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## **NIGERIA: Blasphemy: USCIRF calls for the release of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu**

### **Blasphemy: USCIRF Commissioner Davie calls for the immediate release of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu**

USCIRF (04.03.2022) – <https://bit.ly/3Cirets> – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) called for the release of Muslim gospel singer and member of the Tijaniyya Sufi Islamic order **Yahaya Sharif-Aminu** on the second anniversary of his arrest.

*"USCIRF urges Nigerian authorities to immediately release Yahaya Sharif-Aminu and guarantee his safety," said **Commissioner Frederick A. Davie** who advocates for Sharif-Aminu as part of **USCIRF's Religious Prisoners of Conscience Project**. "Convicting this man on blasphemy charges for expressing his beliefs is reprehensible—and sentencing him to death for such actions is absurd. He does not deserve to be detained for two years, let alone sentenced to death. And allowing a mob to burn down his family home with impunity only adds further insult to this grievous injury."*

On March 4, 2020, a mob **burned down** Sharif-Aminu's family home after he was accused of performing and sharing a song considered blasphemous in WhatsApp. Later that same month, Nigerian authorities arrested him on blasphemy charges. On August 10, 2020, a Kano court sentenced Sharif-Aminu to death for blasphemy, in violation of Section 382 (B) of the Kano State Sharia Penal Code Law. On January 21, 2021, the High Court of Kano State's appellate division overturned his death sentence, citing irregularities, and ordered a retrial. Last month, the Court of Appeals in Kano postponed the retrial until May 12, 2022, agreeing to the Kano State government's request for more time to file its response.

*"Sharif-Aminu's treatment violates international human rights standards and the Nigerian Constitution, but Nigerian authorities still have an opportunity to turn this situation around," added Commissioner Davie. "The United States government should pressure Nigerian authorities to ensure Yahaya's release and safety and that of his family. The U.S. government also should work with Nigerian authorities to repeal blasphemy laws still present in state-sponsored*

*courts.”*

In recent years, Kano state authorities have perpetrated some of Nigeria’s most egregious religious freedom violations. They have arrested, charged, and/or convicted several individuals for blasphemy, prohibited broadcast stations from airing religious content, restricted religious poets and performers, and arrested and detained individuals from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community based on their official interpretation and enforcement of Sharia.

In its **2021 Annual Report**, USCIRF recommended that the State Department redesignate **Nigeria** as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC. USCIRF was **appalled** when the State Department removed Nigeria from its designation as a CPC in November 2021 after designating Nigeria for the first time in December 2020. Additionally, USCIRF published a recent factsheet on **religious freedom conditions in Nigeria’s Kano State** and an episode of the **USCIRF Spotlight podcast** on why redesignating Nigeria as a CPC is warranted.

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*The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is an independent, bipartisan federal government entity established by the U.S. Congress to monitor, analyze, and report on religious freedom abroad. USCIRF makes foreign policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress intended to deter religious persecution and promote freedom of religion and belief. To interview a commissioner, please contact USCIRF at [media@uscirf.gov](mailto:media@uscirf.gov).*

*Photo : Yahaya Sharif-Aminu*

## Further reading about FORB in Nigeria on HRWF website

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