

His Excellency Chief (Dr.) Godswill Akpabio
Governor of Akwa Ibom State,
Government House,
Wellington Bassey Way,
Uyo,
Akwa Ibom State,
Nigeria



London, 28 September 2010

Dear Honourable Governor,

RE: The Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network centre

I am writing on behalf of the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC). The BHRC is the international human rights arm of the Bar of England and Wales. It is an independent body concerned with defending the rule of law and internationally recognised legal standards relating to human rights and the right to fair trial.

The BHRC is contacting you to express its concerns regarding reports received regarding the security at the Child Rights and Rehabilitation Network ("CRARN") centre.

The BHRC has been informed that on Saturday 9 September 2010 a group of three armed men entered CRARN centre fired a round of bullets and then left shortly after. The children under the protection of CRARN were present at the centre at this time and suffered considerable distress. Reports suggest that the men were searching for members of staff and that the attack may have been part of a wider campaign to discredit the President of CRARN, Mr Sam Ita-Umah, and its partner organisation Stepping Stones Nigeria ("SSN") and its Director, Mr Gary Foxcroft.

We wish to draw these events to your attention due to your commitment to protecting the children of Akwa Ibom.

The BHRC respectfully calls to the attention of the Nigerian Government the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which provides that human rights defenders have the right to "promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels", further to Article 1 of the UN Declaration. Undoubtedly as you are aware, Nigeria is under a positive duty to "take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the...Declaration" (Article 12 of the UN Declaration).

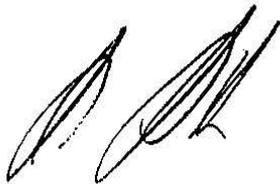
Specifically in relation to the children at CRARN centre, the BHRC reminds the authorities of the obligation under Article 3(2) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child under which State Parties "undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being...".

We know that you are very familiar with Article 11 of the Child Rights Law of Akwa Ibom 2008 (implementing the federal legislation Child Rights Act 2003)whichfurther protects the dignity of child, particularly against physical, mental or emotional injury and torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The BHRC welcomes the commitment of the State of Akwa Ibom to the protection of children and preventing abuse. The BHRC notes particularly in this regard the swift actions of the police in recent case in the Esit Eket area on Friday 24 September 2010 during which there appeared to be an attempt to bury two children alive due to witchcraft accusations. The statement of the Divisional Police Office of Esit Eket that no-one can use witchcraft as an excuse to abuse the rights of children is a message which we are keen to support.

The BHRC respectfully asks for your assistance in urging the Nigerian authorities (specifically the local police) to fully investigate the reports referred to above, and to take immediate and effective steps to protect and ensure the safety of the children and staff at CRARN and SSN and the human rights defenders who are working to strengthen the rule of law and protect the children. Our letter to you is sourced in a joint aim - to preserve the independence and integrity of the administration of justice.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Muller QC
Chair
Bar Human Rights Committee



Kirsty Brimelow
Vice-Chair
Bar Human Rights Committee

Copies sent to:

- Mohammed Bello Adoke, Attorney General and Minister of Justice
- Ogbonna Onovo, Inspector General of Police
- Ekpenyong Ntekim, Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice of Akwa Ibom
- Aniekan Umanah, Commissioner for Information of Akwa Ibom
- Dr. Dalhatu Sarki Tafida, Nigerian Ambassador to the UK
- Bob Dewar, UK Ambassador to Nigeria