

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 44/21/95
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Date: 19 September 1995

MEDICAL CONCERN

**Dr Beko RANSOME-KUTI
NIGERIA**

Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti, a human rights activist and prominent medical association member, was arrested on 27 July 1995. Reports suggest that he may have been brought before a Special Military Tribunal shortly after his arrest, secretly tried and sentenced to life imprisonment. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned for the non-violent expression of his political views, and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

It appears that he may have been convicted in connection with the publication of information about the proceedings of a Special Military Tribunal which has unfairly tried and convicted 43 people in connection with an alleged coup attempt in March 1995. The Nigerian authorities, who have not provided any information about those convicted -- their names, the charges on which they have been convicted, the evidence against them or the sentences imposed -- have reportedly arrested several journalists, human rights activists and others for speaking out about the arrests, interrogations and secret trials. Opposition journalists and human rights activists have been forced into hiding to avoid arrest by the security forces.

On 3 August 1995 the Federal High Court in Lagos issued an interim injunction restraining the Special Military Tribunal from trying or sentencing Dr Ransome-Kuti. Dr Ransome-Kuti was reportedly informed, while in detention at security police headquarters, that he would be tried by the Special Military Tribunal for circulating documents about proceedings of the coup plot trials. The military government has frequently ignored High Court rulings and, indeed, a 1987 military decree which provided for the establishment of Special Military Tribunals specifically excludes the ordinary courts from challenging or reviewing any action of the Tribunal.

The Lagos State branch of the Nigerian Medical Association, of which Dr Ransome-Kuti was formerly an office bearer, has appealed for his release. A Reuters report of 7 September quotes the NMA as demanding access to him and as rejecting the rumoured reason for his arrest as "frivolous". The Nigerian Government is reported to have cancelled this year's annual meeting of the Nigerian Medical Association after Dr Ransome-Kuti stood for presidency of the Association.

Background

Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti has been a frequent victim of arrest and detention in recent years as a result of his criticisms of the military government and his activities as a member of the Campaign for Democracy and Campaign for the Defence of Human Rights. Dr Ransome-Kuti was formerly a Secretary General of the Nigerian Medical Association and was the Commonwealth Medical Association delegated member of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), an umbrella group of Commonwealth non-governmental organizations established in 1989 under the leadership of the former Canadian Foreign Minister, Flora McDonald. Dr Ransome-Kuti is currently still a member of the CHRI's advisory committee.

Dr Ransome-Kuti's arrest was the subject of discussion at the annual meeting of the World Medical Association in Indonesia in September 1995, a meeting which was attended by over 200 delegates from the WMA's 64 national medical associations. A spokesman for the WMA is reported by Reuters as saying: "The WMA and its constituent national medical associations deplore the actions taken by the authorities in Nigeria and demand that Beko Ransome-Kuti be given a fair trial where he can be assured that he will be acquitted."

The Nigerian Government has neither confirmed nor denied reports that Dr Ransome-Kuti has been secretly tried by the special military tribunal. Three other prominent human rights activists, Tunji Abayomi, Abdul Oroh and Chima Ubani were arrested at the same time as Dr Ransome-Kuti. AI is also seeking clarification of their situation and continues to call for the unconditional release of all four detainees.

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To: Medical professionals
From: Medical Office / Africa Regional Program
Date: 19 September 1995

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

**Dr Beko RANSOME-KUTI
NIGERIA**

Keywords

Theme: arbitrary arrest/secret trial

Profession/association: doctor / human rights activist

Summary

Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti, a medical doctor, former Nigerian Medical Association leader, and human rights activist, was arrested on 27 July 1995. It is reported that he may have been sentenced to life imprisonment following a secret trial by military tribunal. The Nigerian Government has not given the reasons for his arrest and apparent trial. Amnesty International regards Dr Ransome-Kuti as a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Recommended Actions

Letters are requested from health professionals to the addresses below:

- expressing concern at the arrest and detention of Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti
- seeking information on his current situation and asking for clarification of reports that he has been already been tried and convicted by special military tribunal
- expressing concern at the lack of due process and urging that, if his detention continues, Dr Ransome-Kuti is immediately given full rights of access to a lawyer, doctor and to family members
- calling for his immediate and unconditional release on the grounds that he is a prisoner of conscience imprisoned for the non-violent expression of his political views

N.B. Please send this information to your National Medical Association with a request that they appeal on Dr Ransome-Kuti's behalf.

Addresses

General Sani Abacha
 Chairman, Provisional Ruling Council
 State House
 Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
 Telegrams: General Abacha, Abuja, Nigeria
 Faxes: +234 9 525 2138
 Telexes: (0905) 91529 or 91530 EXTN 16 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 Aminu Salih
 Secretary to the Government of the Federation of Nigeria
 State House
 Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
 Telegrams: Alhaji Salih, Abuja, Nigeria
 Salutation: Dear Secretary

Copies of appeals may be sent to any of the following

Nigerian Medical Association
 74 Adeniji Jones Avenue
 Ikeja - POB 1108
 Lagos, Nigeria

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

The Editor, The News, PMB 21531, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria

The Editor, Tell, PMB 21749, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria

The Editor, Abuja Times, Daily Times Publications, Abuja, Federal Capital
 Territory, Nigeria

The Editor, Vanguard, PMB 1007, Apapa, Lagos, Nigeria

The Editor, Nigerian Observer, PMB 1334, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

The Editor, Nigerian Tribune, POB 78, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

and to diplomatic representatives of Nigeria accredited to your country.

