

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST RELEASED ON BAIL

Journalist Agba Jalingo has been released on bail from Calabar Prison, Cross River state, southern Nigeria. However, Agba Jalingo and human rights defenders Omoyele Sowore and Olawale Adebayo Bakare continue to face trumped-up charges of treason because they demanded government accountability. They face a life sentence if they are found guilty of these charges. All charges against the journalist and human rights defenders must be immediately and unconditionally dropped.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Muhammadu Buhari
Nigerian Presidential Complex
Aso Rock Presidential Villa
Federal Capital Territory
Abuja
Nigeria

Dear Sir,

I write to express my concern for Agba Jalingo, Olawale Adebayo Bakare and Omoyele Sowore, who are currently facing charges in Nigeria.

I am aware that the journalist and human rights defenders have been released on bail. However, they continue to face trumped up charges. Journalist Agba Jalingo is charged with committing acts of treason, treasonable felony, publishing false information and instigating terrorism, for publishing an article in which he demanded the Cross River State government be accountable for NGN500 million naira (1.4 million United States Dollars equivalent) reportedly approved and released for the floating of the Cross River Microfinance Bank.

Omoyele Sowore and Olawale Adebayo Bakare are facing charges for planning a protest, tagged #RevolutionNow, to demand respect for human rights and the rule of law in Nigeria, which is considered by the government as an act of treason and a call for an undemocratic overthrow of government.

Agba Jalingo, Olawale Adebayo Bakare and Omoyele Sowore have been charged for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and I call on you to immediately and unconditionally drop all charges against them.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 13 February, the Federal High court sitting in Calabar, Cross River state, Nigeria granted bail to journalist Agba Jalingo after spending 174 days in detention in both a police cell and Calabar prison. On 17 February, he met the bail conditions and was released from prison. His two previous applications for bail had earlier been denied. His trial resumes on 6, 7 and 8 April.

Agba Jalingo's co-defendants also continue to face charges. Omoyele Sowore remains in Nigeria's capital city of Abuja and is unable to speak to the press as part of the conditions for his bail. His movement is restricted to Abuja where his trial is being held far away from his family. On 13 February, Omoyele Sowore and Olawale Adebayo Bakare were re-arraigned in court but the prosecution could not proceed to trial as scheduled on the basis that the prosecution had yet to serve the defence copies of the evidence to rely on. The court has fixed 11-13 March for their trial.

In Nigeria, civic space continues to shrink as Nigerian authorities increasingly clampdown on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Authorities have intimidated journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders, harassing them through verbal and physical assault, arbitrary arrest, detention and prosecution. Many of these journalists and human rights defenders face indiscriminate charges such as 'defamation', 'terrorism', 'cyberstalking', 'kidnapping', criminal trespass and theft of state documents. These charges are prosecuted under the Cybercrime Act and Terrorism (Prevention) (Amendment) Act 2013, alongside other laws. The Terrorism (Prevention) (Amendment) Act 2013 prescribes the death penalty for those found guilty. The Nigerian Senate is currently considering two harsh bills relating to freedom of expression online, including one which proposes the death penalty for 'hate speech'. These bills, supported by the Nigerian government, represent an alarming escalation in the authorities' attempts to censor and punish social media users for freely expressing their opinions.

The proposed National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speech bill, and the Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation and other Related Offences bill, give authorities arbitrary powers to shut down the internet and limit access to social media, and make criticizing the government punishable with penalties of up to 3 years in prison.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: [English]

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: [8 April 2020]

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Omoyele Sowore (he/his), Olawale Bakare (Mandate) (he/his) and Agba Jalingo (he/his)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/1682/2020/en/>