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NIGERIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNS EXECUTION OF KEN SARO-WIWA AND EIGHT OTHERS

Amnesty International reacted with horror to the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni supporters of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). The News Agency of Nigeria announced that the nine were executed.

The executions took place less than two weeks after the nine defendants were convicted on 30 and 31 October 1995 following two simultaneous trials by special tribunal. Their charges were in connection with the mob killing of four Ogoni leaders in May 1994.

"Ken Saro-Wiwa successfully articulated Ogoni concerns in the international arena, reflecting also the concerns of many small ethnic groups in Nigeria but particularly in the oil-producing regions of the southeast about environmental degradation of their land and their continuing poverty and powerlessness," Amnesty International said.

"By killing Ken Saro-Wiwa, Nigeria has silenced one of its most effective critics and we urge world leaders to maintain their pressure on Nigeria in the face of its government's continuing contempt for human rights."

Amnesty International believes that at least two of the nine - Ken Saro-Wiwa, writer and environmentalist, and Dr Barinem Kiobel, a former Rivers State Commissioner (minister) - were prisoners of conscience, sentenced because of the non-violent expression of their political views, and that the other defendants were possible prisoners of conscience.

Ken Saro-Wiwa and other activists had been targeted by the Nigerian authorities in recent years because of MOSOP's political campaign against environmental damage by oil companies - notably Shell - and for increased autonomy for the Ogoni ethnic group.

Their trials were politically-motivated and the special tribunal appointed to try them by the Federal Military Government - a Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal - was neither independent nor impartial. Fundamental rights of defence were denied, in particular the right of appeal to a higher and independent court - rights which are guaranteed under Nigeria's own Constitution and under international human rights treaties to which Nigeria is committed such as the African Charter for Human and People's Rights and the United Nations' International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

NOTE TO EDITORS -- PHOTO OPPORTUNITY!

The UK Section of Amnesty International has organized a 24 hour vigil for Ken Saro-Wiwa at: Nigeria House, 9 Northumberland Avenue, from Friday 8 am until 8 am Saturday morning.

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An Amnesty International spokesperson, Norma Johnston, will be at the vigil and available for interviews. She can be reached on mobile phone number: 0421 398 984 or on +181 878 6425.  
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