

AI INDEX: AFR 44/31/96  
11 NOVEMBER 1996

NIGERIA: GOVERNMENT STIFLES COMMEMORATION OF OGONI EXECUTIONS

A heavy security presence in Ogoniland prevented the public and peaceful commemoration yesterday of the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight Ogoni colleagues.

“On 10 November, the anniversary of the executions, the Nigerian authorities announced, with apparent satisfaction, that their law and order operations had successfully prevented public commemorations,” Amnesty International said today. “These attempts should be a source of shame for the government, not satisfaction.”

Although some vigils and church services did go ahead in Ogoniland and in other parts of the country, many planned activities and commemorations in Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State where the executions took place, did not go ahead. The government's 4 November threat to "*deal ruthlessly*" with public demonstrations appears to have had the desired intimidatory effect.

The security presence in Ogoniland and Port Harcourt has been heavy for several weeks, with at least 20 members of the Ogoni ethnic group reportedly arrested. Goi Aadum, Bariaara Kpalap, Duba Aazor and Kenwin Meneta are among those who apparently remain in detention without charge or trial.

Amnesty International believes that those arrested have been detained solely for peacefully expressing their political views and fears that the Ogoni detainees may have been ill-treated while in detention.

Amnesty International restates its appeal to the international community that now is the time to redouble efforts to end contempt for human rights in Nigeria.

“The crisis in Ogoniland cannot be solved without an end to the all-pervasive contempt for human rights which the Nigerian Government displays,” the organization said.

As part of a campaign it launched on 6 November, Amnesty International has published a 10-point program for human rights reform in Nigeria. The organization continues to call on the Nigerian Government to commit itself to a genuine and far-reaching program of human rights reform and urges the international community to press Nigeria to do so.

On 8 November three Amnesty International officials were stopped at a police checkpoint in Lagos on their way to a meeting with foreign diplomats, interrogated and released after 12 hours. One was subsequently deported from the country. The other two, senior officials of the organization's Nigerian Section, have since been ordered to report to the police for several hours every day. The Section's office in Lagos has been forcibly closed by the police.

“Patrice Vahard, Amnesty International's representative from its International Secretariat, was speaking on behalf of Amnesty International’s Secretary General who had been denied entry to the country,” the organization said. “He was threatened by a senior police officer and told that there is an embargo on visits by Amnesty International, including by its Secretary General.”

The human rights organization is calling for an end to the harassment of Amnesty International's Nigerian Section and of all organizations engaged in the peaceful advocacy of human and political rights in Nigeria.

ENDS\