

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: AFR 44/04/95
Distr: UA/SC

Further information on UA 282/94, AFR 44/09/94, 21 July 1994- Health concern for prisoner of conscience

Please organise appeals from medical groups

21 April 1995

NIGERIABashorun (Chief) Moshood K.O. Abiola, 58, newspaper publisher and businessman

Moshood Abiola, widely acknowledged winner of annulled presidential elections in 1993, has been imprisoned on treason charges since June 1994. In constant pain and with failing sight, he is at risk of a stroke or permanent paralysis and urgently requires specialist medical investigations and treatment.

Several foreign governments have appealed for his release, including President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, who recently reiterated his appeal after his envoy, the Most Reverend Desmond Tutu, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, met General Sani Abacha, the Nigerian head of state, and Moshood Abiola on 5 April 1995. Moshood Abiola said that he was in urgent need of medical treatment, had suffered severe weight loss, was locked up 24 hours a day and allowed no exercise. He also said he wanted to accept the government's offer of conditional release originally made in August 1994.

In statements on 11 and 13 April 1995 the Nigerian government said that it would not release him as his case was still before the courts. However, the government has repeatedly shown its contempt for the rule of law by flouting court orders, passing retroactive decrees to block unfavourable court rulings and setting up special courts to try political cases. It has ignored several court orders made in Moshood Abiola's case, including in November 1994 when the Court of Appeal in Kaduna ordered his release on bail. In a split decision, the court later allowed a postponement of the release order while the government appealed against it before the Supreme Court. However, on 20 April 1995 the Supreme Court adjourned hearings in two separate legal actions in the case to 18 May and 1 June.

Also in contravention of court rulings, Moshood Abiola has been held in harsh conditions of detention. He went on hunger-strike in late March 1995 because he has been denied medical examinations by his doctor and family visits, and a few days later the authorities requested his doctor and his wife, Bisi Abiola, to visit him. However on 3 April, after travelling 500 kilometres from Lagos, his wife was denied any access, apparently on orders from the government, and his doctor was given only 10 minutes with him and not allowed to return to do medical examinations.

He is reportedly held in a badly-lit room and forbidden a radio, reading materials apart from the Koran and the Bible, and conversation with his guards. He has apparently not been allowed to have his watch mended and has lost all sense of time. His senior wife, Kudirat Abiola, has been denied visits since October 1994 on the grounds that she was being investigated for an offence although she has not been charged or even questioned. Another wife, Dr Doyin Abiola, was last allowed a visit of a few minutes in December 1994, and has since been invited to Abuja only to be refused access after waiting for several days.

In September and October 1994 medical specialists including government-appointed medical teams said that he was seriously ill with high blood pressure and neurological and musculo-skeletal problems, aggravated by an injury to his back caused when a police officer forcibly removed reading materials from him.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The results of the June 1993 presidential elections were annulled by the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida. In November 1993 General Sani Abacha took power by force from a military-appointed interim government and halted a lengthy return to civilian rule begun in 1987. He removed elected legislative bodies and state governors, banned political parties and leading opposition newspapers, and detained hundreds of opponents without charge or trial, including most recently former head of state General (Retd) Olusegun Obasanjo and others accused of an alleged plot to overthrow the government.

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

- expressing concern at reports of the harsh conditions in which Moshood Abiola is being held and of his serious deterioration in health;
- urging the government to give him full and immediate access to his family and lawyers, as well as the urgent medical examination and treatment he needs, whether within or outside Nigeria;
- appealing for his immediate and unconditional release on the grounds that he is a prisoner of conscience imprisoned for his non-violent political activities.

APPEALS TO

General Sani Abacha
 Chairman, Provisional Ruling Council
 State House
 Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Telegrams: General Abacha, Abuja, Nigeria
Fax +234 95 232138
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

Alhaji Aminu Saleh
 Secretary to the Government of the Federation of Nigeria
 State House
 Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria
Telegrams: Alhaji Saleh, Abuja, Nigeria
Salutation: Dear Secretary

Alhaji Ibrahim Coomasie
 Inspector General of Police

Nigeria Police Force Headquarters
Garki, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

Telegrams: Alhaji Coomasie, Abuja, Nigeria

Salutation: Dear Inspector General

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

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

The Editor, *The News*, PMB 21531, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Tell*, PMB 21749, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Daily Times*, PMB 21340, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Vanguard*, PMB 1007, Apapa, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Nigerian Observer*, PMB 1334, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria
The Editor, *Nigerian Tribune*, POB 78, Ibadan, Oyo State, 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 2 June 1995.