

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 219/94 Prisoners of conscience / Death penalty

8 June 1994

NIGERIA Ameh Ebute, lawyer, former President of the Senate, leading member of the newly-formed National Democratic Coalition (NADECO)
Chief Olusegun Osoba, former Governor of Ogun State
Polycarp Nwite, former Senator
O.A. Okoroafor, former Senator

and several other pro-democracy activists

The military government in Nigeria has arrested and charged with treason prominent critics who have urged it to step down in favour of a civilian government. Former members of the Senate and House of Representatives, which were dissolved after a military coup in November 1993, have called for the reinstatement of democratic institutions. The security police are currently seeking other pro-democracy activists, and Amnesty International fears that more prisoners of conscience will be imprisoned. Treason is an offence punishable by death in Nigeria.

On 1 June 1994 former members of the Senate issued a statement urging General Sani Abacha, the head of the military government, to stand down as head of state. This followed a secret meeting on 30 May of about two-thirds of the disbanded 91-member senate. On 2 June the security police arrested **Ameh Ebute**, former President of the Senate, for having convened the meeting.

On 3 June **Chief Olusegun Osoba**, former Governor of Ogun State, was arrested.

On the same day former members of the House of Representatives met and also called on the military government to resign by 11 June; former civilian state governors were also reported to have held a meeting. On 4 June two other former senators were arrested, **O.A. Okoroafor** and **Polycarp Nwite**, the latter being arrested when he tried to visit Ameh Ebute in detention.

On 6 June Ameh Ebute and Polycarp Nwite were charged with treason and conspiring with others still at large to remove the government. Several other pro-democracy activists are believed to have been detained in recent days. Some are believed to have been denied adequate food, water and bedding.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since Nigeria's independence from colonial rule in 1960, more than 23 years have been under military rule. In June 1993 the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida aborted a planned return to civilian rule when it annulled the results of the presidential elections won by Chief Moshood K.O. Abiola.

In November 1993 a new military government under General Sani Abacha seized power, dissolved the Senate and House of Representatives, dismissed civilian State Governors and prohibited all political activity. General Abacha's promises of a future return to democracy are widely disbelieved and foreign governments have imposed sanctions on Nigeria in protest at his effective termination of the lengthy and expensive process, which began in the 1980s, of returning Nigeria to civilian rule.

In May 1994 the newly-formed National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), comprising former political leaders and pro-democracy activists, demanded that the military government hand over power to the elected President by the end of the month. Its secretariat is currently under surveillance and its members

sought by the security police. The military government has threatened treason charges against Chief Abiola if he tries to form a civilian government.

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

- expressing concern that critics of the government, including those named above, have been arrested simply for calling for an end to military rule in Nigeria;
- expressing concern at reports that some of the detainees have been given inadequate food, water and bedding, and seeking assurances that all those detained are being held in accordance with international standards and given immediate access to lawyers, families and medical care;
- expressing concern also that some have been charged with criminal offences, especially since treason carries the death penalty, which Amnesty International unconditionally opposes;
- stating Amnesty International's belief that the detainees are prisoners of conscience who have neither used nor advocated violence, and calling for the withdrawal of all charges against them and for their immediate and unconditional release.

APPEALS TO

1. General Sani Abacha
Chairman, Provisional Ruling Council,
Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces and
Minister of Defence
State House, Abuja
Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

Telexes: (0905) 91529 or 91530 EXTNAL NG (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Telegrams: General Abacha, Abuja, Nigeria

Salutation: Dear General Abacha

2. Dr Olu Onagoruwa
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Ministry of Justice
Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

Telegrams: Minister of Justice Onagoruwa, Abuja, Nigeria

Salutation: Dear Minister

3. Lieutenant-General D.O. Diya
Chief of General Staff
State House, Abuja
Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

Telegrams: Chief of Staff Diya, Abuja, Nigeria

Salutation: Dear Lieutenant-General Diya

4. Baba Gana Kingibe
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PMB 130, Abuja
Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

Telexes: (0905) 91529 or 91530 EXTNAL NG

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

The Editor, *Daily Times*, PMB 21340, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *National Concord*, POB 4483, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Vanguard*, PMB 1007, Apapa, Lagos, Nigeria
The Editor, *Nigerian Observer*, PMB 1334, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria
The Editor, *Daily Sketch*, PMB 5067, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria
The Editor, *New Democrat*, POB 4457, Kaduna South, Kaduna 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 20 July 1994.