

His Excellency Alhaji Umar Yar'Adua
President of the Republic of Nigeria
Office of the President
Aso Rock
Abuja,
Federal Capital Territory
Nigeria

, 2008

Your Excellency,

Amnesty International has recently published the report "Nigeria: Prisoners Rights Systematically Flouted", which documents widespread human rights violations in the Nigerian prison system. This report has many examples, which describe the living conditions for inmates in Nigerian prisons as cruel, inhumane and degrading. Most of these inmates are awaiting trial (65 %) and most of these do not have any legal representation (80 %). Some have no hope that their case will ever be heard because their files have been lost. In most prisons, children awaiting trial and mentally ill inmates - some of whom are not accused of any offence - are kept in the same cells together with convicted criminals. Many of the 10 prisons that the delegation of Amnesty International visited in 2007 are dilapidated and need renovation; schools and workshops in these prisons are in urgent need of materials for their operation.

To meet UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, it is also necessary that medication is distributed free of charge and that inmates are provided with separate beds. Most of the appalling conditions in Nigerian prisons are due to their overcrowding, which is a result of deficits in the Nigerian Justice system. Inmates often have to wait for many years to be tried and convicted.

I would like to ask your Excellency to ensure that people accused of a crime are provided with legal aid and get a fair trial within a reasonable time. The Legal Aid Council needs to be equipped with the necessary resources to ensure legal representation for all prisoners who need it. Procedures have to be speeded up, especially for minors and people accused of minor offences. Please ensure that all judges and magistrates are aware that individuals detained without charge should be charged promptly with a recognizable criminal offence or otherwise released.

Yours sincerely,