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Prisoner of conscience / Health concern

21 July 1994

**NIGERIA**Bashorun (Chief) Moshood K.O. Abiola, 57, newspaper publisher and  
businessman

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Bashorun Moshood K.O. Abiola, widely believed to be the undeclared winner of the 1993 presidential elections, has been charged with "treasonable felony" and is being detained in harsh conditions. He has been denied access to his family, lawyers and doctors, as well as necessary medical care. Amnesty International is calling for his immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned because of his non-violent political activities.

Moshood Abiola went into hiding in early June 1994 when members of the disbanded Senate and other former political leaders were arrested and charged with treasonable felony for calling on the military government to step down and restore democratic civilian rule (see UA 219/94, AFR 44/05/94, 8 June and AFR 44/08/94, 21 July). On 11 June he proclaimed himself President of Nigeria and on 23 June he was arrested at his home in Lagos by hundreds of armed police after addressing a rally of supporters.

He was detained incommunicado and moved to several different places of detention; his family, lawyers and doctors were denied access to him and even information about him. The government ignored two orders by the High Court in Lagos, on 24 and 30 June, to produce him before the court and justify his detention, and on 4 July the court ordered the Minister of Justice to appear before it on 7 July for contempt of court. On 6 July Moshood Abiola was brought before a High Court in Abuja, the capital in central Nigeria. This court was appointed by the military government especially to try his case and cannot be considered independent of government influence. He was charged with "treasonable felony", a lesser charge than the capital charge of treason, which is punishable by life imprisonment. The judge ordered that he be given access to his family and lawyers, which the government continued to deny him.

On 14 July the Abuja High Court refused his release on bail, on the grounds that he might abscond, despite an appeal for him not to be returned to prison on health grounds. He has been held in Gashua prison in the far north where conditions are harsh, with very high temperatures and poor nutrition and sanitation, and was brought the 600 kilometres from Gashua to Abuja in a police van without seats. He suffers from hypertension and has apparently been denied appropriate medical care.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The results of the June 1993 presidential elections were annulled by the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida. In November 1993 General Sani Abacha took power in a coup from a military-appointed interim government and halted the expensive and lengthy process, begun in 1987, of returning the country to civilian rule. He disbanded elected legislative bodies, replaced elected state governors with military administrators and banned all political activity.

General Abacha's promise of a future return to democracy is widely disbelieved.

A protest strike by oil workers has hit fuel, electricity and water supplies and union leaders have been detained. Hundreds have been arrested in pro-democracy demonstrations and clashes with police. On 18 July at least 20 protestors were reportedly killed by police during riots in Lagos.

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

- expressing concern at the imprisonment of Bashorun Moshood Abiola on charges of treasonable felony;
- expressing concern that he has been detained incommunicado and in harsh prison conditions which have damaged his health, and urging that his health be safeguarded immediately and that he be given immediate and full access to his family, lawyers and doctors;
- calling for his immediate and unconditional release on the grounds that he is a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned because of his non-violent political activities.

**APPEALS TO:**

1. General Sani Abacha  
 Chairman, Provisional Ruling Council,  
 Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces and Minister of Defence  
 State House, Abuja  
 Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria  
**Telegrams: General Abacha, Abuja, Nigeria**  
**Telexes: (0905) 91529 or 91530 EXTNAL NG (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)**  
**Salutation: Dear General Abacha**

2. Lieutenant-General D.O. Diya  
 Chief of General Staff  
 State House, Abuja  
 Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria  
**Telegrams: Chief of Staff Diya, Abuja, Nigeria**  
**Salutation: Dear Minister**

3. Dr Olu Onagoruwa  
 Minister of Justice and Attorney General  
 Ministry of Justice  
 Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria  
**Telegrams: Minister of Justice Onagoruwa, Abuja, Nigeria**  
**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

Baba Gana Kingibe  
 Minister of Foreign Affairs  
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
 PMB 130, Abuja  
 Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

The Editor, *Daily Times*, PMB 21340, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria  
 The Editor, *New Nigerian*, POB 254, Kaduna, Nigeria  
 The Editor, *Nigerian Observer*, PMB 1334, Benin City, Edo  
 The Editor, *Daily Sketch*, PMB 5067, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria  
 The Editor, *The Triumph*, PMB 3155, Kano, Nigeria  
 The Editor, *Daily Champion*, 31 Eyo Edem Street, Calabar, Cross River State, 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 31 August 1994.