

UA 322/02 Fear of torture and ill-treatment/
Prisoners of conscience

30 October 2002

**LIBERIA Blamoh Sieh, (m) human rights defender
Dempster Brown, (m) lawyer, human rights defender
Aloysius Toe (m) human rights defender
Other members of the Liberia Coalition of Human Rights Defenders**

Amnesty International is seriously concerned about the safety of the human rights community in Liberia, following a series of arrests on 29 October. Human rights defenders have frequently been the target of arbitrary arrest and detention and are routinely tortured and ill-treated.

Blamoh Sieh, a leading member of the National Human Rights Center, and Dempster Brown, Chairman of the Liberia Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (a coalition of some 20 human rights groups) and Executive Director of the Center for the Protection of Human Rights (CPHR), were arrested in the early hours of 29 October.

On 25 October, the Coalition had launched a week-long campaign to secure the release of fellow human rights defenders journalist Hassan Bility and Sheikh K.M. Sackor, Executive Director of Humanist Watch, and others detained with them. (See UA 194/02, AFR 34/008/2002, 25 June 2002; AFR 34/010/2002, 1 August 2002; AFR 34/013/2002, 30 August 2002; AFR 34/018/2002, 26 September 2002 and AFR 34/021/02, 28 October 2002). The arrest of Blamoh Sieh and Dempster Brown followed a radio broadcast on 28 October as part of the campaign.

Neither Blamoh Sieh nor Dempster Brown have been allowed visits since their arrest. Dempster Brown is reported to be held at the Central Police Station and Blamoh Sieh at Zone 2 Police Station in Monrovia.

Amnesty International considers Blamoh Sieh and Dempster Brown to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely because of their legitimate activities in defence of human rights, and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release.

There are well-founded fears that other human rights activists who are involved in the Coalition's activities are also at risk. Human rights defenders and others deemed critical of the Liberian government are under constant threat of arrest, detention without charge, torture and ill-treatment. The government has accused human rights defenders of spreading false information intended to "tarnish the image" of Liberia within the international community and, more recently, of being members or supporters of the armed opposition Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD).

Vivian Toe, a civil servant and wife of prominent human rights defender Aloysius Toe, was arrested at her home during a raid by police shortly after midnight on 29 October and released later the same day. Vivian Toe was detained solely because of her relationship with Aloysius Toe, but was not physically ill-treated while detained at the Central Police Station. The Director of Police, Paul Mulbah, is reported to have said that she was being held "in protective custody".

Aloysius Toe, Executive Director of the Movement for the Defence of Human Rights (MODHAR) and Secretary of the Coalition of Human Rights Defenders, is currently in hiding. The Liberian authorities have said that Aloysius Toe is being sought

in connection with documents found at his home and have accused him of having links with the LURD. Amnesty International believes that the accusations against him are without foundation. He was previously arrested and held for several days with four colleagues in March 2002.

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

- expressing serious concern about the arrest of Blamoh Sieh and Dempster Brown on 29 October and their continuing detention;
- urging the authorities to allow them access to lawyers and members of their families;
- urging that they be humanely treated while in detention;
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release as prisoners of conscience;
- expressing concern also for the safety of Aloysius Toe and urging the Liberian government to end arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defenders.

APPEALS TO: (Due to the difficulty in obtaining fax numbers, please send letters instead.)

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

Salutation: Dear President Taylor

Director of Police

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

Salutation: Dear Mr Mulbah

Minister of Justice

Counsellor L. Koboi Johnson
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
Ashmun St, PO Box 9006
Monrovia, Republic of Liberia

Salutation: Dear Counsellor Johnson

COPIES TO:

European Union Resident Adviser in Liberia

Ambassador Godfrey E. Rudd
PO Box 10-3049
Monrovia, Republic of Liberia

Salutation: Dear Mr Rudd

US Embassy in Liberia

Ambassador John Blaney
111 United Nations Drive
Monrovia, Liberia

Salutation: Mr Blaney

and to diplomatic representatives of Liberia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 11 December 2002.