

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN  
AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA

ON

THE FUTURE OF FREEDOM IN NIGERIA

BY

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FOUNDATION FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

FEBRUARY 14, 2024

Dear Chairman James, Ranking Member Jacobs, and Members of the Committee:

In early March 2020, a young man named Yahaya Sharif-Aminu was arrested in Kano State, Nigeria, by the local Hisbah police (the Islamic morality police) and charged with blasphemy under Section 382(b) of the Kano State Sharia Penal Code Law of 2000.<sup>1</sup> I am currently that young man's lawyer, and Yahaya is still detained in prison, but back in March 2020, Yahaya had no lawyer, nor received one during his initial trial. Yahaya is a Sufi Muslim of the Niassene Tijaniyya order, which holds a Senegalese shaykh named Ibrahim Niasse (1900-1975) in high esteem. Yahaya is also a musician. Just a few days prior to his arrest, Yahaya shared some impressionistic song lyrics in a private WhatsApp group. The lyrics were spread by others in the group, who interpreted the lyrics to be an insult to the Prophet Muhammad because they were interpreted as placing Niasse above Muhammad. For this alleged blasphemy, these men stirred up a mob, burned down Yahaya's home, and demanded Yahaya's arrest. Although Yahaya went into hiding, he was discovered not before long.

### **I. Nigeria's Death Penalty Blasphemy Laws, and the Cases of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu and Omar Farouq**

The penalty for Yahaya Sharif-Aminu's alleged blasphemy, under the Kano State Sharia Penal Code, is death. Section 382(b) makes it illegal for a person who calls himself a Muslim to insult the Quran or any of its prophets, and holds those convicted "liable to death." Twelve of the northern Nigerian states have similar death penalty blasphemy laws in their Sharia Penal Codes, which began to be introduced in Northern Nigeria in the early 2000s.<sup>2</sup> These twelve states are overwhelmingly Muslim, although they have significant minorities of Christians and traditional African religious practitioners. Due to these criminal Sharia laws, Nigeria is one of only seven countries in the world to have blasphemy laws for which a person can be put to death.<sup>3</sup>

Yahaya was then prosecuted by the Attorney General and the Governor of Kano State, Nigeria. Yahaya was denied a legal representative during the trial that ensued in March 2020 and was held incommunicado from family members. During the trial, Yahaya admitted to creating the messages at issue. Based on the admission, on August 10, 2020, the Hausawa Filin Hockey upper-Sharia Court convicted him of violating Section 382(b) of the Kano State Sharia Penal Code of 2000 and sentenced him to death by hanging. While Yahaya at trial sought "leniency," the trial court denied leniency because, according to the Sharia judge, "a case of blasphemy against Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) is among the things that a person who made them shall not be excused." The Governor of Kano State said shortly thereafter that he would not hesitate to sign the execution order.<sup>4</sup>

After Yahaya's conviction in August 2020, his case became a national sensation. I traveled to Kano in secret to petition the Court so that I would be able to represent him. I had to do all of this in secret because of the harm that could come to anyone defending a person accused of blasphemy.

A few days later, I returned to Kano to petition for another young man, then only a minor, Omar Farouq. Omar similarly had been convicted of blasphemy by the same court as Yahaya in August 2020 and

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<sup>1</sup> "Yahaya Sharif-Aminu," U.S. Comm'n on Int'l Religious Freedom, <https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/yahaya-sharif-aminu>.

<sup>2</sup> *Shari'ah Criminal Law in Northern Nigeria*, U.S. Comm'n on Int'l Religious Freedom (Dec. 2019), [https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF\\_ShariahLawinNigeria\\_report\\_120919%20v3R.pdf](https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF_ShariahLawinNigeria_report_120919%20v3R.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> "Blasphemy Laws by Country," End Blasphemy Laws, <https://end-blasphemy-laws.org/countries/>.

<sup>4</sup> "Blasphemy: I'll not hesitate to sign death warrant—Ganduje," Vanguard Nigeria (Aug. 28, 2020), <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/08/blasphemy-ill-not-hesitate-to-sign-death-warrant-ganduje/>.

sentenced to ten-years' imprisonment, a lesser punishment than Yahaya's because he was a minor.<sup>5</sup> Omar similarly did not have a legal representative for his trial. Omar had been accused of blasphemy because of alleged derogatory statements he had made towards a colleague during a heated argument. Omar also had had a mob descend upon his home. This is a typical pattern in Northern Nigeria.

