

Urgent Call: In support of Nigerian civil society initiatives against death penalty and blasphemy laws

Monday 14 September 2020, by [DJAZAIROUNA](#), [GREFELS](#), [One Law for All](#), [SACW](#), [SIAWI](#), [VILAF](#), [WICUR](#) (Date first published: 12 September 2020).

- **Statement on death penalty pronounced in blasphemy cases in the State of Kano, Nigeria**
- **In support of Nigerian civil society initiatives against death penalty and blasphemy laws**

Over spring and summer 2020, three cases drew attention to the blasphemy law under which religious courts pronounced death penalty in the state of Kano in Nigeria :

- In April, Mubarak Bala, President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria was arrested in his residence in Kaduna and brought to Kano by the Kano police ; there he was tried in the Sharia Court (religious court) and sentenced to death for blasphemy. It is to be noted that Mr Bala, although born in a Muslim family is not himself a believing Muslim and should not have been tried by a religious court. Had he been tried in a regular court (which unfortunately also criminalises blasphemy), maximum penalty would have been two years in prison. Prior to his arrest, he had received death threats from Muslim fundamentalists. Bala had no access to a defence lawyer. [1]

- On the 10th of August, Yahaya Aminu Sharif, a 22 year old singer belonging to a religious brotherhood (Confrérie Tidjania) was arrested in Kano and brought to a sharia court which sentenced him to death for blasphemy ; it seems that, in one of his songs, he paid so much praise to a Senegalese scholar belonging to the same brotherhood that this was seen as disrespectful to the Prophet Muhammad. Mr Aminu Sharif had no access to a lawyer for his defence. A mob burnt the house of his family and forced them to quit for fear for their life. Lawyers who volunteered for his defence were threatened and denied access. [2]

- On August 10 was also sentenced to ten years in prison for blasphemy a 13 year old boy, Umar Farooq, for using fool language while quarrelling with another boy. It is not known whether this child benefitted from a counsel. [3]

Recently, after the cases became known nationally and internationally, lawyers for Mr Bala and Mr Aminu Sharif were finally able to appeal the sentences on their behalf, although it is still not clear whether they actually had access to the prisoners.

Quite remarkably, Nigerian civil society reacted with much courage against the death sentences, and protests came from various sections of society : Muslim believers and faith organisations, arguing that although the Qur'an condemns blasphemy, it also encourages mercy and pardon, demanded that the 'crime' be pardoned and the 'culprits' life be spared ; concomitantly, secular organisations demanded a secular trial in a secular court and that blasphemy law be repealed, in accordance with Nigeria's commitments to international human rights law and UN conventions.

We, undersigned, express our deepest solidarity with the accused, and we fully support the progressive forces within Nigeria who demand their freedom, that all charges be dropped ; as well as an end to blasphemy laws and one law for all citizens, voted by all citizens as should be the case in a democratic country.

We demand the Federal State of Nigeria to take responsibility for implementing its obligations under international law and guaranteeing all citizens's equal treatment and safety under the law.

September 12, 2020

FREE Mubarak Bala

FREE Yahaya Aminu Sharif

FREE Umar Farooq

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#FreeMubarakBala

#FreeYahayaAminuSharif

#FreeUmarFarooq

#EndBlasphemyLaws

#BlasphemyNotACrime

#FreeMubarakBala

#FreeYahayaAminuSharif

#FreeUmarFarooq

#EndBlasphemyLaws

#BlasphemyNotACrime

Signed by:

DJAZAIROUNA

GREFELS: Groupe de Recherche sur les Femmes et les Lois au Sénégal / Research Group on Women and the Law in Senegal

ONE LAW LAW FOR ALL

SACW: South Asia Citizens' web

SIAWI: Secularism Is A Women's Issue

VILAF: Vision Laïque Africaine

WICUR: Women's Initiative for Citizenship and Universal Rights

P.S.

- Siawi, Sept 14, 2020:
<http://siawi.org/spip.php?article23355>

Footnotes

- [1] <https://end-blasphemy-laws.org/2020/08/a-case-against-blasphemy-in-nigeria/>
- [2] <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/yahaya-sharif-aminu-nba-denied-access-to-kano-singer/wy47ls5>
- [3] <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/08/12/press/4765/article.htm>