

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 51/01/98

UA 20/98

Torture or ill-treatment/
Prisoners of conscience

20 January 1998

SIERRA LEONESylvanus Kanyako, journalist, *Herald Guardian*
David Koroma, journalist, proprietor of *Herald Guardian*
Anthony Swaray, freelance journalist

Three Freetown-based journalists are reported to be in a serious state of ill-health after being tortured and ill-treated following their arrests. Amnesty International is concerned for the journalists' safety and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release as prisoners of conscience.

Sylvanus Kanyako, a journalist working for the *Herald Guardian* newspaper, was arrested on 10 January 1998, together with the newspaper's proprietor, David Koroma, and its production editor, Mohamed Kallon. Two days later Mohamed Kallon was released, his hands reportedly covered in bruises. The arrests are believed to be related to an article in the *Herald Guardian*, which speculated that a senior member of the ruling Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) was to be arrested.

Anthony Swaray was arrested around 14 January, suspected of passing information to a clandestine radio station, which has been broadcasting since July 1997 in support of the government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, ousted in a military coup in May 1997.

No charges have been brought against these journalists.

Sylvanus Kanyako is believed to be held in a cell at police Criminal Investigation Department (CID) headquarters in the centre of Freetown. He is reported to have his arms tied tightly behind his back and to be in a serious condition. David Koroma is reported to have been admitted to hospital as a result of ill-treatment while in custody. Anthony Swaray is also reported to have been severely beaten and is being held at the CID headquarters.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the military coup on 25 May 1997, soldiers, together with members of the armed opposition Revolutionary United Front (RUF) who have joined forces with them, have committed serious human rights violations. Hundreds of people have been arbitrarily arrested and detained; many have been tortured and ill-treated. Some of those suspected of opposing the AFRC have been extrajudicially executed. Victims of human rights violations have included people associated with the ousted government, journalists, students and human rights activists.

Shortly after the military coup, the AFRC expressed its intention to ensure that press freedom was unrestricted. This commitment was, however, short-lived. As with other critics of the coup and the AFRC, journalists have become the targets of threats, ill-treatment, arrest and detention.

In October the AFRC agreed to return power to President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah by 22 April 1998. However, there have been serious set-backs to the implementation of this agreement. Fighting between soldiers, together with RUF forces, and local hunters, known as *kamajors*, who support President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, has intensified throughout the country. The serious human rights abuses, including torture, ill-treatment and deliberate and arbitrary killings

of unarmed civilians, which characterized the internal armed conflict between government forces and the RUF from 1991 to 1996, are once again occurring.

In October 1997 Amnesty International published a report - *Sierra Leone: A disastrous set-back for human rights* - which documented the serious human rights violations that have occurred since the coup, and made specific recommendations to the AFRC for ending these abuses. It also called on the international community, which has condemned the coup and sought to resolve the political crisis in Sierra Leone, to ensure the protection of fundamental human rights in any decisions and actions it takes.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Because of disruption to communications with Sierra Leone since May 1997, Urgent Action coordinators are asked to organize a limited number of appeals only: up to FIVE per section. A restricted international postal services is operating through neighbouring Guinea, but delays are inevitable. Fax machines operate but sometimes intermittently.

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

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of journalists Sylvanus Kanyako, David Koroma and Anthony Swaray, whom Amnesty International considers to be prisoners of conscience;
- expressing concern about reports that they have been tortured or ill-treated while in custody and urging immediate measures to ensure that they are protected from torture and ill-treatment and are humanely treated;
- requesting an immediate investigation into these reports of torture and ill-treatment in order to bring those responsible to justice;
- urging that Sylvanus Kanyako and Anthony Swaray be allowed immediate access to a doctor, a lawyer and members of their families.

APPEALS TO:

Lieutenant Colonel Johnny Paul Koroma
 Chairman, Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
 State House
 Independence Avenue
 Freetown, Sierra Leone
Fax: + 232 22 24 21 26 or 232 22 22 78 78
Salutation: Dear Lieutenant Colonel Koroma

Colonel Abdul K. Sesay
 Secretary General, Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
 State House
 Independence Avenue
 Freetown, Sierra Leone
Fax: + 232 22 22 94 73
Salutation: Dear Colonel Sesay

Mr Allieu Kamara
 Spokesman, Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
 State House
 Independence Avenue
 Freetown, Sierra Leone
Fax: + 232 22 22 88 99
Salutation: Dear Mr Kamara

Mr Alimamy Paolo Bangura
 Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

Department of Foreign Affairs
14 Gloucester Street
Freetown, Sierra Leone
Fax: + 232 22 22 56 15
Salutation: Dear Mr Bangura

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 3 March 1998.