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Human Rights Without Frontiers condemns the death penalty of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu on blasphemy charges

HRWF (13.08.2020) - *Human Rights Without Frontiers* condemns the death sentence by hanging issued by a Nigerian Sharia court in Kano against a 22-year-old singer for allegedly insulting the Prophet in a song that he wrote and circulated on WhatsApp.

"Blasphemy laws are inconsistent with freedom of expression, including on religious issues or about religious figures," HRWF director declared. "They should be repealed and the sentence imposed on the singer should be overturned."

Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, a Muslim musician, is not well-known in northern Nigeria. His songs were not popular outside his Tijaniya Sufi group of North African origin.

The singer had gone into hiding after he composed the song as protesters had burnt down his family home and gathered outside the headquarters of the Islamic police, known as the Hisbah, demanding action against him.

The leader of the protesters that called for the musician's arrest in March, Idris Ibrahim, told the BBC that the judgement will serve as a warning to others "contemplating toeing Yahaya's path".

Sharif-Aminu can appeal the verdict.

Only one of the death sentences passed by Nigeria's Sharia courts has been carried out since they were reintroduced in 1999.

Presidency replies UK Parliament report on religious genocide in Nigeria

By Vincent UFUOMA

ICIR (19.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/37RFsCA> - THE presidency has reacted to a report by the United Kingdom All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, that cited instances of persecution and genocides of Christians in Nigeria.

The [report](#) which is titled; "Nigeria – Unfolding Genocide?" raised the concerns of escalating violence in Nigeria between Fulani herders and farmers in Northern Nigeria.

The report claimed that the violence is mostly directed at and affected by Christians in the North, most of whom have lost their lives and others, their livelihoods to violent Fulani headers.

"APPG members have been alarmed by the dramatic and escalating violence in Nigeria characterised as the farmer-herder conflict. This violence has manifested along ideological lines, as the herders are predominantly ethnic Fulani Muslims and the farmers are predominantly Christians.

"There has been significant debate about what factors are driving and exacerbating this crisis. Therefore the APPG launched a parliamentary inquiry to help develop a nuanced understanding of the drivers of violence and increase parliamentary, public and Governmental interest in the issue. The report is the result of that inquiry."

APPG stated that the response of the Nigerian Government to the conflict involving farmers and herders had been inadequate or ineffective and that this had allowed violence to emerge and escalate.

In a statement on Friday, the presidential spokesperson, Mr. Garba Shehu, rejected the content of the report. He said, unlike previous administrations, the Muhammadu Buhari's administration has been taking steps to ensure the security of lives and properties in the North regardless of religious beliefs.

Mr. Garba said religious tension between farmers and headers in Nigeria is a long age battle for arable lands by farmers and quality grazing by headers.

He admitted that religious tensions in the country became heightened due to the activities of Boko-Haram whom he claimed the Nigerian Military has brought to the minimum.

He said, "The President and Government of Nigeria wish to thank members of the United Kingdom All-Party Parliamentary Group on International Religious Freedom or Belief for their report, launched a few days ago. Although it is difficult reading, the statement also acknowledges the importance of accurate, unbiased, depoliticised and truthful information when it comes to understanding the realities and addressing the challenges for those of faith in Nigeria. In this regard when uncritical attention is afforded to critics with dubious intentions, it only becomes harder for both the government and people of Nigeria to engage in constructive dialogue to resolve our differences, and uphold what is enshrined in our Constitution and laws: that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

"It is clear for all to see that there have, for generations in Nigeria, been tensions between our major religions, Christianity and Islam – and between herders and farmers – both for access to ever-decreasing arable and farmland due to a rapidly rising population, temperatures and desertification through global warming.

"Exacerbating those tensions, our nation has also been in recent times and focused within the northern states – subject to vicious and criminal attacks by the terror group Boko Haram.

"In concert with our American and British allies, Nigeria's military have pushed back the terrorists and largely reduced their capacity over the last five years compared to the previous decade.

"Boko Haram have targeted Christians and Churches specifically because they know it drives forward religious and land tensions already existent in the country. Similarly, they

attack mosques and Muslims in order to issue the threat: radicalise, or become targets yourselves.”

He said the president is working very hard with the vice president to make sure all of these concerns become a thing of the past.

“In the months and years ahead, our President who is Muslim and our Vice President who is an evangelical Christian pastor are irrevocably committed to addressing these multiple and long-term challenges for today’s and future generations.”

Some of the steps being taken by the president include “continuing and increasing Nigeria’s efforts alongside our allies to fully defeat and finally finish Boko Haram, in order to bring security to the north of the country.

“Continuing to seek, negotiate for, and secure the return of all those held hostage and in captivity by the terrorists, regardless of the religious faith or belief.

“Uniting our nation through dialogue organised around respect for difference in religion.

Such a programme is already underway under the leadership of the Vice President, Pastor Yemi Osinbajo.

“Addressing, through Joint Federal and State Governments programmes, access to arable farmland – with land mandated both for farmers and herders. The federal government will issue detailed measures regarding this plan and its rollout in the coming weeks.

“Countering fake news – particularly on social and digital media – by working with the non-partisan stakeholder community, the National Broadcasting Commission and social media platforms themselves, to address the proliferation of false and inflammatory commentary,” he said.

USCIRF condemns arrest of prominent Nigerian atheist, Mubarak Bala USCIRF

USCIRF (08.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3bmMOhd> - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today expressed its deep concern regarding the recent arrest of Mubarak Bala, president of the Humanist Association of Nigeria. Mr. Bala was detained in Kaduna State on April 28, 2020, and was reportedly transferred to the Kano State Police.

His current whereabouts and wellbeing are unknown. No charges have been filed, and it is unclear if Mr. Bala has been allowed access to his legal counsel. The arrest followed a petition filed with Kano State Police by a local law firm that alleges Mr. Bala insulted the Prophet Muhammad in his Facebook posts.

USCIRF Chair Tony Perkins stated, “*USCIRF is alarmed by this arrest, which appears to be for Mubarak Bala’s peaceful exercise of his rights to both freedom of expression and freedom of belief. The fact that Kano State frequently enforces Shari’a law makes the situation particularly worrisome. Nigerian authorities must immediately clarify Mr. Bala’s situation, ensure his safety, and provide him the full protections he is guaranteed under the Nigerian Constitution and international law.*”

USCIRF has analyzed and expressed concern about blasphemy laws in Africa and the state enforcement of Shari’a laws in northern Nigeria, including Kano State. To learn

more, read the reports: *Blasphemy, Apostasy, and Hate Speech Laws in Africa and Shari’ah Criminal Law in Northern Nigeria*.

USCIRF Commissioner Anurima Bhargava added, “USCIRF welcomes the statement by Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback about his concern for Mubarak Bala’s arrest. We urge the State Department and U.S. Embassy in Nigeria to continue to sound the alarm about Mr. Bala's arrest with the Nigerian federal government. The matter is urgent; Nigerian state authorities have refused to provide any information and Mr. Bala’s safety in custody is of serious concern.”

In its 2020 Annual Report, USCIRF designated Nigeria as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, under the International Religious Freedom Act for engaging in or tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom. The Annual Report includes specific recommendations for U.S. foreign policy in order to improve the religious freedom conditions in Nigeria.

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 threats to 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 or Danielle Ashbahian at dashbahian@uscirf.gov