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Nigeria: Harassment of a human rights defender and unlawful arrest and detention of three others in their campaign to bring Charles Taylor to justice **Joint press release**

Amnesty International and Open Society Justice Initiative today expressed grave concern at the continuing harassment of a human rights defender and the unlawful arrests and detentions of three others by Nigerian authorities.

On Monday 1 August 2005, operatives of Nigeria's State Security Service (SSS) arrested Steve Omali and Michael Damisa at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport in Abuja for being in possession of copies of the Interpol arrest warrant for Charles Taylor issued on 4 December 2003. Charles Taylor is facing charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity before the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

On Tuesday, Mathew Damisa, the brother of Michael, visited the SSS headquarters and was arrested and subsequently detained. The same day, two officers of the State Security Service visited the office of Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI). They summoned in absentia Chidi Odinkalu, the Africa Programme Director of OSJI, for questioning at the SSS headquarters.

The Coalition Against Impunity, consisting of up to 300 African and international civil society groups, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI), has been campaigning for Charles Taylor to face justice for the crimes that he committed against African men, women and children in Sierra Leone.

"The unlawful arrest and detention of innocent citizens and harassment of human rights defenders constitute a flagrant violation of the Nigerian constitution and international standards, including the African Charter on Human and People's Rights to which Nigeria is a party. It is ironic that the Nigerian government, instead of turning over Charles Taylor, a man indicted for crimes against humanity, to the Special Court for Sierra Leone, in fact turns against its own citizens and arrests them unlawfully," said Kolawole Olaniyan, Africa Programme Director at Amnesty International.

The two organizations call on the Nigerian government to:

- release immediately Steve Omali, Michael Damisa and Matthew Damisa, who are still being unlawfully detained;
- stop further harassment of Mr Chidi Odinkalu or other human rights defenders;
- surrender Charles Taylor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone, in line with Nigeria's human rights obligations under the African Union Constitutive Act and other international standards to

which Nigeria is a party.

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