

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Nigeria: Intimidation of human rights defenders**

Amnesty International today expressed grave concern at a wave of growing intimidation, by Nigerian authorities, targeting the Nigerian human rights community in violation of the basic rights of freedom of expression and movement of citizens.

In the course of last week, the passports of three human rights activists were confiscated by the security forces at Murtala Mohammed Airport in Lagos. The human rights defenders were then interrogated for hours by agents of the State Security Service (SSS), the Nigerian federal security agency.

"It is ironic that just a few days before the international Human Rights Day, human rights defenders are targeted and deprived of their basic rights," Amnesty International said. "The Nigerian government should return all the confiscated passports and cease any further harassment or intimidation of human rights defenders, as well as end a practice which violates the freedom of movement and the freedom of expression of Nigerians," the organization urged.

Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, chairman of the board of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) had his passport confiscated at the airport by the SSS for several hours.

The SSS is yet to return the passports of Iheoma Obibi, director of the Alliance for Africa, whose passport was seized on 6 December and Jiti Oguye, secretary of the National Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADL), whose passport was confiscated on 5 December.

Joy Ezeilo, executive director of Women's Aid Collective (WACOL), was summoned for interrogation by the SSS on 5 December and prevented from travelling abroad.

Last week's wave of harassment and intimidation of human rights activists comes after two members of the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), another human rights organization, were summoned for questioning by the SSS in October 2002, in relation to their participation in writing a report on impunity and state-sponsored violence in Nigeria. The two CLO workers refused to respond to this request unless they are given a clear explanation as to why they were called for interrogation.

"President Obasanjo should take immediate measures to end disregard for international standards protecting human rights defenders," Amnesty International said.

These standards include the Johannesburg Declaration on Human Rights Defenders in Africa of 1998, and the United Nations 1998 Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups

and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

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