

LIBERIA Tiawon Gongloe (m), Human Rights Lawyer

Human rights lawyer Tiawon Gongloe was arrested on 24 April, and has reportedly been tortured. He is detained without charge, and Amnesty International believes he may be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for his human rights work.

When his lawyer met with him the next day, at police headquarters in the capital, Monrovia, Tiawon Gongloe appeared to have been severely beaten. He had bruises all over his face and blood in his left eye. He had lost the hearing in his left ear, and could hardly stand. He also complained of severe internal pain.

At the request of his lawyer, he was taken to hospital, where he is reportedly under guard. The Director of the Police reportedly issued a statement that day confirming that Mr Gongloe was being kept in custody while police investigations were underway.

In March 2002, Mr Gongloe had spoken at a conference in neighbouring Guinea on the conflict in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. He delivered a paper entitled "Political activities for the attainment of peace and development in the Mano River Union Basin". In other recent speeches Mr Gongloe had blamed the Liberian security forces for widespread human rights violations in the country.

The security forces are allegedly pursuing journalists who published the speech he made in Guinea, and some have gone into hiding.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

People who draw attention to Liberia's poor human rights record live under constant threat of attack, arrest and torture by government forces. Some have been forced to flee the country in fear for their lives.

President Charles Taylor declared a State of Emergency in February, on the grounds that the armed opposition group Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) was moving towards Monrovia. Since then human rights defenders, independent journalists and members of opposition parties have faced increased repression.

On 22 February the Director of the non-governmental Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, former Chief Justice Frances Johnson Morris, was arrested by Police Director Paul Mulbah. She was held with male inmates at the police central prison for several hours. On 28 March Augustine Toe of the Justice and Peace Commission was arrested and held without charge for several hours.

Also on 28 March, police stormed the offices of the National Human Rights Center, and arbitrarily arrested five of the staff.

The *Analyst* newspaper, which published Tiawon Gongloe's speech from the Guinea conference, was closed down on the day he was arrested. Staff of the newspaper had been harassed by the government since the state of emergency was imposed. On 12 February the government closed the newspaper's offices, and arrested three staff members. They were released the next day after the Press Union of Liberia intervened, and were never charged. Earlier that week they had published an article about the advantages and disadvantages of the state of

emergency. On 18 March police officers threatened members of staff, and arbitrarily detained them for several hours.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Tiawon Gongloe, who was arrested on 24 April and allegedly tortured in custody;
- urging the authorities to ensure that he does not suffer any further ill-treatment at the hands of the security forces;
- expressing concern that he appears to have been detained solely for the peaceful expression of his opinions, and urging the authorities to either charge him with a recognisably criminal offence or release him immediately;
- calling on the Liberian authorities to stop the security forces attacking, harassing and ill-treating human rights defenders solely for their legitimate scrutiny and criticism of the Liberian government.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Republic of Liberia

His Excellency Mr Charles Taylor
Office of the President
Executive Mansion
PO Box 9001
Capitol Hill
Monrovia
Republic of Liberia

Fax: + 231 228 026 or + 226 544

Salutation: Dear President Taylor

Director of Police

Paul Mulbah
National Police Force
National Police Headquarters
Monrovia
Republic of Liberia

Salutation: Dear Mr Mulbah

Fax: + 231 226 785

Minister of Justice

Mr Eddington Varmah
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
Ashmun St,
PO Box 9006
Monrovia
Republic of Liberia

Salutation: Dear Mr Varmah

Fax: + 231 227 872

COPIES TO:

EU representative, PO Box 10-3049 Monrovia 10, Liberia

American Embassy in Liberia

Fax: + 231 226 148/49

and to diplomatic representatives of Liberia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.