

EXTERNAL

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Fear of ill-treatment /  
Possible prisoner of conscience

13 June 1996

**NIGERIAN** Nnimmo Bassey, 37, architect, environment and human rights campaigner,  
writer and journalist

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Nnimmo Bassey, a leading environmental and human rights campaigner, was detained on 5 June 1996 as he was leaving the country to attend a conference in Ghana organized by the international environmental organization, Friends of the Earth. Amnesty International fears that he may be facing ill-treatment in detention. It is not clear whether he is being held incommunicado.

He was initially held at the Lagos headquarters of the State Security Service, the security police, in Awolowo Road, Ikoyi, and subsequently by the criminal investigation police, the Federal Investigations and Intelligence Bureau (FIIB). He is believed to be currently held at FIIB headquarters in Alagbon Close, Ikoyi, Lagos.

The reasons for his arrest are unclear. He has not been charged with any offence but is believed to be detained under the State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree, No 2 of 1984. This provides for the indefinite incommunicado detention without charge or trial of any person deemed to have threatened the security or the economy of the state. The police have apparently said that he was wanted in connection with protests in Benin City and Ekpoma in Edo State in July and August 1994 in which the homes of a government minister and other government supporters were destroyed and in which some students were alleged to have been unlawfully killed by the security forces. He was among 35 people declared "wanted" by the authorities at the time. At least 30 people, mostly students, were detained in Benin City; many were reported to have been beaten severely at police stations before being transferred to Oko Prison where they were held in harsh conditions. However, the authorities have not arrested Nnimmo Bassey before this time, even though there have been many opportunities to do so, and it seems that his attendance at an international conference of environmentalists may have been the real reason for his arrest. The Nigerian government has on many occasions prevented human rights activists from travelling abroad for such meetings by seizing their passports or detaining them.

On 12 June 1996 the government announced the revocation of a 1994 amendment to Decree 2, which had specifically prohibited the courts from ordering detainees to be produced before them. However, it remains to be seen whether judicial review of security detentions will be allowed. Even unamended, Decree 2 prohibits any legal proceedings against the government for action taken under the Decree or any court action to contest any detention which contravenes the fundamental rights provisions of the Constitution, and the military government has routinely ignored court orders.

Nnimmo Bassey is Chairman of Environmental Rights Action and of the Southern Zone of the Civil Liberties Organization, both leading Nigerian rights groups.

He is also a leading member of OilWatch International, a new support network for communities affected by the oil industry, as well as President of African Architecture and Secretary General of the Association of Nigerian Authors, both Nigerian organizations.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Political prisoners in Nigeria have been subjected to torture or ill-treatment, including severe beatings and serious medical neglect. They are held in harsh conditions in police cells and prisons which amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Detainees have reported being deprived of food and water for several days following arrest, and there is a high death rate in prisons from malnutrition and medical neglect.

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

- expressing concern at the arrest on 5 June 1996 and subsequent detention of leading environmentalist and human rights activist Nnimmo Bassey;
- asking to be informed of the reasons for Nnimmo Bassey's detention and expressing concern that he may have been imprisoned because of his environmental and human rights activities;
- urging that Nnimmo Bassey be allowed full and immediate access to his lawyer and family, and to appropriate medical care;
- calling for his release unless he is promptly to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and fairly tried according to international standards for fair trial.

**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 2138**  
**Telexes: (0905) 91529 or 91530 EXTNAL NG**  
**Salutation: Dear General**

Mr Michael Agbamuche  
 Minister of Justice and Attorney General  
 Ministry of Justice, PMB 130, Abuja  
 Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria  
**Telegrams: Justice Minister, Abuja, Nigeria**  
**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Alhaji Ibrahim Coomasie  
 Inspector General of Police  
 Nigeria Police Force Headquarters  
 Garki, Abuja, Nigeria  
**Telegrams: Police Inspector General, Police HQ, Garki, Abuja, Nigeria**  
**Salutation: Dear Inspector General**

**COPIES TO:**

Chief Tom Ikimi, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
 Maputo Street, PMB 130, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

The Editor, *The News*, PMB 21531, Ijeka, Lagos, Nigeria  
 The Editor, *Tell*, PMB 21749, Ijeka, Lagos, Nigeria  
 The Editor, *Vanguard*, PMB 1007, Apapa, Lagos, Nigeria  
 The Editor, *The Guardian*, PMB 1217, Oshodi, 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 9 August 1996.