

Worldwide Appeals - December 1996

NIGERIA

Fears are growing for Chief Gani Fawehinmi, Nigeria's renowned human rights lawyer, whose health is deteriorating after more than nine months of incommunicado detention in harsh conditions.

Chief Gani Fawehinmi, aged 58, a prisoner of conscience, was arrested on 30 January 1996 shortly before he was due to address a political rally at the University of Lagos. He has been held without charge in Bauchi prison in northern Nigeria in conditions that are reported to be damp and filthy.

Despite orders from the High Court and Court of Appeal, the authorities have refused him access to his doctor, his wife or a lawyer. He has been suffering from hypertension, a heart complaint and malaria. He was twice reported to have collapsed in prison and to have needed hospital treatment. The latest fears concern his failing eyesight.

Chief Gani Fawehinmi led the defence team that withdrew on the grounds of government interference from the unfair political trial of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni prisoners in 1995. Chief Gani Fawehinmi initiated a legal challenge to the constitutionality of the special tribunal that sentenced them to death for murder. By late 1996 this case had still not been heard.

Since the 1960s he has been detained 25 times by the Nigerian authorities because of his courageous work in defence of human rights.

+Please write, expressing grave concern for the health of Chief Gani Fawehinmi and calling for his immediate and unconditional release, to: General Sani Abachi/ Chairman/ Provisional Ruling Council/ State House/ Abuja/ Federal Capital Territory/ Nigeria.

Fax: +234 9 523 2138. Copies to: your Minister of Foreign Affairs.

PAKISTAN

Riaz Ahmed Choudhry, his son and two nephews were arrested on 23 November 1993 in Piplan, Mianwali district, in the Punjab province of Pakistan. They face the death penalty because of their religious beliefs. The four men were taken into custody on the basis of a complaint that they had claimed that the founder of their religion had worked miracles and that they had, "said something derogatory".

Their alleged statements were deemed an offence under section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code which relates to blasphemy, a criminal offence for which the mandatory punishment is the death penalty. AI considers that the four men are prisoners of conscience.

Riaz Ahmed Choudhry and his family are members of the Ahmadiyya community, a religious group whose members regard themselves as Muslim, but who are considered heretical by orthodox Muslims. Ahmadis have frequently been charged with religious offences, including blasphemy, solely on account of their religious beliefs. Hostility towards them is sometimes enhanced by economic or professional rivalry. Observers believe that the people who accused the four men of blasphemy in fact wanted to take over Riaz' position as village headman of Piplan. A bail application on behalf of the four men was rejected by the sessions court and the Lahore High Court. It has been pending since 1994 in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Their trial has not yet begun.

+Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the four men, urging that the charges against them be dropped and that the blasphemy law be amended so as to make such miscarriages of justice impossible, to: Prime Minister Meraj Khalid/ Caretaker Administration/ Office of the Prime Minister/ Islamabad/ Pakistan. Fax: +92 51 9201545; Copies to: Fakhruddin Ebrahim/ Caretaker Administration/ Minister of Justice/ Ministry of Justice/ Pakistan Secretariat/ Islamabad/ Pakistan.

EGYPT

Despite numerous release orders issued by the courts, Jihan Ibrahim ‘Abd al–Hamid has reportedly been held in administrative detention in Egypt since 7 November 1994. Her current whereabouts are unknown. She is the mother of three children and wife of a prisoner currently serving a 15–year prison sentence on account of his alleged Islamist activities.

AI is concerned that Jihan Ibrahim ‘Abd al–Hamid may have been arrested solely because of her husband’s activities and her alleged contacts with the wife of a suspected Islamist activist killed by police in a shoot–out in November 1994. Under the state of emergency in force in Egypt since 1981, thousands of sympathizers and suspected members of unauthorized Islamist groups have been administratively detained without charge or trial, some for as long as six years.

AI is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Jihan Ibrahim ‘Abd al–Hamid if she is not to be charged with any recognizably criminal offence. If she is being held solely on account of the non–violent expression of her beliefs, she is a prisoner of conscience and should be released at once.

Jihan Ibrahim ‘Abd al–Hamid was being held in the women’s section of al–Qanater al–Khairiya Prison. However, when her family visited the prison in August 1996 they did not find her there. By the end of October 1996, they had not found out where she was being held.

+Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Jihan Ibrahim ‘Abd al–Hamid if she is not to be charged with any recognizably criminal offence or if she is being held solely on account of the non–violent expression of her beliefs, to: H.E General Hassan Mohammad al–Alfy/ Minister of the Interior/ Ministry of the Interior/ Al–Sheikh Rihan Street/ Bab al–Louk/ Cairo/ Egypt. Telex: 21361 MOICM UN.

Fax: +202 355 7792; Copies to: Al–Mustashar Ahmad al–Sayyid Ahmad/ Assistant Public Prosecutor and Head of the Human Rights Unit/ The Public Prosecutor’s Office (Maktab al–Na’ib al–’Am)/ Dar al–Qadha al–’Ali/ Ramses Street/ Cairo/ Egypt. Telex: 94107 MOHEG UN.

[December 1996 AI Index: NWS 22/03/96]