

May 18, 2023

Muhammadu Buhari, President of Nigeria  
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Three Arms Zone 900103  
Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria  
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CC: Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation

*Letter Calling for Immediate Release of Nigerian Prisoner of Conscience Yahaya Sharif-Aminu*

Dear President Buhari:

We are a group of Nigerian and international organizations and advocates focused on promoting the protection of human rights, including within Nigeria. We are writing to express our grave concern at the continuing prosecution of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu in Nigeria for allegations of blasphemy. We strongly urge Nigeria to immediately release Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, withdraw all charges against him, and ensure his safety.

In March 2020, Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, a Sufi musician in Kano State, was arrested on charges of blasphemy for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad in two WhatsApp audio messages and held without bail. Around the time of his arrest, a mob burned down his home, and no member of the mob has been prosecuted. During his trial, he was not afforded a lawyer. He was convicted and sentenced to death by hanging in August 2020 for violating Section 382(b) of the Kano State Sharia Penal Code Law.

While a court later overturned the conviction, he was ordered to a retrial, where he would face the same potential death penalty. Sharif-Aminu is now appealing to the Supreme Court of Nigeria to find Section 382(b) unconstitutional and in violation of international law, including the African Charter. He has now spent over three years in prison for his peaceful and brief remarks that merely expressed his religious beliefs.

Kano State's blasphemy law violates both the Nigerian Constitution and international law. The Nigerian Constitution protects the freedoms of thought, conscience, religion, and expression, and that includes the ability to peacefully share with others the tenets of one's beliefs, even if others may strongly disagree with them.

International law, including the African Charter and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, similarly protect freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief. It also requires that the death penalty be reserved only for the most serious crimes in those States that have not abolished the death penalty. In no sense can the mere posting of peaceful audio messages expressing one's beliefs amount to a severe crime warranting death, or even any crime at all.

International observers have condemned the continuing prosecution of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu and called for his release. On April 20 of this year, the European Parliament overwhelmingly called on Nigeria to immediately release Sharif-Aminu and found that Nigeria's blasphemy laws "are in violation of its international human rights commitments, the African Charter and the Nigerian Constitution." Officials from the United Nations have similarly raised concerns over his prosecution and called for his release, as have officials from the United Kingdom and the United States.

Nigeria is also one of only seven countries in the world—including Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Brunei, Mauritania, and Saudi Arabia—with criminal blasphemy laws for which a person can be sentenced to death.

Yahaya Sharif-Aminu should never have been arrested and imprisoned in the first instance. Instead, he has had to suffer mob violence and spend years in prison for simply and peacefully sharing his beliefs with others.

A democracy cannot function when the most basic freedoms are not protected, and as the largest democracy in Africa, Nigeria's example matters. But now, Nigeria and Your Excellency have an opportunity to set a strong example that you will work to protect the rights of your citizens, not disregard them.

For all of these reasons, we reiterate our call that Nigeria immediately release Yahaya Sharif-Aminu.

Sincerely,

### **Organizations**

21Wilberforce  
Accountability Lab Nigeria  
ADF International  
Alliance of Inclusive Muslims  
Anglican Persecuted Church Network  
Avocats Sans Frontières France (Lawyers Without Borders France)  
Boat People SOS  
Buddhist Solidarity Association  
Center for Pluralism  
CHAT-PRAY-ACT  
Christian Solidarity International  
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office  
Committee for Relevant Art (CORA)  
Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam  
Coptic Solidarity  
Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience  
Culture Advocates Caucus  
Elixir Trust Foundation  
Ex-Muslims of North America  
Freedom of Religion South Africa (FOR SA)  
GAFCON Suffering Church Network  
Genocide Watch  
Global Christian Relief  
Global Peace Foundation Nigeria  
Human Rights Concern – Eritrea (HRCE)  
Independent Journalists Association of Vietnam  
International Christian Concern  
International Committee on Nigeria  
International Institute for Religious Freedom  
International Senior Lawyers Project  
Jubilee Campaign  
Katartismos Global  
Lantos Foundation for Human Rights & Justice  
Lead Africa International e.V (Germany)  
Lumières Sans Frontières  
Media Foundation for West Africa

Muslims for Progressive Values  
Nigerian Centre of PEN International (PEN Nigeria)  
NOPRIN Foundation (Network on Police Reform in Nigeria)  
Religious Freedom Institute  
Save the Persecuted Christians  
Set My People Free  
Shai Fund  
Unchained Vibes Africa  
Vietnamese Women for Human Rights

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*Nigerian Actor and Educator*

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