

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 44/24/97

UA 368/97 Fear of ill-treatment / legal concern / possible prisoner of conscience

NIGERIAOgaga Ifowodo, aged 34, lawyer, member of the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO)

Amnesty International is concerned at the continued detention of Ogaga Ifowodo, a member of the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), a leading human rights organization in Nigeria. Ogaga Ifowodo has been in incommunicado detention, without charge or trial, since his return to Nigeria from the United Kingdom (UK) on around 6 November 1997.

On 13 November the security police, the State Security Services (SSS), confirmed his detention at their offices in Ikoyi, Lagos. No reason has been given for his arrest.

It appears that Ogaga Ifowodo may have been detained as a consequence of his visit to the UK at the time of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, 24 to 27 October. A number of human rights defenders and several Nigerian non-governmental organizations were present in Edinburgh, where the meeting took place, to demonstrate their support for action by the Commonwealth to help restore democracy and respect for human rights in Nigeria.

Restrictions by the Nigerian Government on freedom of movement, usually by seizure of passports or detentions, have made it increasingly difficult for human rights defenders to leave or return to Nigeria openly or without fear of arrest.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting maintained the suspension of Nigeria's membership of the Commonwealth, imposed in November 1995 after the political executions of the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight Ogoni co-defendants.

Its decision not to impose sanctions but to give the Nigerian Government another year to fulfil its transition to civilian rule was criticized by Nigerian human rights and pro-democracy groups in view of the Nigerian Government's failure to release political prisoners, introduce meaningful human rights reforms or allow opposition groups to participate in a credible transition process.

Critics of the government have continued to be detained, incommunicado and without charge or trial, under the draconian provisions of the State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree, No. 2 of 1984. This allows the government to detain any person it considers to be a threat to the security of the state.

There are no safeguards against ill-treatment of detainees and the Decree specifically excludes the courts from making any order with respect to any detainee held under the Decree. Detainees have frequently been held in harsh and health-threatening conditions.

Since the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, there has been a wave of arrests of journalists, particularly of those who have maintained a critical stance towards the military government despite repeated detentions, ill-treatment, harassment and threats (see UA 347/97, 44/21/97, 5 November and updates 44/22/97, 20 November and 44/23/97, 21 November).

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

- expressing concern at the continued detention, since around 6 November 1997, without charge or trial of Ogaga Ifowodo, a member of the Civil Liberties Organisation;
- expressing concern that he may be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned for his work as a human rights defender, and asking the reasons for his arrest and continued detention;
- urging that he be safeguarded against ill-treatment and given immediate and full access to his lawyer, family and a doctor of his own choice;
- calling for him to be released immediately and unconditionally if he is not to be promptly charged and fairly tried in accordance with international standards of fair trial.

APPEALS TO:

General Sani Abacha
Chairman, Provisional Ruling Council
State House, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Telegrams: General Abacha, Abuja, Nigeria
Faxes: + 234 9 523 2138
Salutation: Dear General

Dr Bukar Usman
Director General, Special Services Office
State House, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Telegrams: Dr Usman, State House, Abuja, Nigeria
Salutation: Dear Dr Usman

Alhaji Ibrahim Coomasie
Inspector General of Police
Nigeria Police Force Headquarters
Garki, Abuja, Nigeria
Telegrams: Inspector General Police, Abuja, Nigeria
Salutation: Dear Inspector General

COPIES TO:

Chief Tom Ikimi
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maputo Street
PMB 130, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

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

CLO, 1A Hussey Street, Jibowu, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Daily Times*, PMB 21340, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Sunday Vanguard*, PMB 1007, Apapa, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Nigerian Tribune*, PO Box 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 7 January 1998.