

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Nigeria: Human rights defender assaulted by police**

Amnesty International today called on the Nigerian authorities to launch immediate investigations into the assault by Port Harcourt police of Justine Ijeomah, a human rights defender.

Justine Ijeomah, Secretary of Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), a non-governmental organisation, was assaulted by a police officer while in police detention at Mile 1 Police Station on the afternoon of Wednesday 26 May 2010. According to Justine Ijeomah, he had been brought out from the police cell and seated behind the police counter when he was unlawfully assaulted by a police officer, who bashed his head against a wall four times.

Ijeomah was detained at around 15:30 after a juvenile for whom he had acted as surety failed to return to the police station at the agreed time. He spent approximately 2 hours in the police cell before his lawyer and other human rights defenders who had been alerted to his detention successfully intervened for his production from the cell. Justine was released without charge at around 16:00.

Justine Ijeomah said he sustained injuries to his right eye during the assault and experienced severe headaches for several days afterwards. Following his release, Ijeomah was admitted to hospital, where he was kept overnight. He was placed on antibiotics and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and was discharged in the morning of the following day.

The unlawful use of force and arbitrary detention of Justine Ijeomah must be fully investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice. Police brutality is all too common in Nigeria. This culture will never change until the authorities bring to justice police officers who use wanton and unlawful force, operate a shoot-to-kill policy, extra-judicially execute suspects, or subject them to enforced disappearance, extort money and unlawfully detain suspects.

Ijeomah deserves an immediate, independent, impartial and competent review of his complaint and the perpetrators, who are known, must be brought to justice.

### **Background**

On 23 April 2010, Justine Ijeomah and three other members of Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), Rivers Branch, were stopped in their vehicle and questioned by 5 police officers. In the process of searching the car, one of the police officers apparently, and without reason, threatened to shoot the men, and then slapped Justine Ijeomah's face and hit him in the chest. The men were taken to Olu Obasanjo police station where they were released by the DPO.

On 5 April 2010, three human rights activists were assaulted and detained by police in the city of Port Harcourt. Isaac Asume Osuoka, AkpoBari Celestine and Ken Henshaw from non-governmental organisation Social Action, were stopped in their car and detained by police after leaving their office.

AkpoBari Celestine said he was repeatedly hit with the butt of a gun, poked with a barrel in his arms and legs and slapped in the face, as at least six armed men, including at least three uniformed police officers, forced the activists out of their car and into a white van. The three men were not told why they were stopped and detained but were taken to Olu Obasanjo police station in Port Harcourt. The activists were released without charge around midnight, after alerting friends and colleagues in the city who intervened on their behalf.

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) continues to commit a wide range of human rights violations with impunity, including unlawful detention, torture, other ill-treatment, unlawful killings and enforced disappearances. Human rights activists, doctors and lawyers who work on cases of human rights violations by the Nigeria Police Force are often subjected to intimidation. Amnesty International spoke to many human rights defenders who have been beaten, harassed and intimidated by the police when asking for information about suspects.

For further information see Amnesty International's report "Killing at will: Extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings by the police in Nigeria":

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR44/038/2009/en>