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Legal Concern/Torture

24 April 1991

UGANDA

Okwanga Latigo - local community leader

Yovan Ojok - local community leader

Tiberio Atwoma Okeny - politician

Tadeo Omal - mayor of Gulu town

and several hundred others.

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Tiberio Atwoma Okeny, leader of the National Liberal Party and founder of the Uganda Peace Society, Okwanga Latigo, chairman of Gulu District Resistance Committee,\* Yovan Ojok, chairman of Bazaar (Gulu town) Resistance Committee, and Tadeo Omal, mayor of Gulu town, were among several hundred people arrested in Gulu and Kitgum Districts in northern Uganda in late March and early April 1991. They remain detained in military custody without charge or trial.

Starting on 30 March 1991, a mass "screening" exercise was conducted by the army in an effort to locate rebels active in Gulu and Kitgum Districts. Over two thousand people were held in Gulu town football stadium overnight on 30 March 1991 without shelter or other facilities. The arrests of the three community leaders in Gulu is reported to have followed their intervention on 31 March 1991 to protest at the conduct of the "screening", in particular at beatings of civilians by soldiers and at the continuing detention of people with valid identity documents. There are reports that soldiers publicly caned the three men before taking them to the military barracks in Gulu town. Several hundred of those "screened" are reported to remain in military detention without charge or trial. It is believed that many have been taken to the military barracks in Lira.

Tiberio Atwoma Okeny has been active in non-governmental attempts to achieve rapprochement between the Uganda Government and rebels active in the north. The authorities have not given any official reason for his arrest, but it is reported that local military officials have claimed that he had been "spreading malicious rumours about the army".

Amnesty International regards all four men as possible prisoners of conscience, detained without charge or trial while reportedly attempting to fulfil their role as community leaders and, in the case of Tiberio Atwoma Okeny, for engaging in legitimate, non-violent political activity.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Uganda Government has been facing armed insurgency in the north and east of the country since late 1986. There have been mass arrests, which have frequently led to people being held without charge or trial for several years, and many incidents where the army has been responsible for the extrajudicial execution of prisoners and unarmed civilians. In addition to the arrests outlined above, there are reports of extrajudicial executions and soldiers raping women prisoners in Gulu and Kitgum Districts

and of hundreds of detentions in the neighbouring districts of Lira and Apac.

\* Resistance Committees are the grassroots structure of the ruling National Resistance Movement. They have responsibilities for local administration and mobilizing people in support of the government.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:**

- expressing concern at the detention without charge or trial of possible prisoners of conscience Okwanga Latigo, Yovan Ojok and Tadeo Omal, who are reported to have been arrested while attempting to fulfil their role as community leaders;

- expressing concern at reports that the three men were subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment - a public caning after their arrest;

- urging that investigations be established into these reports and others that soldiers engaged in "screening" exercises were responsible for beatings of civilians;

- expressing concern at the detention without charge or trial of possible prisoner of conscience Tiberio Atwoma Okeny and several hundred other civilians;

- urging that unless they are to be charged with recognisably criminal offences and brought promptly to trial, Okwanga Latigo, Yovan Ojok, Tadeo Omal, Tiberio Atwoma Okeny and all other detainees be immediately released.

**APPEALS TO**

President Yoweri Museveni  
President of the Republic  
Office of the President  
Parliament Buildings  
PO Box 7168  
Kampala, Uganda

**Telegrams: President Museveni, State House, Entebbe  
Uganda**

**Telexes: 61048 KAPITAL, 61006 VICTORIA**

**Fax: 256 41 235462**

Mr Eriya Kategaya  
First Deputy Prime Minister  
Office of the Prime Minister  
PO Box 341  
Kampala, Uganda

**Telegrams: Deputy Prime Minister Kategaya, Kampala,  
Uganda**

**Telexes: 62001**

General David Tinnyefunza  
Minister of State for Defence  
Ministry of Defence  
PO Box 3798  
Kampala, Uganda

**Telegrams: Defence Minister Tinnyefunza, Kampala,  
Uganda**

**Telexes: 61023**

**COPIES TO:**

Mr Augustine Ruzindana  
Inspector General of Government  
1st Floor, Post Office Building  
PO Box 1682

Kampala, Uganda

and to diplomatic representatives of Uganda in your country

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 31 May 1991.