



# INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS

Commission internationale de juristes - Comisión Internacional de Juristas

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **NIGERIA: ICJ Calls for Harassment and Detention of Justice Activists to Stop**

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) today called on the Nigerian Government to allow justice activists to operate freely in Nigeria. On 1 and 2 August 2005 the Nigerian State Security Service (SSS) repeatedly visited the Abuja office of the Open Society Justice Initiative to question human rights lawyer Chidi Odinkalu about his leadership of the "Coalition Against Impunity." When they could not find Chidi Odinkalu the SSS reportedly arrested three men associated with the printing of "wanted" posters calling for Charles Taylor extradition and confiscated 10,000 copies of the posters.

The "Coalition Against Impunity" is a civil society campaign that is calling on the Nigerian Government to send former Liberian President Charles Taylor to face trial before the Special Court in Sierra Leone.

"In a country that has made such important progress on human rights and democracy in the last seven years, it is shocking that the security services can so blatantly try to suppress peaceful and legitimate human rights campaigning," said Nicholas Howen, Secretary-General of the ICJ.

Two of those detained at SSS headquarters in Abuja, Steve Omali and Michael Damisa, worked in a local printing press and the third man arrested, Matthew Damisa, is the brother of Michael Damisa. The SSS reportedly said that they would release the three men if Chidi Odinkalu presented himself to the security service instead.

"Chidi Odinkalu is a well-known lawyer and human rights advocate and is exercising his rights to freedom of expression and association, guaranteed by the Nigerian Constitution. It would appear that the three men in detention are involved merely because of the printing of the posters and are in effect being held 'hostage' until the security service can locate Chidi Odinkalu" added Nicholas Howen.

"The SSS must immediately release the three men," said Nicholas Howen. "I look to the Nigerian Government to publicly reaffirm that human rights defenders are free to carry out their work and to instruct the SSS to stop harassing human rights defenders," he concluded.

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The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations

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