

# Nigerian Court Finally Fixes Date for Trial of Al-Qaeda-Linked Suspect

THE Federal High Court, Abuja Division yesterday fixed April 3, 2012 for definite trial of Mohammed Ashafa over his alleged link with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic Boko Haram sect.

Although Ashafa was first arrested and arraigned and granted bail in 2006, he was re-arrested by the State Security Service (SSS) in July 2011 for alleged link with Boko Haram.

But when the matter was called up yesterday, it could not go on as Ashafa's counsel was not in court. But Ashafa was quick to tell the court that he had been detained in the underground cell of the SSS for over seven months without being charged to court until now.

But prosecutor for SSS, Thompson Olatigbe denied the allegation made by Ashafa, saying that it was not true.

He said Ashafa was first accused of having connection with the world terrorist group, Al-Qaeda in 2006, but was later released on bail.

However, Olatigbe admitted that Ashafa was later arrested by the operatives of the SSS and charged before the court for alleged link with the dreaded Islamic group, Boko Haram.

Ashafa later pleaded with the trial judge Adamu Bello to remand him in prison instead of the SSS custody on the claim that he had suffered enough in the custody of the SSS.

According to him, "they arrested me about seven months ago and they have kept me in underground cell in SSS office. They should take me back to prison. They don't have any evidence against me. "They arrested me at the National Mosque in Abuja on August 15 , 2011. They will not allow my lawyer to see me, please take me to prison".

But Olatigbe said: "He (Ashafa) has not been charged for the current offences of having connection with Boko Haram. It is not up to seven months since he was arrested. We initially charged him for having a relationship with Al-Qaeda, but now we arrested him in connection with his relationship with Boko Haram. Arrangement is being made to arraign him".

The court ordered the SSS to allow the suspect to have access to his lawyer, adding that there was no way he could send him to prison on the current charge since he had not been arraigned before the court.

He further ordered the SSS to show more seriousness in the prosecution of the case.

The trial judge who explained to the suspect why he still had to remain in the custody of the SSS said, "they are saying that they will charge you to court for another offence. I cannot make an order that you should be taken to prison."