

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Legal concern / Prisoners of conscience

31 July 1995

NIGERIA Tunji Abayomi, lawyer, head of Human Rights Africa
Abdul Oroh, Executive Director, Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO)

**Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti, President, Campaign for Democracy (CD) and Committee
for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR)
Chima Ubani, General Secretary, Democratic Alternative**

At least four leading Nigerian human rights and pro-democracy activists have been arrested and are being held without charge or trial. It appears that the authorities are trying to silence them at a time when Nigeria's human rights record is attracting widespread international criticism. Amnesty International considers the four to be prisoners of conscience who have been detained for the non-violent expression of their political views and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release.

No official reason has been given for their arrests. However, it appears that they may have been detained because of their criticism of a secret treason trial by military tribunal in which former head of state General (Retd) Olusegun Obasanjo and 42 others were convicted of involvement in an alleged coup attempt (see UA 64/95, AFR 44/01/95, 14 March 1995, and updates). The reported sentencing to death of 14 defendants and the gross unfairness of the trial have provoked widespread protests from governments, heads of state and former heads of state all over the world, and a decision whether to confirm the convictions and sentences is awaited from the head of the military government, General Sani Abacha. One of those convicted was Shehu Sanni, Vice-Chairman of the Campaign for Democracy (CD), who was reportedly sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for "managing an illegal organization" despite the lack of evidence that CD was an illegal organization or that either he or CD was engaged in unlawful activities.

Chima Ubani is believed to have been arrested in mid-July 1995. Tunji Abayomi heads Human Rights Africa, a human rights organization set up by General Obasanjo in 1990; he was arrested on 26 July after calling for General Obasanjo's unconditional release. Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti was arrested on 27 July and Abdul Oroh on 28 July. On 31 July the CD offices were reportedly under occupation by soldiers.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The detainees are probably held under the State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree, No. 2 of 1984, which allows the government to detain without charge or trial, indefinitely and incommunicado, any person it believes to be a threat to the security of the state or the economy. There is no legal recourse to the courts to challenge detention under the Decree, which has been frequently used for the detention of prisoners of conscience. Sylvester Odion-Akhaine, CD General Secretary, has been detained, incommunicado and without charge or trial, since January 1995.

Dr Ransome-Kuti has been a prisoner of conscience many times in the past, most recently on several occasions in May and June 1995 when he and other pro-democracy and human rights activists were repeatedly detained for short periods to prevent their commemorations of the annulled presidential elections of 1993.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the arrest of the four human rights and pro-democracy activists named above;
- urging that, while they remain in detention, they be given full access to their lawyers, doctors and families;
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release on the grounds that they are prisoners of conscience, imprisoned for the non-violent expression of their political views.

APPEALS TO

General Sani Abacha
Chairman, Provisional Ruling Council
State House
Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Telegrams: General Abacha, Abuja, Nigeria
Salutation: Dear General

Lieutenant-General D. Oladipo Diya
Vice-Chairman, Provisional Ruling
Council and Chief of General Staff
State House
Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Telegrams: Lieutenant-General Diya, Abuja, Nigeria
Salutation: Dear Lieutenant-General

Alhaji Aminu Saleh
Secretary to the Government of the Federation of Nigeria
State House
Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Telegrams: Alhaji Saleh, Abuja, Nigeria
Salutation: Dear Secretary

COPIES TO:

Chief Tom Ikimi
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Maputo Street
PMB 130, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

**The Editor, *Theweek*, PO Box 11333, Ikeja,
Lagos, Nigeria**

**The Editor, *Newswatch*, PMB 21499, Ikeja,
Lagos, Nigeria**

**The Editor, *The Sunday Magazine*, PMB
21687, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria**

**The Editor, *Tempo*, PMB 21531, Ikeja, Lagos,
Nigeria**

**The Editor, *Daily Sketch*, PMB 5067, Ibadan,
Oyo State, Nigeria**

**The Editor, *Daily Times*, PMB 21340, Ikeja,
Lagos, Nigeria**

and to diplomatic representatives of NIGERIA accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 September 1995.