

PUBLIC

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Incommunicado Detention/ fear of torture or ill-treatment

NIGERIA

Samuel George (m)

Samuel George, a Nigerian national who had been acting as a translator and guide for a US filmmaker, is being held incommunicado without charge by the States Security Services (SSS). He may be at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

Samuel George had been assisting US journalist and filmmaker Andrew Berends, a US national who had been filming a documentary in the city of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, in the Niger Delta. On 31 August, while filming in the Nembe waterside area of Port Harcourt, the men were arrested by Nigerian military personnel. The Nigerian authorities have claimed that they had not authorised filming in this area, though Andrew Berends claims he had been given such permission.

The Nigerian military interrogated the men about the reason for their filming, before handing them over to the SSS, who also questioned them. Andrew Berends was detained by the SSS at their Port Harcourt headquarters for 36 hours before being released. He is now required to report to the SSS headquarters every morning and is released each evening. His passport has been confiscated by the SSS. However, Samuel George has not been seen since his colleague was released on 1 September. Andrew Berends believes he is still held at the SSS headquarters. The men have not been charged with any offence, or brought before a court.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights defenders and journalists regularly face intimidation and harassment in the Niger Delta. In May 2008, a photographer reportedly working for US-based TV news broadcaster CNN was detained by police for three days before being released without charge. In April 2008, security forces arrested four US filmmakers and a Nigerian who were reportedly working on a documentary about the oil industry in the delta. They were detained for six days on spying charges before being released to the US embassy. In September 2007, a US citizen and director of a Nigerian-based non-governmental organization, a Nigerian staff member and two German journalists were arrested by the SSS on suspicion of spying in the Delta. They were later released without charge.

The police frequently use torture while interrogating suspects. The police rarely bring suspects to court within 48 hours, as stipulated in Nigeria's penal code.

The security forces continue to commit human rights violations in the Niger Delta, including extrajudicial executions, torture and other ill-treatment, and destruction of homes. Since 2007, the military has been deployed in Port Harcourt.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern that Samuel George is being held incommunicado by the State Security Service (SSS) in Port Harcourt;
- calling for Samuel George to be charged with a recognisable criminal offence or else granted immediate and unconditional release;

- calling on the authorities to ensure that he is not tortured or ill-treated in detention, and that he has access to adequate supplies of food and water without delay;
- urging the authorities to give him immediate access to relatives, lawyers and all necessary medical care;
- calling on the authorities to either charge Andrew Berends with a recognizable criminal offence or grant his unconditional release.

APPEALS TO:

Vice-President

Goodluck Jonathan
Office of the vice-President
The Presidency
State House
Abuja
Nigeria
Email: info@nigeria.gov.ng
Fax: +234-9-2341733/ +234 9 314 8793
Salutation: Your Excellency

Director-General of the State Security Service

Mr. Abbas Gadzama
Aso Drive
Abuja
Federal Capital territory
Nigeria
Salutation: Dear Director General

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Nigeria in your own country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 October 2008.