

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Nigeria: Authorities must allow Human Rights Commission to audit military detention centres

Amnesty International today wrote to the Nigerian authorities urging them to publicly announce that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) will have unhindered access to places of detention run by the military in northern Nigeria.

The organisation welcomes the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) working group to lead an audit of detention centres across Nigeria. The organization urges the Nigerian authorities to provide unrestricted access to all detention centres, including to military detention facilities.

On 30 October 2013, the Governing Council of the NHRC issued a communiqué authorising the creation of a three person group with a mandate to inspect 'ungazetted detention centres' run by various agencies in the public sector in Nigeria. Amnesty International urges the NHRC to prioritise those run by the military in northern Nigeria and make public its findings.

The work of the auditing group is essential as it would help to increase accountability and transparency, and compliance with internationally accepted human rights standards.

The establishment of this auditing group should go beyond developing a register of ungazetted detention centres in Nigeria. The NHRC must ensure that the terms of reference for the working group include undertaking adequate investigation of allegations of enforced disappearances and deaths in custody and as appropriate, to recommend prosecution of suspected perpetrators of human rights violations, as well as compensation for victims.

Background

On 15 October 2013, Amnesty International revealed that over 950 people reportedly died in detention facilities run by the Joint Task Force (JTF) in the first six months of 2013 alone. A large proportion of these people are believed to have died in Giwa military barracks in Maiduguri, Borno state and Sector Alpha, commonly referred to as 'Guantanamo' and Presidential Lodge (known as 'Guardroom') in Damaturu, Yobe state - facilities used by the JTF to detain people suspected of being members of or associated with Boko Haram.

Amnesty International has repeatedly urged the authorities to conduct thorough and independent investigations into the alleged human rights

violations with a view to bringing suspected perpetrators to justice in a fair trial. Amnesty International has not received any formal response to its recommendations from the Nigerian authorities.

International standards require that any death in custody must be investigated thoroughly and impartially. Moreover, all places of detention must be accessible to legally recognised national and international organisations and individuals, including human rights defenders.

In many parts of Nigeria hundreds of people suspected of committing crimes have been arbitrarily detained by the security forces and other law enforcement agencies. Many have been detained incommunicado for lengthy periods without charge or trial, without being brought before any judicial authority, and without access to lawyers and families.

The working group, will allow the NHRC to fully execute its legal mandate as stated under Section 6 (1) [d] of the National Human Rights Commission (Amendment) Act 2011, which gives the commission powers to visit prisons, police cells and other places of detention in order to ascertain the conditions thereof and make recommendations to the appropriate authorities.