
Nigeria: Nnimmo Bassey imprisoned and released

Nnimmo Bassey, President of Oilwatch Africa, was detained on Sunday 26 October, when returning to Nigeria from the meeting of the International Committee of Oilwatch in Ecuador.

An architect, poet and active defender of human and environmental rights in this country, Nnimmo has been carrying on a persistent denounce of the abuses of oil companies in Nigeria. Although he has been politically active in Nigeria for years, it is only since becoming a high-profile, vocal critic of the oil industry that he has been imprisoned. In June-July 1996 he was imprisoned during 43 days for attempting to attend a West African regional meeting of Friends of the Earth.

Responding to an urgent call of the Oilwatch Network Secretariat, the International Secretariat of the WRM addressed a message to all WRM members and friends, asking to express their solidarity with Nnimmo. At the same time a fax was sent to the Nigerian Ambassador in Buenos Aires, Argentina, expressing our concern for Nnimmo's arrest and asking to be informed about his situation. We later received news that Nnimmo had been released. What follows is the letter where Nnimmo expresses his gratitude to all who supported him in those difficult moments:

Dear friends,

I write to thank you all for the solidarity shown over my present brush with the wielders of state power here. I was arrested on arrival at the Murtala Mohammed Airport in Lagos at about 9 pm on Sunday 26th October. I was detained in the airport for the night and transferred to the Head Office of the SSS in Lagos the next morning. All through Monday I was subjected to rigorous interrogations. I spent Monday night in their cell. No talk of convenience in the cell! I regained partial freedom at about 8 pm on Tuesday night, I was allowed out of their center, but with all my luggage held hostage. That included my eye glasses, wedding ring, wrist watch and wallet. I was further interrogated on Wednesday and Thursday. Centred on my involvement in the struggle for a better environment in Nigeria. Centred also on my activism in the Oilwatch network.

I was finally released yesterday [Friday 31st October] at about 12 noon. My luggage was returned to me but my Passport is still being held. This means that my movement is severely restricted. Means my attending the FoEI AGM in Uruguay is quite unlikely.

Where is the liberty? Where my freedom? Our freedom?? I was only able to reunite with my family at about 5 pm yesterday; and this was when I was able to have a change of clothes since I left Quito!!

I have to keep reporting to the SSS and that in itself is dangerous!

That's the price to pay for fighting for an environment suitable for mankind.

That's it for now. Please do not push this matter to the back burners. Keep on the pressure.

Nnimmo

