

Worldwide Appeals June 1998
AI Index: NWS 22/03/98

Nigeria – prisoners of conscience

Two leading pro-democracy and human rights activists have been imprisoned for more than 16 months for the non-violent expression of their political views. Dr Frederick Fasehun, 62, Acting Chairman of the Campaign for Democracy, has been detained since December 1996. Chief Olu Falae, 59, a former Minister of Finance, was arrested in January 1997.

In March 1997 they were charged with treason, a capital offence, ostensibly in connection with a series of bombings that took place throughout the country between May 1995 and February 1997 in which as many as 20 people were killed. However, the charges appear to have been brought against the two men to justify their continued detention and in an attempt to discredit the pro-democracy movement. The trial has been repeatedly stalled by the authorities and no evidence that the two men have used or advocated violence has been disclosed. Dr Fasehun was reportedly questioned solely about his human rights activities before he was charged.

The two men are detained at the headquarters of the federal police in Lagos. Dr Fasehun is reported to have failing sight in one eye and to be suffering harsh conditions in solitary confinement. He is said to be denied visits from family or lawyers and appropriate medical treatment.

+ Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Chief Olu Falae and Dr Frederick Fasehun, to: General Sani Abacha, Chairman, Provisional Ruling Council, State House, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria (faxes: 234 9 523 0394/0210).

Colombia - fears for safety

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Fears for the safety of residents of San José de Apartadó, municipality of Apartadó in the northern region of Urabá, grew on 26 March 1998 when soldiers reportedly fired on the house of Argemiro Jiménez and Rosmira Tabares in the hamlet of Bellavista, injuring them and their three children. Around 1,000 people who fled massacres by army-backed paramilitaries and guerrilla groups in 1996 and 1997 took refuge in the community of San José de Apartadó. In March 1997 they declared themselves a Comunidad de Paz, Peace Community, to persuade warring factions to respect their neutrality and right to life. They also demanded that the government secure conditions for their safe return home.

Since their declaration in March 1997, two inhabitants have “disappeared” and more than 30 have been killed, the majority by army-backed paramilitary groups, but several by guerrilla groups. Now, some of the residents of the community, including 300 people who returned to the nearby hamlet of La Unión on 23 March, have started to return to their lands.

Approximately a million people have been displaced by political violence since 1985. Many of the communities formed by these people are considering or have initiated the process of return to lands they were forced to abandon, even though conditions for their safe return have not yet been secured. No effective measures have been taken by the authorities to dismantle paramilitary groups in the region or to bring those responsible for human rights violations to justice.

+ Please write, expressing your concern for the safety of the residents of San José de Apartadó and of displaced persons returning to their lands. Send letters to: Señor Presidente Ernesto Samper Pizano, Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia (faxes: 57 1 284 2186). Send solidarity letters to the community via the Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz, AA 31861, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia.

China - prisoner of conscience

Nine years after the 4 June 1989 massacre of pro-democracy protesters in China, Zhang Jie, a 31-year-old prisoner of conscience from Jinan, Shandong Province, is still imprisoned for his involvement in the 1989 protests. Zhang Jie, an unemployed worker who was apprehended in June 1989, was sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment and five years' deprivation of political rights by the Qingdao Intermediate People's Court in November 1989. He is held in Shandong Prison No. 3. Zhang Jie was accused of "instigating the overthrow of the government" and "blocking and interrupting public traffic and disturbing social order". These accusations relate to a meeting held outside the Qingdao municipal government building and Qingdao University on 5 June 1989 which he is alleged to have organized and during which he made a speech denouncing the army crack-down on pro-democracy protesters in Beijing.

Zhang Jie is typical of the many labour activists who are still serving long sentences in prisons or forced labour camps for their activities in 1989. Workers received particularly heavy sentences and have suffered especially harsh prison conditions and ill-treatment.

Independent trade unions are illegal in China. The only official workers' organization, the All China Federation of Trade Unions, is tightly controlled by the Communist Party. Attempts to form or register independent labour unions are quickly suppressed. Those attempting to set up independent labour unions in China continue to be imprisoned or suffer short-term detention or harassment.

+ Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Zhang Jie, to: Premier of the People's Republic of China, Zhu Rongji, Guowuyuan, 9 Xihuangchenggenbeijie, Beijingshi 100032, People's Republic of China.