

UA 108/98 Fear of ill-treatment/possible prisoners of conscience

8 April 1998

NIGERIA Joshua Ogbonna, publisher of *The Rising Sun* newspaper
John Edward, publisher of *Prime Sunset* newspaper
Ganiyu Adeoye, assistant editor of *Prime Sunset* newspaper
Chidi Nwokpara and Donatus Njoku, freelance journalists
Danlami Nmodu, Kaduna bureau chief of *Tell* magazine

Further journalists have been arrested and are detained in Nigeria. Amnesty International is concerned that they may be prisoners of conscience arrested solely for the peaceful exercise of their profession as journalists, and that they may be at risk of ill-treatment, including harsh conditions of detention.

Joshua Ogbonna was arrested on 9 March 1998 following publication of articles critical of a supporter of the government-backed campaign to "civilianize" the military government. On 22 March **John Edward** and **Ganiyu Adeoye** were arrested by officers of the State Security Services (SSS), the security police, in Lagos. Journalists **Chidi Nwokpara** and **Donatus Njoku** were arrested on 24 March while investigating reports of an explosion at a flow station owned by Agip Oil company in Imo State. They are reportedly held in police custody in Okuta, Imo State. **Danlami Nmodu** was arrested on 27 March by SSS officers at his home in Kaduna, northern Nigeria.

The authorities have not stated the reasons for the journalists' arrest or continued detention without charge or trial. 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

Journalists and other media workers have been routinely targeted for arrest, ill-treatment and administrative detention. Independent news media, including *Tell* magazine, have been forced to operate under increasingly clandestine conditions under General Abacha's military rule, because of their criticism of the government's human rights record and the current program for transition to civil rule.

Obi Chukwumba, Deputy Editor of *African Concord* news magazine, was arrested on 5 January 1998 and detained for several weeks before being released without charge. On 19 February 1998 **Tunde Yusuff** and **Dunni Fagbayibo** (f), senior managers of the government-owned Ondo State Television, were reportedly assaulted by military personnel attached to the State Military Administrator. Following protests from local journalists, they were suspended from their posts and a military investigation was set up with a mandate which included looking into their financial management. On 3 March 1998, 10 journalists and photo-journalists were arrested while covering a pro-democracy march in Lagos which was broken up forcibly by police; they were released without charge the same day.

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

- expressing concern at reports of the arrest and continued detention of journalists Joshua Ogbonna, John Edward, Ganiyu Adeoye, Chidi Nwokpara, Donatus Njoku and Danlami Nmodu, solely for the exercise of their profession, and asking the reason for their arrest;
- expressing concern that they may be subjected to ill-treatment in detention, and urging that they be given immediate access to their families, lawyers and doctors of their own choice;
- expressing concern that they may be prisoners of conscience and 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 arrests, arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of journalists and other news media workers.

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 0394/0210 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs - write "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

Chief I.K. Mokelu

Minister of Information and Culture
Ministry of Information
Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

Telegrams: Chief Mokelu, Minister Information, Abuja, Nigeria

Salutation: Dear Chief Mokelu

COPIES TO:

Mr Justice P.K. Nwokedi, Chairman

National Human Rights Commission
PMB 444, Garki, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

The Editor, *Tell*, PMB 21749, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria

The Editor, *The Punch*, PMB 21204, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria

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

The Editor, *Today*, PO Box 10281, Kaduna, 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 23 May 1998.