After securing my status as legal representative for both Yahaya Sharif-Aminu and Omar Farouq, we appealed their cases to the High Court of Kano State in September 2020. While the Court considered its decision, Yahaya's and Omar's cases garnered international outcry as outrageous violations of these two young men's fundamental human rights. UNICEF publicly expressed its "deep concern" over Omar Farouq's conviction.<sup>6</sup> Six UN Human Rights Council Special Mechanisms likewise raised their concerns over Yahaya Sharif-Aminu's conviction.<sup>7</sup> These international law expert bodies noted the multiple violations of international treaties that the convictions raised.

On January 21, 2021, the High Court of Kano State decided the appeal in both Omar's and Yahaya's cases. For Omar, thankfully, the High Court dismissed the case completely, as he had been a minor and tried without a lawyer.<sup>8</sup> But for Yahaya, the outcome was different. While the High Court overturned the conviction because Yahaya had not had a lawyer during the trial, they did not throw out his case. Instead, the High Court ordered Yahaya to a retrial, where he would once again face the same death penalty blasphemy law.<sup>9</sup>

A few days later, we appealed Yahaya's retrial order to the Court of Appeal, Kano Judicial Division (which is a federal court), arguing that the case should be dismissed based on the procedural irregularities of the trial, such as Yahaya's lack of legal representation, but also asking that the death penalty blasphemy law be ruled unconstitutional. A year-and-a-half later, on August 17, 2022, a three-judge panel of the Court of Appeal upheld the retrial order, finding 3-0 that the law was constitutional.<sup>10</sup>

On November 9, 2022, we then filed a Notice of Appeal with the Supreme Court of Nigeria.<sup>11</sup> A case number has been issued by the Supreme Court, but no hearing date yet set. Our Briefs of Argument were filed with the Supreme Court on January 18, 2023. As with the Court of Appeal, we are asking the Supreme Court of Nigeria to find Kano State's death penalty blasphemy law, Section 382(b) of the Sharia Penal Code Law, to be unconstitutional and in violation of international treaties to which Nigeria is bound. Yahaya has now sat in a prison cell for nearly four years because of his song lyrics.

## II. Nigeria's Blasphemy Laws Violate the Nigerian Constitution and International Law

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<sup>5</sup> "Outrage as Nigeria sentences teenage boy to 10 years in prison for blasphemy," CNN (Sept. 16, 2020), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/16/africa/blasphemy-nigeria-boy-sentenced-intl/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup> "UNICEF statement on sentencing of 13-year-old child to 10-years' imprisonment with 'menial labour' for blasphemy," UNICEF (Sept. 16, 2020), <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/press-releases/unicef-statement-sentencing-13-year-old-child-10-years-imprisonment-menial-labour>.

<sup>7</sup> Communication, UA NGA 4/2020, Mandates of the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention et al. (Sept. 18, 2020), <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=25539>.

<sup>8</sup> "They were unjust to me," says teenager freed after blasphemy sentence quashed in Nigeria," CNN (Jan. 31, 2021), <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/31/africa/blasphemy-nigeria-boy-interview-intl/index.html>.

<sup>9</sup> "Nigeria: Further information: Retrial ordered for singer on death row: Yahaya Sharif-Aminu," Amnesty Int'l (Jan. 29, 2021), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/3568/2021/en/>.

<sup>10</sup> "BREAKING: Nigerian Appeal Court Orders Retrial of Kano Musician, Sharif-Aminu, Initially Sentenced to Death for 'Insulting' Prophet Mohammed," Sahara Reporters (Aug. 17, 2022), <https://saharareporters.com/2022/08/17/breaking-nigerian-appeal-court-orders-retrial-kano-musician-sharif-aminu-initially>.

<sup>11</sup> "Musician Sentenced to Death for Blasphemy Appeals to Nigerian Supreme Court," ADF Int'l (Nov. 14, 2022), <https://adfinternational.org/news/nigerian-musician-sentenced-to-death-for-blasphemy>.

