

UA 131/98 Possible prisoners of conscience / Fear of ill-treatment

24 April 1998

**NIGERIA** Mufutau Lateef, company accountant  
Anthony Nwana, chief librarian  
Borisanmi Olutoye, Assistant Chief Security Officer  
Rotimi Obasa Yomi Osoba, special project executive  
Austin Uganwa, journalist  
and two other employees of *The News* media group

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The above named people and two other unnamed employees of *The News* media group were detained by security officers on 20 April 1998 and may be at risk of ill-treatment, including harsh conditions of detention.

The arrests were made when around 50 armed officers of the State Security Service (SSS), the security police, raided the two separate administrative and editorial offices of Independent Communications Network Ltd (ICNL) in Ikeja, Lagos.

All staff members were held for about three hours while the agents searched the administrative office, subsequently arresting Mufutau Lateef. At the editorial office, Anthony Nwana, Borisanmi Olutoye, Rotimi Obasa Yomi Osoba and Austin Uganwa were arrested. At least two other staff members have reportedly also been detained. On 23 April, ICNL's computers were taken away and on 24 April its editorial office was sealed by armed police.

All are reportedly held at the Lagos headquarters of the federal police, the Federal Intelligence and Investigations Bureau, in Alagbon Close, Ikoyi, Lagos. The authorities have not stated the reasons for the arrests and no charges have been brought against those detained.

Under the State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree, No. 2 of 1984, any person deemed to threaten the security or the economy of the state may be detained indefinitely, incommunicado and without charge or trial. Political prisoners have routinely been held in harsh and life-threatening conditions which amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The Decree prohibits any legal challenge to detention and provides no safeguards against torture or ill-treatment.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

ICNL publishes *The News* magazine and *Tempo* and *PM News* newspapers, which are all noted for their continued criticism of the Nigerian Government. Despite ICNL staff having been repeatedly imprisoned or driven into exile under the present government, *The News*, *Tempo* and *PM News* have continued to be published, in semi-clandestine conditions. Their distribution agents and vendors have frequently been harassed.

**Kunle Ajibade**, editor of *The News*, was one of four journalist prisoners of conscience sentenced in 1995 to 15 years' imprisonment after secret treason trials. Three ICNL staff have been detained without charge or trial since November 1997: **Babafemi Ojudu**, managing editor, **Rafiu Salau**, administrative manager, and **Adetokunbo Fakeye**, defence correspondent (see UA 347/97, AFR 44/21/98, 5 November 1997, and updates).

Assaults, arrests and administrative detention of journalists have increased since October 1997. In one case, on 15 April 1998, police reportedly horse-whipped **Ademola Adeyemo** and **Dan Ukana** of *This Day* newspaper, **Wale Ogundoyin** of *Omega* magazine, and **Sanya Adejokun** of the *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper. They were reporting on a pro-democracy rally in Ibadan, southwestern Nigeria, in which at least two people were reportedly shot dead, including Tunji Olaleye, a 17-year-old motor mechanic, and dozens arrested by police (see UA 117/98, AFR 44/23/98, 16 April 1998).

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

- expressing concern at the arrest on 20 April 1998 of further employees of *The News* media group, apparently solely for the exercise of their profession, and asking the reason for their arrest;
- urging that they will be protected from ill-treatment in detention, and that they be given immediate access to their families, lawyers and doctors of their own choice;
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release if they are not to be charged with recognizably criminal offences and promptly and fairly tried;
- appealing for an end to the repeated assault and arbitrary detention of journalists and other news media managers and staff.

**APPEALS TO:**

General Sani Abacha

Chairman, Provisional Ruling Council  
State House, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

**Telegrams: General Abacha, Abuja, Nigeria**

**Faxes: c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs + 234 9 523 0394/0210 ("please forward")**

**Salutation: Dear General**

Dr Auwalu Hamisu Yadudu

Special adviser to the Head of State on legal matters  
State House, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

**Telegrams: Dr Yadudu, State House, Abuja, Nigeria**

**Salutation: Dear Dr Yadudu**

Deputy Inspector-General of Police

Federal Intelligence and Investigations Bureau (FIIB)  
Alagbon Close, Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria

**Telegrams: Deputy Inspector General Police, FIIB, Lagos, Nigeria**

**Salutation: Dear Deputy Inspector General**

**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, PMB 444, Garki  
Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

The Editor, *Tempo*, PMB 21531, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria

The Editor, *Daily Times*, PMB 21340, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria

The Editor, *National Concord*, POB 4483, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria

The Editor, *This Day*, PO Box 54749, Ikoyi, Lagos, 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 6 June 1998.