

PUBLIC

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UA 117/98

Possible excessive use of force / Fear for safety /  
Fear of ill-treatment

16 April 1998

**NIGERIA Around one hundred pro-democracy activists arrested**

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Some 100 activists were arrested by armed Nigerian security forces on 15 April 1998 at a pro-democracy rally outside Ibadan stadium in South-western Nigeria. While in detention they are at risk of ill-treatment.

Following the intervention by the security forces, reportedly using teargas and live bullets, at least two protesters, including a 17-year-old youth, were killed and many others seriously injured. Some 100 other protesters were carried away in security vehicles to an undisclosed location.

Around 2,000 pro-democracy supporters took part in the rally called by the United Action for Democracy (UAD), an independent umbrella organisation of pro-democracy and human rights groups. The event was unauthorized and planned as a protest against a pro-government rally, organized by local politicians, taking place in the stadium.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Public demonstrations perceived to be critical of the government and its program of transition to civilian rule are being routinely disrupted and broken up by security forces in the remaining months leading up to Legislative and Presidential elections.

Political prisoners are routinely held in harsh and life-threatening conditions, which amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

On 3 and 4 January 1998 dozens of members from the Ogoni community were arrested after trying to organize activities to commemorate Ogoni Day on 4 January. At least two of these were reported to have been beaten with rifle butts and electric cables and subsequently denied food and medical attention for injuries sustained (see UA 16/98, AFR 44/02/98, 16 January 1998).

On 3 March a gathering of pro-democracy organisations, including UAD, was also violently broken up by armed security forces in Lagos. They reportedly aimed their guns at protesters who intended to march in order to threaten them and proceeded to arrest around 31 activists. Olisa Agbakoba, a leading human rights lawyer and activist among those arrested, was beaten up and gun-butted in the face. The detainees were released after two days and charged with public order offences. The UAD have subsequently taken the Nigerian government and police to court for violations of fundamental rights in connection with this event.

The last "transition to civilian rule", initiated by the ruling military authorities between 1987 and 1993, was aborted by the military leadership when its favoured candidate did not win the presidential elections; the winning candidate, Moshood Abiola, has been imprisoned since 1994, ostensibly awaiting trial on treason charges. Hundreds of critics, including independent journalists and pro-democracy and human rights activists, have since been arrested and dozens imprisoned long-term as prisoners of conscience.

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

- calling for the activists arrested during a pro-democracy rally in Ibadan on 15 April 1998 to be safeguarded against ill-treatment during their detention and allowed access to their families and a doctor and lawyer of their choice;
- urging that anyone arrested purely for the non-violent expression of their political beliefs be released and that anyone suspected of committing a recognizable criminal offence be promptly and fairly tried;
- expressing concern at allegations of police brutality against pro-democracy activists, including the use of teargas and live ammunition;
- calling for an independent and impartial enquiry into the deaths of at least two pro-democracy activists on 15 April, including a minor under the age of eighteen, and for those responsible to be brought to justice.

**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 0394 / 523 0210 (This is c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs**  
**- please ask for it to be forwarded)**  
**Salutation: Dear General**

Alhaji Ibrahim Abdulahi  
 Minister of Justice and Attorney General  
 Ministry of Justice  
 Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria  
**Telegrams: Alhaji Abdulahi, Attorney General, Abuja, Nigeria**  
**Salutation: Dear Alhaji**

Alhaji Ibrahim Coomasie  
 Inspector General of Police  
 Nigeria Police Force Headquarters  
 Garki, Abuja, Nigeria  
**Telegrams: Inspector General Police, Abuja, Nigeria**  
**Salutation: Dear Inspector General**

Alhaji Ismaila Gwarzo  
 National Security Adviser  
 State Security Service (SSS)  
 Federal Headquarters  
 Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria  
**Telegrams: National Security Adviser, SSS, Abuja, Nigeria**  
**Salutation: Dear Sir**

**COPIES TO:**

Mr Justice P.K. Nwokedi, Chairman  
 National Human Rights Commission  
 PMB 444, Garki  
 Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

The Editor, *The Guardian*, PMB 1217, Oshodi, Lagos, Nigeria  
 The Editor, *Nigerian Tribune*, PO Box 78, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria  
 The Editor, *Daily Sketch*, PMB 5067, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria  
 The Editor, *The News*, PMB 21531, 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 29 May 1998.