

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER FACING INTIMIDATION

Human rights defender Maurice Fangnon was detained at the Nigerian Police Force Criminal Intelligence and Investigations Department in Abuja accused of providing police with false information that a member of a powerful royal family was responsible for arson, murder and forced evictions of residents of the Otodo-Gbame community. He was released four days later, but was asked to report back on Wednesday, 2 August. Amnesty International is concerned that this is an attempt to intimidate him.

Maurice Fangnon, a 60 year old human rights defender, was on 24 July released on bail and asked to report back to the Nigerian Police Force Criminal Intelligence and Investigations Department in Abuja, Nigeria on 2 August. He had been arrested by officials of the Nigerian Police Force Criminal Intelligence and Investigations Department and detained in Lagos on 19 July. He was then transferred to Abuja the same day.

Maurice Fangnon wrote at least three petitions to the police (between September 2014 and December 2016), asking for investigations into allegations of the involvement of a member of a powerful royal family in incidences of arson, looting and murder during attempts to forcibly evict residents of the Otodo-Gbame community. According to his lawyer, the police arrested Maurice Fangnon because they investigated the allegations in his petitions and found them to be false. His lawyer also said that the police do not have any substantial evidence against him, and his arrest was an attempt to stop his advocacy on the case.

Between November 2016 and April 2017, residents of Otodo-Gbame were attacked by armed persons whom the residents identified as having been sent by a member of a powerful royal family, who sometimes accompanied them during the attacks. Lagos State authorities and police have on three occasions also forcibly evicted residents of Otodo-Gbame. This resulted in about 30,000 people being forcibly evicted, while at least five people died and at least 15 others sustained machete and gunshot injuries. During the forced evictions which took place on 9 April, all the structures belonging to the residents of Otodo-Gbame were destroyed by fire and state bulldozers.

Amnesty International is concerned that Maurice Fangnon is facing harassment and intimidation because of his human rights work and that this is an attempt to silence him. If the police continue to harass Maurice Fangnon, he is vulnerable to a range of other human rights violations.

Please write immediately in English or your own language:

- Urging the Inspector General of Police to immediately investigate the harassment of Maurice Fangnon, including his arrest;
- Calling on the government to conduct an independent and impartial investigation into the allegations of arson, murder, assault, forced eviction and wilful destruction of property, which took place in the Otodo-Gbame community.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 6 SEPTEMBER 2017 TO:

Governor of Lagos State

Governor Akinwunmi Ambode

Twitter: @AkinwunmiAmbode

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Akinwunmi

i.Ambode

Salutation: Your Excellency

Inspector General of Police

Mr. Ibrahim Kpotun

Force Headquarters

Louis Edet House, 5th Floor, Shehu

Shagari Way, Abuja, Nigeria

Twitter: @PoliceNG: PoliceNG_PCRRU

Salutation: Dear Sir

And copies to:

The Acting Executive Secretary of the National Human Rights Commission

Mrs. Oti Ovwah

National Secretariat

No 19 Aguiyi Ironsi Street Maitama

P.M.B. 444Garki Abuja, Nigeria

Salutation: Dear Madam

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Mr A.S. Ogah, Acting High Commission for the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Nigeria House 9 Northumberland Avenue WC2N 5BX, 020 7839 1244 Fax 020 7839 8746 chancery@nigeriahc.org or information@nigeriahc.org.uk or hc@nigeriahc.org.uk

Salutation: Your Excellency Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Maurice Fangnon is a human rights defender, and Secretary General of Centre for the Defence of Human Rights and Democracy in Africa working in Lagos, Nigeria. He is being persecuted for his human rights work and has previously received several death threats via emails and anonymous telephone calls. He has reported the death threats to the Deputy Commissioner of Police in Lagos State where he resides.

In November 2016, Maurice Fangnon, Justice and Empowerment Initiatives (JEI, a human rights organisation working closely with Otodo-Gbame) and residents of the community wrote separate petitions to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) requesting investigations into the forced eviction of the Otodo-Gbame community by fire, by criminal gangs allegedly from the neighbouring community and the police, which led to the loss of lives and property. They also requested investigation into two murders, and series of violent attacks on residents of Otodo-Gbame since 2014. The petitions were directed to the IGP because of concerns that the Lagos State Police divisions lacked impartiality to investigate the matter, and because earlier petitions and complaints at the state level had resulted in the arrest and long detention of Otodo-Gbame community members, while their alleged attackers were not arrested. Also, due to a fear of further attacks, the petitions requested for police protection for the community during the period of the investigation.

The IGP directed these to Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad (Federal SARS) for investigations. The Federal SARS commenced its investigations in Lagos on 28 December 2016, and arrested two suspects, but released them shortly after taking their statements. Maurice Fangnon and a representative from JEI protested their release but they were told by the SARS team that the men were released on bail and that all parties to the case were invited to the Police Force headquarters in Abuja to continue with the investigations. The meeting was scheduled for 7 December 2016 at the Federal SARS headquarters in Abuja. After this meeting, Maurice Fangnon and six other residents who were in attendance were arrested, but later released by a Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG), following the intervention of an attorney from JEI.

The Otodo-Gbame community members claim ownership of the land they occupied, and told Amnesty International that they had occupied this land for at least ten decades. Amnesty International interviewed people above 70 years old, who said they were born and raised on that land. All the residents have been forcibly evicted and the land appears to have been taken over by the royal family. A construction sign post seen on the land in June 2017 indicates that the royal family is now in control of the land. Maurice Fangnon, JEI, community residents and Amnesty International have continued to call on state authorities and the police to investigate the attacks and forced eviction of residents of the Otodo-Gbame community and bring those responsible to justice.

Nigeria's criminal justice system is compromised by the potential for people with money and power to influence the police, other security forces, and government agencies. As a consequence of this, the lives of human rights defenders, such as Maurice Fangnon, are at risk.

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