



PRESS RELEASE

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Nigeria: Senior members of military must be investigated for war crimes

- **Horrific war crimes committed by Nigeria's military including 8,000 people murdered, starved, suffocated, and tortured to death;**
- **senior military commanders, named by Amnesty International, must be investigated in relation to war crimes and possible crimes against humanity;**
- **new government needs to ensure the protection of civilians and bring to an end the culture of impunity within the Nigeria's armed forces.**

The Nigerian military, including senior military commanders, must be investigated for participating, sanctioning or failing to prevent the deaths of more than 8,000 people murdered starved, suffocated, and tortured to death, according to a comprehensive report by Amnesty International.

Based on years of research and analysis of evidence - including leaked military reports and correspondence, as well as interviews with more than 400 victims, eyewitnesses and senior members of the Nigerian security forces - the organization outlines a range of war crimes and possible crimes against humanity committed by the Nigerian military in the course of the fight against Boko Haram in the north-east of the country.

The report, *Stars on their shoulders. Blood on their hands: War crimes committed by the Nigerian military*, reveals that, since March 2011, more than 7,000 young men and boys died in military detention and more than 1,200 people were unlawfully killed since February 2012.

Amnesty International provides compelling evidence of the need for an investigation into the individual and command responsibilities of soldiers, and mid-level and senior-level military commanders. The report outlines the roles and possible criminal responsibilities of those along the chain of command - up to the Chief of Defence Staff and Chief of Army Staff - and names nine senior Nigerian military figures who should be investigated for command and individual responsibility for the crimes committed.

"This sickening evidence exposes how thousands of young men and boys have been arbitrarily arrested and deliberately killed or left to die in detention in the most horrific conditions. It provides strong grounds for investigations into the possible criminal responsibility of members of the military, including those at the highest levels," said Salil Shetty, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

"Whilst an urgent and impartial investigation of these war crimes is vital, this report is not just about the criminal responsibility of individuals. It is also about the responsibility of Nigeria's leadership to act decisively to end the pervasive culture of impunity within the armed forces."

Amnesty International is calling for Nigeria to ensure prompt, independent and effective investigations of the following military officers for potential individual or command responsibility for the war crimes of murder, torture and enforced disappearance detailed in this report:

- * Major General John A.H. Ewansiha
- * Major General Obida T Ethnan
- * Major General Ahmadu Mohammed
- * Brigadier General Austin O. Edokpayi
- * Brigadier General Rufus O. Bamigboye



Amnesty International is further calling for Nigeria to ensure prompt, independent and effective investigations of the following high-level military commanders for their potential command responsibility for crimes committed by their subordinates. They would be responsible if they knew or if they should have known about the commission of the war crimes and failed to take adequate action to prevent them or to ensure the alleged perpetrators are brought to justice:

- * **General Azubuike Ihejirika** - Chief of Army Staff, Sept 2010 - Jan 2014).
- * **Admiral Ola Sa'ad Ibrahim** - Chief of Defence Staff, Oct 2012 - Jan 2014).
- * **Air Chief Marshal Badeh** - Chief of Defence Staff, Jan 2014 - time of writing
- * **General Ken Minimah** - Chief of Army Staff, Jan 2014 - time of writing

Mass deaths in custody

In their response to Boko Haram's attacks in the north-east, the Nigerian military have arrested at least 20,000 young men and boys since 2009, some as young as nine years old. In most cases they were arbitrarily arrested, often based solely on the word of a single unidentified secret informant. Most were arrested in mass "screening" operations or "cordon-and-search" raids where security forces round up hundreds of men. Almost none of those detained have been brought to court and all have been held without the necessary safeguards against murder, torture and ill-treatment.

Detainees are held incommunicado in extremely overcrowded, unventilated cells without sanitary facilities and with little food or water. Many are subjected to torture and thousands have died from ill-treatment and as a result of dire detention conditions. One former detainee told Amnesty International: "All I know was that once you get detained by the soldiers and taken to Giwa [military barracks], your life is finished."

A high-ranking military officer gave Amnesty International a list of 683 detainees who died in custody between October 2012 and February 2013. The organization also obtained evidence that in 2013, more than 4,700 bodies were brought to a mortuary from a detention facility in Giwa barracks. In June 2013 alone, more than 1,400 corpses were delivered to the mortuary from this facility.

A former detainee who spent four months in detention described how on arrival "The soldiers said: "Welcome to your die house. Welcome to your place of death". Only 11 of the 122 men he was arrested with survived.

Starvation, dehydration and disease

Amnesty International researchers witnessed emaciated corpses in mortuaries, and one former Giwa detainee told the organization that around 300 people in his cell died after being denied water for two days. "Sometimes we drank people's urine, but even the urine you at times could not get."

The evidence gathered from former detainees and eyewitnesses is also corroborated by senior military sources. One senior military officer told Amnesty International that detention centres are not given sufficient money for food and that detainees in Giwa barracks are "deliberately starved."

Disease - including possible outbreaks of cholera - was rife. A police officer posted at a detention facility known as the "Rest House" in Potiskum told Amnesty International how more than 500 corpses were buried in and around the camp. "They don't take them to the hospital if they are sick or to the mortuary if they die," he said.

Overcrowding and suffocation

Conditions of detention in Giwa barracks and detention centres in Damaturu were so overcrowded that hundreds of detainees were packed into small cells where they had to take turns sleeping or even sitting on the floor. At its peak, Giwa barracks -- which was not built as a detention facility -- was accommodating more than 2,000 detainees at one time.



