

PUBLIC

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To: Health professionals
From: Medical office / West Africa team
Date: 18 April 2000

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION
Lack of medical care of Ogoni detainees
Nigeria

Key words: ill-health / lack of medical care / ill-treatment

Summary

Amnesty International is concerned by reports that detainees arrested following a police raid on a village in Ogoniland, southeast Nigeria, on 11 April 2000, have been denied access to medical care while in police custody.

At least 16 residents of K-Dere village were reportedly arrested on 11 April, including **Pastor Monday Gbonage, Saturday Namon, Sunday Namon, Stephen Oomii, Fridya Tenalo, Pastor Deebari Zortee and Lucky Zorgbaa**. On 13 April **Ledum Mitee**, lawyer, former prisoner of conscience and President of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), the community organization formerly headed by the executed writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, was arrested. On 17 April he was brought to court with three others and charged with attempted murder, assault occasioning harm and arson. No details of the charges were given to the court but they are believed to be in connection with the police raid.

Recommended actions

This medical letter writing action is based on an urgent action and needs immediate action. Please send e-mails and faxes where possible or telegrams/express/airmail letters to the addresses below:

- introducing yourself as a member of of Amnesty International's health professionals network;
- expressing concern at reports of the lack of medical care for detainees arrested in connection with the police raid on the village of K-Dere in Ogoniland on 11 April 2000, and asking for more information on the current state of health of Pastor Monday Gbonage, Saturday Namon, Sunday Namon, Stephen Oomii, Fridya Tenalo, Pastor Deebari Zortee, Lucky Zorgbaa and Ledum Mitee;
- asking in particular for details on the health of Pastor Deebari Zortee, who was reportedly beaten following arrest; Saturday Namon who is reported to be unable to stand up and possibly has a spinal injury; any other detainees who were injured at the time of arrest; and Ledum Mitee who has reportedly suffered breathing difficulties while in custody;
- urging the authorities to provide them with any necessary medical treatment;

- also appealing to the authorities to safeguard the detainees from ill-treatment, and to allow them full and immediate access to their families, lawyers and doctors.

Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 15 May 2000, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

Addresses

Commissioner for Health, c/o Government House
91000 Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

Tel/fax: c/o State Governor +234 84 231323 (marked for attention Commissioner for Health)

E-mail: c/o State Governor Rivgov@phca.linkserve.com (marked for attention Commissioner for Health)

Telegrams: Commissioner Health, Rivers State, Nigeria

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

Copies

Please send copies of your letters to:

Dr Tim Menakaya
Minister for Health, Ministry for Health
New Federal Secretariat Complex
Shehu Shagari Way, Central Area District, Abuja
Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

**Faxes: c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs +234 9 523 0208 / 0394
or c/o President's Press Office + 234 9 523 2136
(marked for attention Minister of Health)**

**E-mails: president.obasanjo@nigeriagov.org
(marked for attention Minister of Health)**

Nigerian Medical Association
National Secretariat, 74 Adeniyi Jones Avenue, Ikeja
PO Box 1108, Marina
Lagos, Nigeria
tel/fax +234 1 583 1027 / 493 6854

and to diplomatic representatives of Nigeria accredited to your country.

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MEDICAL CONCERN
Lack of medical care of Ogoni detainees
Nigeria

Amnesty International is concerned by reports that detainees arrested following a police raid on a village in Ogoniland, southeast Nigeria, on 11 April 2000, have been denied access to medical care while in police custody.

At least 16 residents of K-Dere village were reportedly arrested on 11 April, including **Pastor Monday Gbonage, Saturday Namon, Sunday Namon, Stephen Oomii, Fridya Tenalo, Pastor Deebari Zortee** and **Lucky Zorgbaa**. On 13 April **Ledum Mitee**, lawyer, former prisoner of conscience and President of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), the community organization formerly headed by the executed writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, was arrested. On 17 April he was brought to court with three others and charged with attempted murder, assault occasioning harm and arson. No details of the charges were given to the court but they are believed to be in connection with the police raid.

Current state of health of prisoners

A number of those detained are reportedly in poor health. Reports indicate that Pastor Deebari Zortee, of the Apostolic Church, was beaten following arrest. Others were said to have been wounded by police. Saturday Namon is reported to be unable to stand up and possibly has a spinal injury; how he was injured is not known. Ledum Mitee has reportedly had breathing difficulties while in custody, probably as a result of asthma.

They are reported to have been denied medical care since their arrest. Detainees held in police cells and prisons in Nigeria have frequently been held in conditions so harsh as to amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and to have suffered serious ill-health and premature death as a result of malnutrition, insanitary conditions and lack of medical care. Six youths from K-Dere who were arrested on 23 March 2000 and detained for several days without charge by police in Port Harcourt, after protests against a road-building project, were reportedly denied access to medical care while in custody.

Background information

According to the Rivers State authorities in Port Harcourt, the state capital, police went to the village of K-Dere in the early hours of 11 April to quell inter-communal unrest between the inhabitants and those of a neighbouring village and were ambushed by youths who seized and seriously injured eight officers, and burned police vehicles. The authorities have confirmed that one resident was killed by police, while police sources have also been quoted as reporting that five other people were killed.

According to MOSOP, however, the raid on K-Dere and arrests by armed Mobile Police were not provoked by any community unrest, and police shot dead Barinaadua Jungle Gbaraka, aged 18, when he tried to escape arrest. MOSOP said that after youths had injured police officers in retaliation, dozens of armed officers returned to the village, killed at least five people and burned down homes,

including those of Ledum Mitee and two traditional rulers. Reports indicated that the police were accompanied by a senior local government official and associates who identified as targets those who had opposed a road-building project by a company contracted to the Shell oil company. The inhabitants of K-Dere have fled into the bush where two elderly people and a baby are reported to have died as a result of the harsh conditions.

Since the raid, police have accused Ledum Mitee of a range of offences, including arming a secret youth wing of MOSOP, incitement to violence, organizing an ambush of police officers, the destruction of police vehicles and the burning of homes in K-Dere. Ledum Mitee was one of six defendants acquitted of murder charges after the political trials of MOSOP supporters which resulted in the conviction and execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight Ogoni companions in 1995. Allegations that the security forces committed extrajudicial executions and instigated inter-communal violence in Ogoniland in the mid-1990s have not been the subject of official investigation.