

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 3, 2008

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary, U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20451

Dear Secretary Rice:

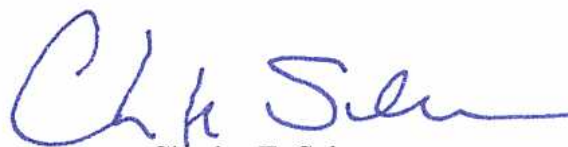
I ask that you strongly communicate to the Nigerian government that it must immediately release Andrew Berends, a U.S. citizen and resident of New York. Mr. Berends, a filmmaker and journalist from New York, entered Nigeria legally in April 2008 to complete a documentary film. He was detained last Sunday August 31st, along with his translator, Samuel George, by the Nigerian military, where he was held in custody for 36 hours without food, sleep, or representation, and only limited water.

According to email communication from Mr. Berends, he has been charged by the State Security Services (SSS) with spying. Although he was temporarily released by the SSS, his passport, equipment, telephones and film have been confiscated. He has been instructed to return to the SSS office each morning for further questioning, while his translator remains in custody.

This situation is untenable. Mr. Berends, an award-winning journalist, was making a film about the Niger Delta, Nigeria's oil-producing area where government forces and armed separatists have been fighting for years. There are serious issues in this region that impact Nigeria, Africa and the global community and the more we know of the details, the better able we will be to address them. Mr. Berend was embarked on an effort to raise awareness of and concern for this region and its complicated problems. Unfortunately, in this case, it seems that the Nigerian government's response is to harass and intimidate foreign and native journalists. This is unacceptable.

I urge you to work quickly with your counterparts in the Nigerian government to secure Mr. Berends's immediate release.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senate