

EXTERNAL

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Incommunicado Detention/Health Concern

10 January 1996

NIGERIANosa Igiebor, Editor-in-Chief, Tell magazine

Nosa Igiebor, Editor-in-Chief of the independent weekly *Tell* magazine, was arrested on 23 December 1995 by officers of the State Security Service (SSS). Since then he has been detained incommunicado and reportedly denied medication to treat hypertension and an ulcer. No reason has been given for his arrest and no charges have yet been brought against him, but it is most likely that his detention is related to continuing criticism of the Nigerian government by *Tell* magazine.

Nosa Igiebor is reportedly being held at the Lagos State headquarters of the SSS in Shangisha, near Lagos. On 8 January 1996 his lawyer mounted a legal challenge to his detention before the Federal High Court in Lagos on the grounds that it violated both the Nigerian Constitution and international human rights standards. His lawyer also asked the Federal High Court to order the authorities to allow Nosa Igiebor's wife to visit him in detention to give him the medication which he requires. The Federal High Court did so. However, such court orders have been routinely ignored by the Nigerian authorities in the past and when Mrs Harit Igiebor went to the SSS headquarters on 9 January 1996 she was refused access to her husband. The Federal High Court is expected to rule on the wider issue of the legality of Nosa Igiebor's detention on 15 January 1996.

Amnesty International believes that Nosa Igiebor is probably a prisoner of conscience, detained because of continuing criticism of the Nigerian government by *Tell* magazine. The organization is urging that he be given appropriate medical care and that he be granted immediate access to his lawyer. It calls for his immediate and unconditional release if he is not to be charged promptly with a recognizably criminal offence and fairly tried according to international standards of fair trial. It also calls upon the Nigerian authorities without delay to end his incommunicado detention and respect the court order of 9 January requiring them to allow Nosa Igiebor's wife access to him in order to give him the medication he requires.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The detention of Nosa Igiebor comes in the context of continuing harassment of the independent Nigerian press, including *Tell* magazine, by the authorities. In December 1995 the Nigerian authorities on at least two occasions raided the printers of *Tell* magazine and confiscated thousands of copies of recent editions. A number of street vendors selling *Tell* magazine were also arrested and later charged with selling an "unpatriotic magazine" before being released on bail. Government agents were suspected of responsibility for arson attacks by persons unknown on two independent newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The News*, in the same month. George Mbah, Assistant Editor of *Tell* magazine, was one of four journalists arrested in March 1995 and sentenced to life (later commuted to 15 years) imprisonment in secret military trials for reporting the arrests and grossly unfair trials of alleged coup-plotters (see Amnesty International's report on Nigeria, *A Travesty of Justice. Secret Treason Trials and Other Concerns* (AI Index: AFR 44/23/95)).

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

-asking to be informed of the reason for Nosa Igiebor's detention and expressing concern that he has been imprisoned because of continuing criticism of the government by *Tell* magazine;

-urging that Nosa Igiebor be granted full and immediate access to his lawyer and to appropriate medical care;

-calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Nosa Igiebor unless he is promptly to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and fairly tried according to international standards for fair trial;

- calling upon the Nigerian authorities without delay to respect the court order requiring them to allow Nosa Igiebor's wife access to her husband in order to give him essential medication.

APPEALS TO:

General Sani Abacha
 Chairman, Provisional Ruling Council
 State House
 Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Telegrams: General Abacha, Abuja, Nigeria
Faxes: +234 9 523 2138
Telexes: (0905) 91529 or 91530 EXTNAL NG
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

COPIES TO:

Mr Michael Agbamuche
 Minister of Justice and Attorney General
 Ministry of Justice, PMB 130, Abuja
 Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

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

The Editor, *The News*, PMB 21531, Ijeka, Lagos, Nigeria
 The Editor, *Tell*, PMB 21749, Ijeka, Lagos, Nigeria
 The Editor, *Vanguard*, PMB 1007, Apapa, Lagos, Nigeria
 The Editor, *The Guardian*, PMB 1217, Oshodi, 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 21 February 1996.