

Bayelsa Journalist Arrested for Suspected Militancy Dead, Allege Colleagues

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Emmanuel Addeh in Yenagoa

A group of local newspaper publishers in Bayelsa State wednesday alleged that a detained journalist, Jones Abiri, accused of being a Niger Delta militant by the Department of State Services (DSS), had died in custody.

Abiri, publisher of the Atlantic Express, was arrested on July 21, 2016 in his Yenagoa office and has since been in the custody of the nation's secret police without arraignment.

Among others, he was accused of sponsoring the circulated hoax of a planned overthrow of President Muhammadu Buhari and destruction of pipelines belonging to oil multinationals.

The group under the aegis of Pen Pushers Association of Nigeria (PPAN), in a statement by its President, Mr. Richard Ogbagie, argued that almost 12 months after his arrest and detention without trial, the group had information that the journalist had died in detention.

It said that it was the reason the DSS in whose custody Abiri was kept, had found it impossible to arraign him.

"It is no longer news that one of our members, Chief Jones Abiri was arrested by the DSS at his office in Yenagoa on July 21, 2016 and the DSS claimed that Abiri is nicknamed Akotebe Darikoro and was accused of furthering militant tendency in connivance with other criminal gangs in the Niger Delta.

"After the arrest, the DSS issued a statement alleging that Abiri masterminded the vandalism and bombing of Agip Oil Company and the Shell Petroleum Development Company pipelines in Southern Ijaw and Brass on July 8, 2016. "DSS also claimed that Abiri masterminded the much circulated hoax of planned overthrow of President Muhammadu Buhari and threat to launch missile attack on Aso Villa in Abuja.

"However, we have noted with concern, that after his arrest, he has not been arraigned before a competent court of law to ascertain if he is guilty or not," his colleagues led by Ogbagie said.

Accordingly, the local publishers said the continued detention of Abiri without trial was unlawful, unjust and an infringement on the fundamental human rights of the suspect, who is also a lawyer.

"The DSS should know that Abiri is married with children and lived with an aged mother who are now languishing in penury without their bread winner.

"Based on our submissions, if the likes of Nnamdi Kanu, accused of treasonable felony, a crime bigger than what was alleged that Abiri committed, is walking freely today, we don't see any reason why Jones Abiri cannot be released on bail while facing trial in a competent court of law.

"We are privileged to have an unconfirmed information that Abiri is long dead in DSS custody and that is the reason why they have refused to bring him to court.

"We also wish to inform you at this point that we have since reported this information to Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Transparency International for consideration," the publishers said.