

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 44/09/96

UA 138/96 Fear of extrajudicial executions /  
Prisoner of conscience

7 June 1996

**NIGERIA** Alhaja Kudirat Abiola (f), aged 44, businesswoman  
Moshood Abiola, aged 58, winner of 1993 presidential elections

On 4 June 1996, Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, senior wife of prisoner of conscience Moshood Abiola, was shot by unidentified assailants and died later in hospital.

Amnesty International fears that her assassination may have been carried out by government agents acting with or without the knowledge of the central authorities. The government must now initiate an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing. Failure to do so will reinforce suspicions that the government has been involved in killing its opponents extrajudicially, and will heighten fears for the safety of other government critics (see background).

Kudirat Abiola and her driver were shot at point-blank range near her home in Lagos. The driver was reportedly wounded but survived. The attack did not appear to have been motivated by robbery. The military head of state, General Sani Abacha, has expressed his condolences to the family and the police have announced that their inquiry will be conducted by a senior officer.

Opposition leaders have accused the government of involvement in her death. Kudirat Abiola had been a persistent and courageous critic of her husband's imprisonment. Moshood Abiola won the 1993 presidential elections which were subsequently annulled by the military government and has been imprisoned since June 1994 on treason charges for declaring himself head of state. Kudirat Abiola continued to call for his release despite constant and vindictive harassment of her family and supporters by the government. Since October 1994 she had been refused all access to her husband, who has been held virtually incommunicado and in poor health, denied necessary medical examination and treatment. No lawyer has been allowed access to him since October 1995, preventing progress in his case and, most recently, the resolution of a family dispute over his legal representation. The government has ignored key court rulings in his case, including an Appeal Court order for his release on bail in 1994.

Kudirat Abiola gave interviews on several occasions to the foreign and Nigerian press in which she called for his release and accused the government of destroying her family financially, and was charged with conspiracy and making false statements; on 8 May 1996 the Lagos High Court acquitted her. She was charged again with these offences on 28 May and the Lagos High Court ordered her release on bail to await trial on 17 July.

The Nigerian government should now demonstrate its willingness to implement the human rights reforms which it promised the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General in May 1996 by immediately and unconditionally releasing Moshood Abiola. The political crisis in Nigeria cannot be resolved while he remains imprisoned. His release would be a positive step towards restoring respect for human rights in Nigeria.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Many opposition leaders have had their homes and cars attacked since 1994, and some recent killings also appear to have been politically-motivated. Chief Alfred Rewane, 79, a financial backer of the opposition National Democratic

Coalition, was shot dead by gunmen at his home in October 1995, and in February 1996 Alex Ibru, a former government minister and publisher of the liberal *Guardian* newspaper - under government proscription in 1994/5 - was shot and wounded by unknown assailants.

The military government of General Sani Abacha, which seized power in November 1993, has come under sustained international pressure to uphold human rights and restore democracy, particularly following the execution of writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni in November 1995. Following a UN investigation in April 1996, the government told the UN that it would introduce human rights reforms, including the release of political prisoners and allowing judicial review of political detentions and trials. However, it remains to be seen whether these reforms will be implemented; political detainees and prisoners continue to be held incommunicado and in harsh conditions, in many cases despite serious concerns for their health.

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

- expressing concern that the assassination of Alhaja Kudirat Abiola may have been a political killing, carried out by government agents acting with or without the knowledge of the authorities;
- calling for an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation in order to bring to justice those responsible for the killing, stressing that such an inquiry must satisfy the UN 1989 Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions;
- calling for all members of the security forces in Nigeria to be immediately and publicly instructed that any government agent involved in the killing of political opponents will be brought to justice;
- calling on the government to demonstrate its willingness to implement the human rights reforms which it promised the UN Secretary-General in May 1996 by immediately and unconditionally releasing Moshood Abiola.

**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**

Lieutenant-General D. Oladipo Diya  
 Vice-Chairman, Provisional Ruling Council and Chief of General Staff  
 State House, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria  
**Telegrams: Lieutenant-General Diya, Abuja, Nigeria**  
**Salutation: Dear Lieutenant-General**

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, *National Concord*, POB 4483, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria  
The Editor, *The Punch*, PMB 21204, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria  
The Editor, *Tempo*, PMB 21531, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria  
The Editor, *Newswatch*, PMB 21499, Ikeja, 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 5 August 1996.