“Hundreds have been killed in detention either (by soldiers) shooting them or by suffocation,” a military officer told Amnesty International, describing the situation in Sector Alpha detention centre (known as ‘Guantanamo’). Amnesty International has confirmed that on a single day, 19 June 2013, 47 detainees died there as a result of suffocation.

Fumigation

In order to combat the spread of disease and stifle the stench, cells were regularly fumigated with chemicals. Fumigation may have led to the deaths of many detainees in their poorly ventilated cells. One military official based at Giwa barracks told Amnesty International: “Many Boko Haram suspects died as a result of fumigation. They fumigated with the chemicals you use for killing mosquitoes. It is something very powerful. It is very dangerous.”

Torture

Amnesty International has received consistent reports as well as video evidence of torture by the military during and after arrest. Former detainees and senior military sources described how detainees were regularly tortured to death, hung on poles over fires, tossed into deep pits or interrogated using electric batons. These findings are consistent with widespread patterns of torture and ill-treatment documented by Amnesty International over a number of years, most recently in the 2014 report, *'Welcome to hell fire': Torture in Nigeria*.

Extrajudicial executions

More than 1,200 people have been extrajudicially executed by the military and associated militias in north-east Nigeria. The worst case documented by Amnesty International took place on 14 March 2014 when the military killed more than 640 detainees who had fled Giwa barracks after Boko Haram attacked.

Many of these killings appear to be reprisals following attacks by Boko Haram. A senior military official told Amnesty International that such killings were common. Soldiers “go to the nearest place and kill all the youths... People killed may be innocent and not armed,” he said.

In a so-called “mop up” operation following a Boko Haram attack in Baga on 16 April 2013, a senior military official told Amnesty International how the military “transferred their aggression on the community”. At least 185 people were killed.

Detainees were also routinely killed. One military officer based in Giwa Barracks told Amnesty International that since the end of 2014, very few suspects were even taken into custody but were immediately killed instead. This was confirmed by several human rights defenders and witnesses.

High level military commanders knew of the crimes

The highest levels of Nigeria’s military command, including the Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Staff, were regularly informed of operations conducted in north-east Nigeria.

Evidence shows that senior military leaders knew, or should have known, about the nature and scale of the crimes being committed. Internal military documents show that they were updated on the high rates of deaths among detainees through daily field reports, letters and assessment reports sent by field commanders to Defence Headquarters (DHQ) and Army Headquarters.

Amnesty International has seen numerous requests and reminders sent from commanders in the field to DHQ warning of the rise in the number of deaths in custody, the dangers of fumigation and requesting a transfer of detainees. In addition, reports by teams sent to DHQ to assess military facilities and “authenticate data”, highlight death rates and warn that overcrowding was causing serious health problems and could lead to “an epidemic”.

Amnesty International has verified this knowledge and failure to act from a number of sources, including interviews with senior military officers. One military source told Amnesty International: “People at the top saw it but refused to do anything about it.”



Need for action

"Despite being informed of the death rates and conditions of detention, Nigerian military officials consistently failed to take meaningful action. Those in charge of detention facilities, as well as their commanders at army and defence headquarters, must be investigated," said Salil Shetty.

"For years the Nigerian authorities have downplayed accusations of human rights abuses by the military. But they cannot dismiss their own internal military documents. They cannot ignore testimonies from witnesses and high-ranking military whistle blowers. And they cannot deny the existence of emaciated and mutilated bodies piled on mortuary slabs and dumped in mass graves."

"We call on newly-elected President Buhari to end the culture of impunity that has blighted Nigeria and for the African Union and international community to encourage and support these efforts. As a matter of urgency, the President must launch an immediate and impartial investigation into the crimes detailed in Amnesty International's report and hold all those responsible to account, no matter their rank or position. Only then can there be justice for the dead and their relatives."

For more information or to arrange an interview please contact:

LONDON - stefan.simanowitz@amnesty.org
+ 44 (0) 20 7413 5729 or 07778 472126 press@amnesty.org

ABUJA - susanna.flood@amnesty.org +44 7908 394 319

The report and other media materials can be downloaded here

https://amnesty.app.box.com/files/0/f/3643340145/Nigeria_Military_Abuses_Report_2015

Background

Between 2013 and 2015, Amnesty International delegates conducted six field investigations in north-east Nigeria and one in northern Cameroon.

This report is based on 412 interviews with victims, their relatives, eyewitnesses, human rights activists, doctors, journalists, lawyers and military sources. Amnesty International also analysed more than 90 videos and numerous photographs.

Amnesty International repeatedly shared findings with the Nigerian authorities. The organization has held dozens of meetings with government authorities and has written 57 letters to the federal and state authorities, sharing research findings, raising concerns about ongoing violations and requesting information and specific action, such as investigations.

Government responses are reflected in relevant sections of this report.

Amnesty International has also shared the findings of this research and relevant evidence, with the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The organization has also submitted to the ICC a list of names of military officers who should be investigated for their possible role in the crimes under international law and serious human rights violations documented in this report.

This report follows on from other Amnesty International reports published about human rights violations committed in the context of the conflict in north-east Nigeria. The most recent of these, published on 14 April, 'Our job is to shoot, slaughter and kill': Boko Haram's reign of terror in north east Nigeria"

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/1360/2015/en/>