

---

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 94/94

---

TO: PRESS OFFICERS  
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE  
DATE: 5 MAY 1994

NO OF WORDS:1081

AI INDEX: NWS 11/94/94  
DISTR: SC/PO

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA, NIGERIA

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Saudi Arabia - 10 May - SEE NEWS SERVICE 62

Burundi - 17 May - SEE NEWS SERVICES 81/94, 53/94 and 36/94

China - 1 June - SEE NEWS SERVICE 81/94

Pakistan - 29 June - SEE NEWS SERVICE 81/94

## TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

China - 5 May - SEE NEWS SERVICES 81/94 AND 86/94

## FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Annual Report - 7 July - SEE NEWS SERVICE 51/94

**News Service 94/94**

**AI INDEX: EUR 63/WU 04/94**

**5 MAY 1994**

**AID WORKERS HELD IN BOSNIA MAY BE HOSTAGES**

Eleven French aid workers being held by the *de facto* Bosnian Serb authorities may be hostages, according to Amnesty International. "If so, they should be immediately released", Amnesty International said.

When they were detained on 8 April, workers from the organization Première Urgence were taking lorries carrying humanitarian aid to Sarajevo. Their lorries were reportedly parked overnight under the control of the Bosnian Serb authorities.

The following day, arms were allegedly discovered in the lorries, in the presence of a Bosnian Serb television crew, and the workers were accused of attempting to smuggle them to the mainly Muslim Bosnian army. Unconfirmed reports suggest that three of the French aid workers will soon be brought to trial by the Bosnian Serb authorities.

When Première Urgence requested access to the detainees two weeks ago, a Bosnian Serb official stated that they were prepared to exchange the aid workers for 11 medical staff held by the mainly Muslim Bosnian authorities.

On the basis of this statement and other information, Amnesty International says that there are strong grounds to believe that the aid workers are being held as hostages, detained solely for the purpose of securing the release of prisoners held by the Bosnian Government authorities and in contravention of international humanitarian standards.

The 1949 Geneva Conventions for the protection of victims of war expressly prohibit the taking of hostages in any armed conflicts, whether a civil war or international war. Hostage-taking can also amount to a war crime for which individuals can be prosecuted and tried by the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

In the letter responding to the request by Première Urgence, the Bosnian Serb authorities referred specifically to five doctors and two nurses who were already being held by Bosnian Muslim authorities in Sarajevo and other individuals whom, in their words, "we will determine".

Amnesty International believes these to be among a group of five doctors and three nurses, predominantly Serbs, who were until recently staff at the Koševo hospital in Sarajevo. The Bosnian authorities have reportedly held them in detention in Sarajevo since January 1994, when they tried to cross to Bosnian Serb-controlled areas.

Amnesty International has urged the Bosnian government to clarify the reason for their arrest and has called for their release if they have not committed any recognisably criminal offence.

**ENDS/**

**News Service 94/94**

**AI INDEX: AFR 44/WU 01/94  
5 MAY 1994**

**CONTINUING HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS AMONG NIGERIA'S OGONI**

**Amnesty International fears that the Nigerian authorities are trying to cover up a continuing human rights crisis among the Ogoni ethnic group.**

The human rights organization is gravely concerned for the safety of the community following the latest in a series of killings in which the Nigerian security forces have been implicated. Amnesty International is also concerned about the establishment, last month, of a special court with the power to impose the death penalty. The organization fears the court's powers may be used against Ogoni detainees after hasty and unfair trials.

On 3 April 1994, about 20 people are reported to have been killed in clashes between members of the Ogoni and Ndoki ethnic groups in Rivers State, southeast Nigeria. There have been allegations that the security forces encouraged Ndoki villagers to attack Ogoni villages over a long-standing and previously non-violent land dispute. The security forces then reportedly followed the Ndoki attackers, burning down several Ogoni villages, including Ledor on 16 April and Tumbee on 18 April. Several Ogoni villagers were arrested and reportedly remain in detention without charge or trial. On 21 April, the Rivers State police ordered hundreds of police and military personnel into Ogoniland to maintain law and order.

At about the same time, the Rivers State authorities set up a special court - the Civil Disturbances Tribunal - with the power to impose the death penalty, not only for capital offenses committed in connection with the unrest but also apparently for previously non-capital crimes such as "attempted murder". The tribunal's members may include armed forces officers as low as the rank of captain. Although chaired by a retired judge, its members are not required to have legal training. Defendants may appeal to the High Court but trials before other special courts set up in recent years to try civil unrest and other political cases have been grossly unfair.

The incident on 3 April is not the first time Nigerian security forces have been implicated in the deaths of Rivers State villagers. In October 1990 about 80 people in Umuechem were killed and their village razed by police; a judicial commission of inquiry recommended prosecution of named police officers but its findings were kept secret and no one was brought to justice.

In 1993 the security forces are alleged to have been responsible for a number of extrajudicial executions after being brought into Ogoniland ostensibly to maintain order. Although hundreds of Ogoni were reportedly killed in inter-communal fighting in 1993, there was evidence implicating the security forces in some killings. An official inquiry into some of these killings has not made its findings public.

Amnesty International is calling for immediate measures to be taken to protect the Ogoni people from further attacks. "There must be a thorough and impartial investigation into the reports of extrajudicial executions by security forces and the inter-communal killings in Rivers State in 1993 and 1994", Amnesty International said. "The findings of the investigation should be made public and those found responsible should be brought to justice in accordance with international standards".

The human rights organization also urges that any people detained in the context of the conflict in Ogoniland be tried in accordance with international standards for fair trial and that the death penalty not be imposed.

Amnesty International is also concerned that attempts by independent observers of human rights and environmental concerns to undertake research in Ogoniland has been obstructed by the authorities, with delegates being either detained or denied entry.

**Journalists from the Nigerian Guardian and the US Wall Street Journal were briefly detained while investigating the 3 April killings.**

**ENDS/**