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U.S. LAWMAKERS CALL ON NIGERIAN PRESIDENT TO RELEASE DETAINED FILMMAKERS

SEATTLE, April 15, 2008 – Fourteen members of the United States Congress today called on the President of Nigeria to release the four American filmmakers being held since April 12th.

U.S. lawmakers say they are “deeply concerned that these individuals have been held for so long without any apparent cause.” The members of Congress call for the immediate release of the group and urge President Yar’Adua to “ensure their full protection during their entire time in Nigeria.”

Signatories to the letter are U.S. Senators Maria Cantwell, Russ Feingold, John Kerry, Max Baucus, Patty Murray, Jon Tester, Mary Landrieu and Sherrod Brown; and U.S. Representatives Jim McDermott, Rick Larsen, Norm Dicks, Adam Smith, Brian Baird and Jay Inslee.

The four Americans, along with a Nigerian citizen, were taken into custody by the Nigerian military April 12th, while traveling by boat in the Niger Delta. The filmmakers had been issued a visa by the Nigerian government granting them permission to return to Nigeria to complete their documentary, Sweet Crude. The film crew has been actively documenting the impact of oil production on the Niger Delta since 2005 and was known to authorities.

Nigerian officials claim the group is being “detained for investigation” yet no charges have been filed at this time.

Director Sandy Cioffi, along with producer Tammi Sims and photojournalists Cliff Worsham and Sean Porter entered the country legally on April 5th. They were accompanied by Joel Bisina, a Nigerian being held in custody with them. Bisina is the founder of a Warri-based NGO, Niger Delta Professionals for Development.

No communication from the group has been received since Saturday April 12th, 8:30 am PDT. Family, friends and colleagues are making a plea for their safe and immediate release.

Attachment: Letter from United State Congress to President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua

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