

# URGENT ACTION

## JOURNALIST MUST BE RELEASED

Nigerian authorities have released human rights defenders Omoyele Sowore and Olawale Adebayo Bakare from the custody of the State Security Service (SSS) in Nigeria's capital Abuja. Agba Jalingo remains in detention in Calabar prison, Cross River state, southern Nigeria. They all are facing trumped-up charges of treason because they demanded government accountability. Agba Jalingo must be released immediately and unconditionally. All the charges against the three journalists and human rights defenders must be dropped.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

Muhammadu Buhari  
Nigerian Presidential Complex  
Aso Rock Presidential Villa  
Federal Capital Territory  
Abuja  
Nigeria

Dear Sir,

*I write to express my concern for journalists and human rights defenders Omoyele Sowore, Olawale Adebayo Bakare (Mandate) and Agba Jalingo, who are currently facing charges in Nigeria.*

*I am aware that Omoyele Sowore and Olawale Adebayo Bakare have been released on bail, while Agba Jalingo remains in detention in Calabar Prison. Omoyele Sowore and Olawale Adebayo Bakare are facing charges for planning a protest, tagged #RevolutionNow, to demand respect for human rights and the rule of law in Nigeria, which is considered by the government as an act of treason and a call for an undemocratic overthrow of government.*

*On 22 August, police officials arrested Agba Jalingo, a journalist with CrossRiverWatch news website, for publishing an article in which he demanded the Cross River State government be accountable for NGN500 million naira (1.4million United States Dollars equivalent) reportedly approved and released for the floating of the Cross River Microfinance Bank. Agba Jalingo spent 33 days in police custody without trial or access to his lawyer and family. He was thereafter charged with committing Acts of treason, treasonable felony, publishing false information and instigating terrorism. He is currently facing a secret trial at Calabar division of the Federal High court.*

*I believe that the charges against Omoyele Sowore, Olawale Adebayo Bakare and Agba Jalingo are attempts to silence them.*

*I urge you to ensure that Agba Jalingo is released immediately and unconditionally and that all charges against Omoyele Sowore, Olawale Adebayo Bakare and Agba Jalingo are dropped. I also urge you to ensure that Agba Jalingo is protected from torture and other ill-treatment while in detention.*

Yours sincerely,

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 23 October, the Federal High court granted leave for the prosecution to allow witnesses and ordered Agba Jalingo's trial to proceed in secret. This implies that the public will not be allowed to observe the process, which raises questions around the transparency and fairness of the process. The prosecuting judge for Agba Jalingo's case withdrew from the case following a leaked video where Justice Amobeda was caught on tape saying the journalist would be treated like Ken Saro-Wiwa, a rights activist who was sentenced to death by hanging in 1995. As normal practice, Justice Amobeda was required to return the case file to the Chief Judge for reassignment following his withdrawal from the case but he did not. Instead, he kept the case file for one month after his withdrawal, presumably to delay the process.

One of the conditions for bail for Omoyele Sowore is that he would not travel outside Nigeria's capital city Abuja where his trial is being held.

In Nigeria, civic space continues to shrink as Nigerian authorities increasingly clampdown on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Authorities have intimidated journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders and activists, including through verbal and physical assault, arbitrary arrest, detention and prosecution. Many of these journalists, human rights defenders and activists face charges such as 'defamation', 'terrorism', 'cyberstalking', 'kidnapping', criminal trespass and theft of state documents. These charges are prosecuted under the Cybercrime Act and Terrorism (Prevention) (Amendment) Act 2013, alongside other laws. The Terrorism (Prevention) (Amendment) Act 2013 prescribes the death penalty for those found guilty. The Nigerian Senate is currently considering two harsh bills relating to the right to freedom of expression online, including one, which proposes the death penalty for 'hate speech.' These bills, supported by the Nigerian government, represent an alarming escalation in the authorities' attempts to censor and punish social media users for freely expressing their opinions.

The proposed National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speech bill, and the Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation and other Related Offences bill, give authorities arbitrary powers to shut down the internet and limit access to social media, and make criticizing the government punishable with penalties of up to 3 years in prison.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** [English Language]

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** [18 March 2020]

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Omoyele Sowore (he/his), Olawale Bakare (Mandate) (he/his) and Agba Jalingo (he/his)

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/1447/2019/en/>