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SECRETARY OF STATE STEWART DEPLORES DEATH SENTENCES IN NIGERIA

Secretary of State (Latin America and Africa) Christine Stewart, on behalf of Foreign Affairs Minister André Ouellet, today deplored the death sentences imposed on Ken Saro-Wiwa, a prominent Nigerian human rights activist, and eight other human rights campaigners.

"I am deeply disturbed that Nigeria has once again resorted to using a military tribunal to pass judgement on individuals working on behalf of human rights," said Mrs. Stewart.

"Mr. Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues deserved to be judged under due process. In the wake of the Head of State's announcement of a new transition plan, it is vital that the restoration of democracy be accompanied by respect for human rights and the rule of law," she added.

Mrs. Stewart has written to the Nigerian foreign minister, urging his government to review and commute the sentence of the military tribunal.

Mr. Saro-Wiwa is the leader of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni Peoples, a minority group adversely affected by pollution caused by the petroleum industry in the Niger delta. A prominent author, Mr. Saro-Wiwa was recently nominated for the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize. Mrs. Stewart met with Ken Wiwa, Mr. Saro-Wiwa's son, when he toured Canada last April as part of a campaign to publicize the plight of human rights activists in Nigeria.

- 30 -

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