

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 449/91 Health/legal concern

18 December 1991

GHANA John Akparibo Ndebugre, lawyer, former government minister, former ~~prisoner of conscience, opposition politician, National Organizer~~ for the Movement for Freedom and Justice

John Ndebugre has been detained without charge and allegedly beaten and ill-treated. He is alleged not to have stood up promptly when Ghana's national anthem was being played. Amnesty International is concerned at reports that he is ill as a result of his harsh conditions of detention and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release on the grounds that he is a prisoner of conscience.

John Ndebugre was arrested on 10 December 1991 in Bawku, Upper East Region in northern Ghana, after a traditional rally attended by the head of state, Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, Chairman of the ruling Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). He apparently failed to stand up promptly when the national anthem was played and was arrested by members of Flight-Lieutenant Rawlings' bodyguard. They reportedly beat him; he was then held in custody, his head was brutally shaved, and he was forced to practise standing up for the national anthem.

According to some reports, he was subsequently charged at Bawku Magistrate's Court with "failing to show respect for the national flag" and acquitted for lack of evidence. Other reports suggest that he was also brought before the Magistrate's Court in Bolgatanga, the capital of the Upper East Region, which ruled that it had no jurisdiction to hear the case and discharged him. He was apparently re-detained on the orders of the PNDC and is believed to have become seriously ill in Bolgatanga prison as a result of the harsh conditions.

His legal status is unclear but it appears that he may be held in administrative detention under the Preventive Custody Law, PNDC Law 4 of 1982, which allows indefinite detention without charge or trial of any person suspected of threatening the security of the state. This law has frequently been used to detain prisoners of conscience.

A lawyer and opposition politician, in the early 1980s John Ndebugre was a Regional Secretary in northern Ghana and a Secretary (minister) for Agriculture in the PNDC government. General Secretary of the Kwame Nkrumah Revolutionary Guard, a political organization, he was previously detained without charge or trial from July 1987 until April 1988 because of his criticism of PNDC policies. He is currently the National Organizer for the Movement for Freedom and Justice, a human rights organization including several opposition political groupings.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern at the arrest of John Ndebugre, apparently for failing

to stand up promptly for the national anthem, and at his continued detention in harsh conditions;

- expressing concern at reports that he was beaten and ill-treated by members of Flight-Lieutenant Rawlings' bodyguard following his arrest, and that he is ill as a result of his harsh conditions;

- requesting clarification of his current legal status;

- explaining that Amnesty International believes him to be a prisoner of conscience and calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Page 2 of UA 449/91

APPEALS TO:

1) Flight-Lieutenant J.J. Rawlings
Chairman of the Provisional National Defence Council
Office of the PNDC
PO Box 1627
Castle, Osu
Accra, Ghana

Dear Chairman

Telegrams: Flt-Lt. Rawlings, Accra, Ghana
Telexes: 2132 SCALE GH or 2337 NATSEC GH

2) Captain Kojo Tsikata
PNDC member responsible for National Security and
Foreign Affairs Office of the PNDC
PO Box 1627
Castle, Osu
Accra, Ghana

Dear Captain

Telegrams: Kojo Tsikata, Accra, Ghana
Telexes: 2132 SCALE GH or 2337 NATSEC GH

3) Mr E.G. Tanoh
Attorney General and Secretary for Justice
Ministry of Justice
PO Box M60
Accra, Ghana

Dear Attorney General

Telegrams: Mr E G Tanoh, Accra, Ghana

4) Major-General W.M. Mensah-Wood
Chief of Army Staff, General Officer Commanding the Ghana Armed Forces
Burma Camp
Accra, Ghana

Dear Major-General

Telegrams: Maj-Gen Mensa-Wood, Accra, Ghana
Telexes: 2077 BCAMP GH

COPIES TO:

Dr Obed Y. Asamoah
Secretary for Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PO Box M53
Accra, Ghana

and the following newspapers:

The Christian Chronicle
PO Box 494
Dansoman Estate
Accra, Ghana

Pioneer
PO Box 325
Kumasi, Ghana

The Vanguard
PO Box 157
Darkuman
Accra, Ghana

Young and Old
PO Box 7304
Accra-North, Ghana

and to diplomatic representatives of Ghana in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 January 1992.