

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 44/01/98

UA 13/98 Fear of ill-treatment / Legal concern /
Possible prisoner of conscience

15 January 1998

NIGERIA Chima Ubani, Secretary General of the Democratic Alternative, former
prisoner of conscience

Chima Ubani was arrested on 14 January 1998 and taken to an unknown location where he is being detained. He is Secretary General of the Democratic Alternative (DA), a pro-democracy group and National Secretary of the United Action for Democracy, an umbrella grouping of pro-democracy and human rights organizations.

He was arrested by eight armed men belonging to the Special Security Services (SSS), the security police, during a press conference held at the headquarters of DA in Lagos. The press conference was held to launch the production of an audio cassette, entitled "Reflections", which contains testimonies and opinions of ordinary Nigerians about the political and economic situation in the country. At the press conference, calls were made for the release of another human rights defender, Ogaga Ifowodo, detained incommunicado and without charge or trial since November 1997 (see UA 368/97, AFR 44/24/97, 26 November 1997).

According to reports, the SSS agents, when called upon to produce an arrest warrant, threatened those attending the press conference with guns. They searched all those present at the conference and seized all copies of the cassette.

Chima Ubani has previously been detained as a prisoner of conscience, because of his pro-democracy and human rights work. In July 1995 he was arrested after unsubstantiated accusations that human rights groups were plotting to free defendants in secret treason trials in 1995. He was detained uncharged, untried and incommunicado until October 1996, in poor conditions and without adequate medical treatment. Since his release he has been living in hiding.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There has been a wave of arrests since October 1997. Those arrested include journalists, particularly those who have maintained a critical stance towards the military government despite repeated detentions, ill-treatment, harassment and threats against them (see UA 347/97, AFR 44/21/97, 5 November and updates AFR 44/22/97, 20 November and AFR 44/23/97, 21 November), and of pro-democracy and human rights activists and people related to them (see UA 401/97, AFR 44/29/97). In December 1997, 11 members of the military, including the Deputy Head of State and one civilian, were arrested on suspicion of organising a coup against General Sani Abacha (see UA 406/97, AFR 44/30/97).

Since the annulment of the Presidential elections in June 1993, critics of the government have continued to be detained, incommunicado and without charge or trial, under the draconian provisions of the State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree, No. 2 of 1984. This allows the government to detain any person it considers to be a threat to the security of the state. There are no safeguards against ill-treatment of detainees and the Decree specifically excludes the courts from making any order with respect to any detainee held under the Decree.

Detainees have frequently been held in harsh and health-threatening conditions.

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

- asking to be informed of the reasons for the detention of Chima Ubani, who appears to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned for his work as a leading pro-democracy and human rights activist;
- expressing concern that, when called upon to produce an arrest warrant, SSS officers threatened with guns those attending a peaceful public event;
- urging that Chima Ubani be safeguarded against ill-treatment and given immediate and full access to his lawyer, family and a doctor of his own choice;
- calling for him to be released immediately and unconditionally if he is not to be promptly charged and fairly tried in accordance with international standards of fair trial.

APPEALS TO:

General Sani Abacha
Chairman, Provisional Ruling Council
State House, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Telegrams: General Abacha, Abuja, Nigeria
Faxes: c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs + 234 9 523 0394/0210 ("please forward")
Salutation: Dear General

Dr Bukar Usman
Director General, Special Services Office
State House, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Telegrams: Dr Usman, State House, Abuja, Nigeria
Salutation: Dear Dr Usman

Alhaji Ibrahim Coomasie
Inspector General of Police
Nigeria Police Force Headquarters
Garki, Abuja, Nigeria
Telegrams: Inspector General Police, Abuja, Nigeria
Salutation: Dear Inspector General

COPIES TO:

Chief Tom Ikimi
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maputo Street
PMB 130, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Faxes: +234 9 523 0394 or +234 9 523 0210.

Mr Justice P.K. Nwokedi, Chairman
National Human Rights Commission
National Assembly Complex, Maitama
PMB 444, Garki
Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

The Editor, *Newswatch*, PMB 21499, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *The News*, PMB 21531, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *The Guardian*, PMB 1217, Oshodi, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Tell*, PMB 21749, Ijeka, 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 28 February 1998.