The Northern Nigerian death penalty blasphemy law plainly contradicts the Nigerian Constitution of 1999.<sup>12</sup> Section 38 of the Nigerian Constitution protects religious freedom and states that “Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.” Section 39 of the Nigerian Constitution protects freedom of speech and states that “Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference.” And Section 10 of the Nigerian Constitution prevents the government’s establishment of any religion: “The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion.” While the Nigerian Constitution does permit the establishment of Sharia courts, it only allows them for Islamic personal law matters, not criminal law.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, Nigeria’s death penalty blasphemy law plainly violates international law, including under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)<sup>14</sup> and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>15</sup> The Nigerian Constitution’s Section 38, on religious freedom, draws directly from the ICCPR, article 18, in its language. Section 39, on free speech, draws directly from article 19 of the ICCPR. The death penalty blasphemy law likewise violates similar provisions of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, article 8 (religious freedom) and article 9 (free expression).<sup>16</sup> Nigeria’s various blasphemy laws would plainly violate the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution if they were enacted here.

I am pleased to see that the case of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu is raised within the amended version of House Resolution 82 concerning Nigeria’s religious freedom violations, as well as the problem of Nigeria’s blasphemy laws.<sup>17</sup> The use of the blasphemy laws in Nigeria is egregious, systematic, and ongoing. I fully support the language in the amended resolution asking the U.S. Secretary of State to “publicly call for the immediate release of all individuals charged with or convicted of blasphemy-related charges in Nigeria and devote all necessary resources to secure their release and ensure their safety and that of their families.” The U.S. has an enormous voice on the international stage, including within Nigeria, and the call for the release of those detained and imprisoned on blasphemy-related charges will do much good in helping to secure their release. I also note that the House of Representatives has recently called for the repeal of blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy laws worldwide, and certainly we need these laws overturned and repealed in Nigeria.<sup>18</sup>

Yahaya Sharif-Aminu’s and Omar Farouq’s cases are not isolated. The death penalty blasphemy law has been used on others. House Resolution 82 mentions the case of Sufi cleric Sheikh Abduljabar Nasiru Kabara. He was sentenced to death by hanging by the Kano Upper Shari’ah Court Kofar Kudu on December

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<sup>12</sup> Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, available at <http://www.nigeria-law.org/ConstitutionOfTheFederalRepublicOfNigeria.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> *See id.*, Sections 6(5)(f)(g); 237; 240; 244; 260; 261; 262; 263; 264; 275; 276; 277; 278 & 279.

<sup>14</sup> Int’l Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UN Gen’l Assembly (adopted Dec. 16, 1966), available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

<sup>15</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN Gen’l Assembly (adopted Dec. 10, 1948), available at <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

<sup>16</sup> African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Organisation of African Unity (adopted June 1, 1981), available at [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36390-treaty-0011 - african\\_charter\\_on\\_human\\_and\\_peoples\\_rights\\_e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36390-treaty-0011 - african_charter_on_human_and_peoples_rights_e.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H. Res. 82 Offered by Mr. Smith of New Jersey, U.S. House of Representatives (Feb. 6, 2024), <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA00/20240206/116792/BILLS-118-HRes82-S000522-Amdt-97.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> H. Res. 512—Calling for the global repeal of blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy laws, engrossed in U.S. House of Representatives Dec. 7, 2020, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/512/text>.

15, 2022. An appeal in his case was filed earlier this month.<sup>19</sup> Abdul Nyass is another Sufi Muslim from Kano who was sentenced to death for blasphemy, in 2015, although thankfully the sentence is yet to be carried out.<sup>20</sup>

The Sharia Penal Code Laws of the northern Nigerian states contain other religious insult and blasphemy laws, although with far lesser penalties than Section 382(b)'s death penalty blasphemy law. The Sharia Penal Code Laws also contain archaic and brutal punishments, including caning and lashing, stoning to death, and amputation of hands and feet, in addition to death by hanging for blasphemy.<sup>21</sup> These are all unconstitutional punishments based on the establishment of a religion.

