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NIGERIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGES THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS TO ADOPT CONCRETE MEASURES

Amnesty International today urged the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to take concrete measures on the human rights situation in Nigeria at its extraordinary session in Kampala, Uganda on 18 and 19 December 1995.

"For the first time since its establishment in July 1987, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights is to hold an extraordinary session to consider the human rights situation in a particular country," Amnesty International said today.

The African Commission, the body of experts which monitors implementation of the OAU African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, will be meeting to recommend practical measures to be taken by the Nigerian government, the OAU and the African Commission to protect human rights there.

Welcoming this initiative, Amnesty International urged the African Commission to adopt concrete measures, including

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- requesting Nigeria to present a special report to the African Commission responding to critical resolutions by the African Commission on arbitrary arrests and detentions, restrictions on the right to freedom of expression, tampering with the independence of the judicial system and the adoption of decrees preventing the courts from investigating human rights violations;
- requesting the African Commission's human rights expert on political killings to visit Nigeria to research a report which will be presented to the next session of the African Commission in March 1996 with recommendations to improve the human rights situation;
- placing Nigeria as a special item on its agenda so that it receives regular attention at future sessions of the African Commission;
- requesting the OAU Council of Ministers, which meets in February 1996, to establish a group of eminent African leaders to influence the Nigerian government to respect human rights.

"The African Commission should seize this opportunity to take decisive steps to prevent the human rights situation in Nigeria deteriorating further and in so doing it will demonstrate its willingness to act quickly and effectively to protect human rights in Africa," the organization stated.

Amnesty International today also expressed concern about 19 Ogoni detainees who are charged with the same murders for which Ken Saro-Wiwa and nine others were recently executed. The trial of the 19 was due to commence in January 1996, but on 12 December 1996 the Federal High Court in Lagos ordered its suspension until 12 February 1996. The accused are asking the court to declare that a special court which is to try them is illegal and unconstitutional.

“We fear that the Nigerian authorities will ignore the order of the Federal High Court, as it has done previously, and that the trials of the 19 Ogoni may proceed in January 1996. If that happens, we are concerned that they could be unfairly tried, sentenced to death and executed without right of appeal to a higher court, in violation of Nigeria’s solemn treaty commitments to respect the rights to life and fair trial,” the organization said.

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