



September 15, 1994

Professor Harry J. Hartley  
President  
University of Connecticut  
Storrs, CT. 06269-2048

Dear Professor Hartley:

We are in receipt of a letter signed by Mr. Ganiyu Jaiyeola, President of the African Club, on behalf of the Nigerian community at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, regarding the award of an honorary Doctor of letters degree by your university to Chief M.K.O. Abiola. In their letter, this group professed no disagreements in principle, with the award, but objected to the reasons for the honor. Specifically, they objected to the characterization of Chief Abiola as a devotee to democracy.

We respect the views of the Nigerian community at Storrs regarding their objections to the rationale for the award. They are indeed entitled to their opinions and they have expressed them at great length. The assertions contained in the letter however, are serious; we encourage the authors to present credible evidence to back them up. Sadly though, Chief Abiola is not able to defend himself against these allegations. In a perverse twist of irony, he remains firmly behind bars for daring to defend the individual freedom that the authors of this letter have grown to enjoy and take for granted in their stay in the United States of America.

It is not our intention to go into excessive detail in order to judge Chief Abiola's qualifications for this degree. Whatever his objectionable behavior, past and present, the truth of the matter is that for standing up to enforce the people's mandate, he has been thrown in jail, maltreated and denied medical facilities that are afforded common criminals. People have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for suffering lesser indignities.

We believe it is appropriate to view Chief Abiola as a universal symbol of the Nigerian people's yearning to join the league of those nations that have established a culture of respect and reverence for individual freedom, dignity and the collective views of the people. The Nigerian people have spoken loudly and clearly: this struggle is not about one individual. It is about the immediate and long-term survival of a nation that is greater than any one individual. Your action is an endorsement of the legitimate cry of our people for freedom.

In this light, we applaud your university's decision to confer an honorary doctorate degree on Chief M.K.O. Abiola. Your gracious and courageous decision is an affirmation of your belief in the just struggle for democracy by the Nigerian people. As we write, the dictatorship continues to shut down all voices of reason and progress within Nigeria's walls. As we write, a once vibrant nation is being throttled economically by the intransigence of a few that have elevated their personal agenda above the dreams and aspirations of an overwhelming majority. Your action is a rallying bugle call to the international community. It says to all of us: this disgraceful display of despotism and intolerance must stop.

We the authors of this letter are grateful to the University of Connecticut for this gesture of solidarity.

Sincerely,

*Phillip*  
On behalf of undersigned.

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