officials and political leaders on charges of involvement in illegal political activity;

- explaining that Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience who have been imprisoned for the expression of their non-violent political views and is appealing for their immediate and unconditional release;

- calling also for the withdrawal of charges against the two out on bail;

- urging the repeal of the Participation in Politics and Elections (Prohibition) Decree, No. 25 of 1987, which, by providing for the imprisonment of former government officials and political leaders whether they have ever been convicted of committing an offence or not, allows the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience.

APPEALS TO

1) General Ibrahim Babangida **Dear Mr President**
President, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces
State House, Ribadu Road
Ikoyi Island, Lagos, Nigeria
Telegrams: President Babangida, Lagos, Nigeria
Telexes: 21444 EXTNAL NG or 21236 EXTNAL NG
(via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

2) Admiral (Retd) Augustus Aikhomu **Dear Mr Vice-President**
Vice-President
State House, Ribadu Road
Ikoyi Island, Lagos, Nigeria
Telegrams: Vice-President Aikhomu, Lagos, Nigeria
Telexes: 21444 EXTNAL NG or 21236 EXTNAL NG
(via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

3) Prince Bola Ajibola **Dear Minister**
Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice
Minister of Justice
The Old Secretariat, PMB 12517, Marina

Lagos, Nigeria

Telegrams: Justice Minister Ajibola, Lagos, Nigeria

COPIES TO:

Major-General (Retd) Ike O.S. Nwachukwu
Minister of External Affairs
Ministry of External Affairs
Maputo Street, Abuja
Federal Capital Territory
Nigeria

Nigerian Tribune, POB 78, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria
New Democrat, POB 4457, Kaduna South, Kaduna State, Nigeria
Daily Star, PMB 1139, Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria
The Triumph, PMB 3155, Kano, Kano State, Nigeria
National Concord, POB 4483, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria
Nigerian Standard, PMB 2112, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

and to diplomatic representatives of Nigeria in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 22 January 1992.