

KANO, 25 December 2007 (IRIN) - Local human rights groups in Nigeria have disputed claims by Amnesty International that seven prisoners executed for armed robbery and murder did not receive proper trials. "Amnesty International's accusations of secret executions in Nigerian prisons are wrong," Joshua Akinola Ajayi, a human rights lawyer with the Coalition of Civil Rights Groups in northern Nigeria, told IRIN on the phone from the northern city of Kaduna on 24 December. In a 17 December statement Amnesty accused the Nigerian government of improperly carrying out at least seven executions and said it "fears more individuals may have been put to death". "All of the individuals recently executed were convicted in a Kano state court and relocated to prisons across the country. The death warrants were all signed by the current Kano state governor, Malam Ibrahim Shekarau," the Amnesty statement said. Of the seven people Amnesty knew to have been hanged in the last two years, two "did not have lawyers throughout the proceedings. Neither [were they] given an opportunity to appeal the judgments", the statement said. But Kano's justice commissioner Aliyu Umar told IRIN a different story. "All legal channels were exhausted before the death sentences were carried out and all the convicts had legal representation". He said all seven cases were decided 10 years earlier. "The appeals court and the supreme court both affirmed the convictions and the governor felt it was wrong to have kept these people in prison all these years. He therefore endorsed the death warrants", he said. Ajayi, the local human rights lawyer, supported the justice commissioner's claim. "I know of all the seven executions Amnesty is referring to and none of them was carried out without exhausting all legal channels," Ajayi said. "You don't just sit in New York or London and issue statements on matters you have little knowledge about," Ajayi said. "It's not fair."