Nigeria also maintains non-Sharia blasphemy laws, although these are styled as “religious insult” and “public disturbance” laws. These “secular” blasphemy laws exist across the whole country, not just in the North, but they are enforced primarily in the Northern states, and rarely enforced in the Southern states. For example, Section 210 of the 2006 Bauchi State Penal Code, which is representative of the Northern states’ laws, punishes religious insults: “Whoever, by any means, publicly insults or seeks to incite contempt of any religion in such a manner as to be likely to lead to a breach of the peace, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years or with a fine or with both.” Section 114 of the same Code, which punishes “public disturbance,” is frequently added to blasphemy charges under Section 210: “Whoever does an act with intent to cause or which is likely to cause a breach of the peace or disturb the public peace shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to three years or with fine which may extend to six hundred naira or with both.” Section 204 of the Criminal Code Act, a religious insults law, is representative of laws in the Southern states, but is rarely enforced: “Any person who does an act which any class of persons consider as a public insult on their religion, with the intention that they should consider the act such an insult, and any person who does an unlawful act with the knowledge that any class of persons will consider it such an insult, is guilty of a misdemeanour and is liable to imprisonment for two years.”<sup>22</sup> These “secular” blasphemy laws can be applied to anyone: Muslims, Christians, traditionalists, humanists, or others.

### **III. Nigeria’s Blasphemy Laws Inspire Mob Violence and Lead to the Imprisonment of Muslims, Christians, and Humanists**

All of these blasphemy laws implicitly encourage an atmosphere of mob violence based on blasphemy accusations. Yahaya Sharif-Aminu’s and Omar Farouq’s cases demonstrate that fact. House Resolution 82 also describes the horrific case of Deborah Yakubu, a Christian student attending college in Sokoto state, who faced allegations of blasphemy in May 2022 because of comments she made regarding her Christian faith on a classroom WhatsApp channel. For those comments, her largely Muslim classmates whipped up a large mob,

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<sup>19</sup> “Court Sets Date to Hear Applications For, Against Appeal of Abduljabbar’s Death Sentence,” Justice Watch News (Feb. 5, 2024), <https://justicewatchnews.com/court-sets-date-to-hear-applications-for-against-appeal-of-abduljabbars-death-sentence/>.

<sup>20</sup> “Nigeria Judge Sentences Imam to Death Over Blasphemy,” Voice of America (Dec. 15, 2022), <https://www.voanews.com/a/nigeria-judge-sentences-imam-to-death-over-blasphemy/6878489.html>.

<sup>21</sup> See Kano State Sharia Penal Code Law 2000, Sections 94(1)(b); 97(a-i); 99; 115(1)(2); 116(2); 117; 118(2); 123; 125(a-b); 126(e)(2); 127(a-b); 129(a-b); 131; 134; 134(b); 135(2); 136; 137; 140(b); 141(b); 146(a); 148; 150; 154; 155; 157; 162; 163(c); 169; 170; 174(3); 175-178; 186; 187; 189; 191-194; 196; 197; 199; 200; 208-211; 216-221; 223-227; 237; 246(a); 260(a-b); 264; 268; 273; 276(c), (i); 277(c); 280(b); 281-284(c); 285-287(b); 290; 291(b); 292; 293(d)(i-ii); 294(a-b); 295(a); 296(a); 297(a-b); 298(b); 299(a-b); 300-308; 309(a-b); 310-312; 315(1-2); 316(1); 317; 323; 324(a); 325; 328; 329(a-b); 330-332; 335(b); 336(b); 337(b); 338(b); 339(b); 340; 342(c); 344(c); 345(c); 346(c); 347(b); 348(b); 349(b); 352(a); 353; 356; 358; 360-362; 368; 369(b); 373; 376; 377(e); 382(b); 385; 387(b) & 388(1).

<sup>22</sup> Section 204 of the Criminal Code Act of Nigeria, available at [https://jurist.ng/criminal\\_code\\_act/sec-204](https://jurist.ng/criminal_code_act/sec-204).

who beat her and stoned her to death on campus, and then set her on fire.<sup>23</sup> The police did not intervene to stop the mob. Only two students out of dozens were arrested, and later they were released with prejudice for failure to prosecute.<sup>24</sup> It is very rare for mob attackers to be arrested and prosecuted. Neither Yahaya Sharif-Aminu's nor Omar Farouq's attackers were arrested.

