

EXTERNAL

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Health concern

24 July 1997

**NIGERIA** Ben Charles OBI, journalist  
George MBAH, aged 37, journalist

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The health of Ben Charles Obi and George Mbah is reported to have seriously deteriorated since they were imprisoned in May 1995.

Ben Charles Obi, held in Agodi-Ibadan Prison, Oyo State, is reported to be suffering from symptoms of a suspected disease of the nervous system. His general health is very poor and worsening and he has lost a considerable amount of weight.

George Mbah, held in Biu prison, Borno State, is in a serious state of health due to an inadequate diet and as a result has lost a considerable amount of weight. He is also experiencing loss of sight in his right eye and is suffering from an infection of a surgical wound to his right eyelid, which was left untreated after his imprisonment.

Since their imprisonment both men have been denied access to their lawyers. George Mbah has been allowed limited access to one member of his family, while Ben Charles Obi has been denied all visits.

Amnesty International believes Ben Charles Obi and George Mbah to be prisoners of conscience who have not used or advocated violence and who have been imprisoned solely because of their work as journalists.

Ben Charles Obi, a journalist and former editor of *Weekend Classique* magazine, and George Mbah, a journalist and former assistant editor of *Tell* magazine, were convicted of being an "accessory after the fact of treason" during secret and grossly unfair trials by a special military tribunal in 1995. They received long-term prison sentences, together with 41 other civilians and armed forces officers. In October 1995 the Provisional Ruling Council, the executive organ of the Nigerian military government, commuted their sentences of life imprisonment to 15 years' imprisonment.

Amnesty International has received numerous and consistent reports about the serious deterioration of the health of other long-term political prisoners and detainees, including prisoners of conscience and possible prisoners of conscience, due to harsh prison conditions and inadequate medical care. Among prisoners of conscience suffering from serious ill-health are (Retd.) General Olusegun Obasanjo, Major-General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua and Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti, sentenced to long terms of imprisonment during the secret treason trials of 1995.

Chief Olabiyi Durojaiye, Ibrahim Dasuki, deposed Sultan of Sokoto, and others, detained without charge or trial, apparently under the State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree, No.2 of 1984, are also reported to suffer serious ill-health caused by harsh prison conditions and lack of adequate medical care.

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

- expressing concern at reports that Ben Charles Obi and George Mbah are suffering serious ill-health because of the harsh conditions in which they are held and that they have been denied access to their families and lawyers;

- appealing for them to receive immediately all appropriate medical care, to be held in conditions of detention that conform to international standards, and to be allowed visits by their families, lawyers, and a doctor of their choice;
- calling for their release on the grounds that Amnesty International believes them to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely because of their non-violent professional activities as journalists and the exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

**APPEALS TO:**

General Sani Abacha  
Chairman, Provisional Ruling Council  
State House, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria  
**Telegrams: General Abacha, Abuja, Nigeria**  
**Fax: + 234 9 523 2138**  
**Salutation: Dear General**

Dr Auwalu Hamisu Yadudu  
Special adviser to the Head of State on judicial matters  
State House, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria  
**Telegrams: Dr Yadudu, State House, Abuja, Nigeria**  
**Salutation: Dear Dr Yadudu**

Major-General Abdulsalam A. Abubakar  
Chief of Defence Staff  
Provisional Ruling Council, State House  
Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria  
**Telegrams: Chief of Defence Staff, Abuja, Nigeria**  
**Salutation: Dear Major-General**

**COPIES TO:**

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

The Editor, *The Punch*, PMB 21204, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria  
The Editor, *PM News*, PMB 21531, Ijeka, Lagos, Nigeria  
The Editor, *The Week*, PO Box 11333, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria  
The Editor, *Sunday Tribune*, PO Box 78, Ibadan, Oyo State, 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 4 September 1997