Mob violence can start from a mere accusation arising during an argument. Usman Buda was a Muslim butcher in Sokoto who had a dispute with someone near his shop in June 2023. That altercation led to a mob accusing him of blasphemy and then stoning him to death.<sup>25</sup> The video of the incident, as with the video of Deborah Yakubu's murder, spread quickly over social media.

The "secular" blasphemy laws are used frequently as well in the North. Rhoda Jatau is a Christian woman, nurse, and mother of five, who allegedly shared a video in May 2022 with her colleagues that was created by someone else condemning the attack on Deborah Yakubu. Simply because she allegedly shared that video—a video that has never been released by the police or prosecutors—a mob soon descended upon her neighborhood, destroying storefronts and injuring individuals, and calling for her arrest. She was detained immediately in May 2022 and charged with blasphemy violations under Sections 210 and 114 of the Bauchi State Penal Code in December 2022. Her trial began shortly thereafter. She was held incommunicado the entire time, with only occasional access to her lawyers and family at hearings, until December 2023, when she finally obtained bail after national and international outcry. Her charges are yet to be dropped.<sup>26</sup> Rhoda Jatau's case is also mentioned in House Resolution 82.

Mubarak Bala is the former President of the Nigerian Humanist Association and used to be a Muslim. He was arrested under Sections 210 and 114 of the Kano State Penal Code, which is substantively similar to Bauchi's, for allegedly "blasphemous" Facebook posts he had made. He was convicted on over a dozen counts—as each post was considered a separate offense—by the Kano State High Court on April 5, 2022, and sentenced to 24 years in prison.<sup>27</sup> Mubarak Bala's case is mentioned in House Resolution 82.

And just last week, Bauchi State charged an Islamic cleric, Idris Abdulaziz, with blasphemy, in a case that has political undertones. Abdulaziz has fled the state in response.<sup>28</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusion: The International Community Must Act**

All of this activity related to blasphemy accusations in Northern Nigeria over the past few years shows a very worrisome trend. Mere accusations can lead to mobs burning down buildings and killing victims. The accusations can lead to arrests and lengthy detentions and imprisonments, including the possibility of the death penalty hanging over one's head. The increasing use of blasphemy accusations and blasphemy laws does not

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<sup>23</sup> Sean Nelson, "A Christian Stoned to Death for 'Blasphemy' in Nigeria—When Will It End?," National Review (May 19, 2022), <https://www.nationalreview.com/2022/05/a-christian-stoned-to-death-for-blasphemy-in-nigeria-when-will-it-end/>.

<sup>24</sup> "ICYMI: Court frees suspects linked to Deborah's murder over police failure to diligently pursue suit," The Cable Nigeria (May 19, 2023), <https://www.thecable.ng/icymi-court-frees-suspects-linked-to-deborahs-murder-over-police-failure-to-diligently-pursue-suit>.

<sup>25</sup> "Mob kills man accused of blasphemy in Sokoto," Premium Times Nigeria (June 25, 2023), <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/nwest/606656-mob-kills-man-accused-of-blasphemy-in-sokoto.html>.

<sup>26</sup> "Christian mother on bail after 19 months in Nigerian prison for 'blasphemy,'" ADF Int'l (Dec. 13, 2023), <https://adfinternational.org/news/rhoda-jatau-bail>.

<sup>27</sup> "Mubarak Bala," U.S. Comm'n on Int'l Religious Freedom, <https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/mubarak-bala>.

<sup>28</sup> "Islamic cleric who fled Bauchi over alleged persecution faces fresh charges," Premium Times Nigeria (Feb. 6, 2024), <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/665962-islamic-cleric-who-fled-bauchi-over-alleged-persecution-faces-fresh-charges.html>.



bode well for the future of freedom in Nigeria, especially religious freedom. I pray that the Supreme Court in Yahaya Sharif-Aminu's case will soon rule that, at a minimum, the worst of these laws, the Sharia-based death penalty blasphemy law, is unconstitutional.<sup>29</sup> But all of these blasphemy laws, in their ambiguous substance and arbitrary enforcement, violate the fundamental human rights of the victims, as well as international law.

Thankfully, the international community is beginning to see how egregious these blasphemy laws in Nigeria are. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has regularly derided these laws and the unjust enforcement of them<sup>30</sup>, and I was honored to receive the U.S. Secretary of State's International Religious Freedom Award this year, in recognition of my work to combat the terrible effects of these blasphemy laws.<sup>31</sup> The European Parliament in April 2023 called for the immediate release of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, as well as Mubarak Bala and Rhoda Jatau, decrying the case of Deborah Yakubu, and calling for the repeal of the blasphemy laws.<sup>32</sup> UK Parliamentarians have repeatedly raised their deep concern over these cases.<sup>33</sup> I have filed, with ADF International, an application for Yahaya Sharif-Aminu with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention<sup>34</sup>, and others have filed an application on behalf of Mubarak Bala.<sup>35</sup> UN Special Mechanisms raised concerns over all of these cases in a communication to Nigeria in August 2023—a communication that went unanswered by Nigeria.<sup>36</sup> These cases have all received widespread national and international outcry. That is why we need the U.S. Congress to make its voice heard. We need as many advocates as we can get, and the voice of the U.S. government carries the strongest weight worldwide and in Nigeria.

I am hopeful that as more people see the reality of these blasphemy laws, these unjust prosecutions, this mob violence, and the religiously-motivated violence in general plaguing so much of Nigeria, they will be inspired to raise their voices and act. The situation is no longer tolerable, but that is often where the hope of freedom truly begins to blossom. Please add your voice to the cause of religious freedom in Nigeria.

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<sup>29</sup> Kola Alapinni, "Nigeria Must Secure the Fundamental Rights of Its Citizens," *Newsweek* (Mar. 3, 2023), <https://www.newsweek.com/nigeria-must-secure-fundamental-rights-its-citizens-opinion-1785088>.

<sup>30</sup> *Policy Update: Blasphemy Laws in Nigeria*, U.S. Comm'n on Int'l Religious Freedom (Oct. 2022), <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/2022%20Nigeria%20Blasphemy%20Policy%20Update.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> "Secretary of State's International Religious Freedom Awards," U.S. Dep't of State (Jan. 18, 2024), <https://www.state.gov/secretary-of-states-international-religious-freedom-awards/>.

<sup>32</sup> European Parliament resolution of 20 April 2023 on the risk of the death penalty and the execution of singer Yahaya Sharif-Aminu for blasphemy in Nigeria (2023/2650(RSP)), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0116\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0116_EN.html).

<sup>33</sup> *See, e.g.*, Blasphemy laws in Nigeria, Early Day Motion 1200: tabled on 22 May 2023, UK Parliament, <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/60931>.

<sup>34</sup> "Sentenced to Death for WhatsApp Lyrics, Petition for Nigerian Musician's Release Brought to UN Working Group," ADF Int'l (Sept. 25, 2023), <https://adfinternational.org/news/yahaya-unwgad-petition>.

<sup>35</sup> "NGOs file UN petition to free Nigerian humanist Mubarak Bala on the 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of his arrest," Freedom House (Apr. 28, 2023), <https://freedomhouse.org/article/ngos-file-un-petition-free-nigerian-humanist-mubarak-bala-3rd-anniversary-his-arrest>.

<sup>36</sup> Communication, AL NGA 1/2023, Mandates of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention et al. (Aug. 4, 2023), <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=28273>.

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# Kola Alapinni

## DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS & GENERAL COUNSEL



Kola Alapinni is an international human rights lawyer from Nigeria. He has represented multiple victims charged with blasphemy laws in Nigeria, including Omar Farouq and Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, and is currently challenging Kano State, Nigeria's Sharia-based death penalty blasphemy law at the Supreme Court of Nigeria. He is a 2023 recipient of the U.S. Secretary of State's International Religious Freedom Award, and has spoken at the UN Human Rights Council, the European Parliament, and the International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington, D.C. Mr. Alapinni is the General Counsel and Director of Operations of the

Foundation for Religious Freedom in Abuja, Nigeria. He has an LLB (Honours) from the University of Ibadan and an LLM in International Human Rights Law from the University of Essex. He is a member of the Nigerian Bar Association. He has worked in both electronic and print media as a TV presenter and the Law Editor of a national newspaper with experience spanning 25 years.