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Trial against Christian mother for alleged blasphemy will continue

- Nigerian court has refused to dismiss the prosecutors' case in trial against Rhoda Jatau, whose defence is supported by ADF International.
- Jatau, a Christian and mother of 5, remains imprisoned for allegedly sharing a blasphemous video that condemned the lynching of Christian college student Deborah Emmanuel Yakubu.

ADF (29.11.2023) - On Monday, a judge in Bauchi State, Nigeria, refused to dismiss prosecutors' case in their trial against Rhoda Jatau. Jatau, a Christian and mother of five, has been imprisoned since May 2022 for allegedly sharing a video on WhatsApp condemning the lynching of Deborah Emmanuel Yakubu, a Nigerian university student who was murdered and set on fire by a mob of her classmates in May 2022 for sharing her Christian faith. ADF International is supporting Jatau's defence.

Jatau's lawyers had filed a "no case submission" after the prosecution had rested based on serious evidentiary issues. Jatau's lawyers raised significant legal lapses in the prosecution's case and argued that they had not established the basic elements of their case against Rhoda.

From the time of her arrest, Jatau repeatedly has been denied bail and detained incommunicado, only having intermittent access to legal counsel and family members during court appearances.

"No one should be prosecuted for peaceful expression or for their religion. The continuing prosecution and detention of Rhoda Jatau is a travesty of justice," stated Sean Nelson, legal counsel for ADF International. "Time and time again, the prosecution has failed to present even the barest evidence against Rhoda. While we are disappointed in the court's ruling in a case that should never have been brought, we will continue to seek justice and freedom for Rhoda and all who suffer persecution in Nigeria."

Lead counsel for Rhoda Jatau's case and ADF International allied lawyer, said: "I am disappointed with the ruling, but we will prepare for her defence. Rhoda and her family have suffered needlessly for over a year and a half. I implore all who are able to continue to pray for her swift and safe release."

The decision to continue with the prosecution follows a joint allegation letter sent by United Nations experts to the Nigerian government, in response to [appeals from ADF International](#) and other religious freedom advocacy organizations, highlighting the danger of blasphemy laws as a violation of international human rights, and calling attention to Yakubu and Jatau's cases.

Jatau's trial is scheduled to resume on 19 December. Jatau faces up to 5 years imprisonment if convicted of the charges against her.

Nigeria's Persecution of Christians

The cases of Rhoda Jatau and Deborah Emmanuel Yakubu are but two examples of the widespread violence against religious minorities, including Christians in Northern Nigeria, prevalent in Nigeria today.

Together with other religious minorities in Nigeria, the persecution of Christians in Nigeria is especially severe. Worldwide, over [5,500 Christians](#) were killed for their faith last year. Of those, 90% were Nigerian.

The criminalisation of blasphemy in Nigeria carries with it dangerous implications for the country as a whole. In a country of more than 200 million, split nearly evenly between Christians and Muslims, blasphemy laws are a significant driver of societal tensions. These laws punish the innocent for expressing their beliefs, silence people from sharing their faith, and perpetuate societal violence. Blasphemy laws throughout Nigeria encourage brutal mob violence and inflict severe harm on minority Muslims, Christian converts, and others.

ADF International also is supporting the legal defence of Nigerian musician [Yahaya Sharif-Aminu](#), a Sufi Muslim who was sentenced to death by hanging for sharing song lyrics that were deemed "blasphemous" on WhatsApp. With the support of ADF International, Yahaya is appealing his case to the Supreme Court of Nigeria in the hopes of overturning the death penalty blasphemy laws in Nigeria. Yahaya remains in prison awaiting his appeal. Yahaya has been imprisoned for over three and a half years.

HRWF Footnote: FORB Prisoners Database

Humanists (1)

[BALA, Mubarak](#)

Christians (1)

[JATAU, Rhoda](#)

Muslims (1)

[ISAH, Isma'ila Sani](#)

Muslims – Sufis (3)

[INYASS, Abdulazeez](#)

[KABARA, Abduljabar Nasiru](#)

[SHARIF-AMINU, Yahaya](#)

Yahaya Sharif-Aminu's death penalty blasphemy case discussed at European Parliament

ADF (12.10.2023) – Every day, on average, [14 Christians](#) are violently killed in Nigeria. Persecution of religious minorities in the country is severe. The case of Sufi Muslim Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, pending before the Supreme Court of Nigeria, challenges the blasphemy law of Kano state, Nigeria, under which he was sentenced to death by a Sharia court for peaceful expression on WhatsApp. ADF International is supporting his legal defence.

“Nobody should be punished because of their faith, let alone be executed for it. It is imperative that we support Yahaya, advocating not only for his release, but also to end the persecution of religious minorities. Blasphemy laws are in violation of international law and should be abolished, in Nigeria and elsewhere,” said MEP Miriam Lexmann from the European People’s Party (EPP) parliamentary group, who co-hosted the event in the European Parliament.

International human rights lawyer Kola Alapinni, representing Sharif-Aminu at the Supreme Court with the support of ADF International, spoke about his work in defence of religious freedom in Nigeria: “I recently visited Yahaya again. He is a musician—an artist—who peacefully expressed himself through his lyrics. Now I see him in prison, because of a life-threatening Sharia law.

As long as religious minorities are imprisoned for mere peaceful expression, there’s no religious freedom in Nigeria. I thank everyone involved in the resolution on Yahaya that the European Parliament adopted earlier this year. Please keep up the pressure. Let us not forget the fate of Yahaya and countless others who suffer because of blasphemy laws.” In April, the European Parliament called for Sharif-Aminu’s release in a near unanimous [urgency resolution](#).

“The European Union and its Member States should promote and protect the international human right to freedom of religion by urging Nigerian authorities to repeal blasphemy laws and call for an end to religious persecution in Nigeria. Every day, on average, 14 Nigerian Christians are violently killed for their faith. Nigeria is an influential country throughout Africa and the Muslim world. Yahaya’s case shows the need to lead the way towards abolishing blasphemy laws in this country and the wider region,” commented event co-host and MEP Bert-Jan Ruissen from the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) parliamentary group.

Death sentence for “blasphemy”

More information about Yahaya Sharif-Aminu’s case is available here, including video footage of his story and family’s testimony.

In 2020, Sufi Muslim Yahaya Sharif-Aminu was sentenced to death by hanging for “blasphemy.” His alleged crime involved sending song lyrics on WhatsApp that were deemed blasphemous towards the prophet Mohammed. While Sharif-Aminu’s initial conviction was overturned, he has

been ordered to a retrial where he would once again face the same death penalty blasphemy law.

With support from human rights legal advocacy group ADF International, Sharif-Aminu has appealed his case to the Supreme Court of Nigeria and is challenging the constitutionality of Sharia-based blasphemy laws. He remains in prison awaiting the Supreme Court appeal. His case is far from an isolated incident. The persecution of minority religion adherents, including Christians and minority Muslims, in Nigeria is especially severe. In 2022, approximately 90% of all Christians worldwide who were killed for their faith were in Nigeria.

"The importance of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu's case cannot be overestimated. ADF International is committed to supporting this important case and bringing about justice for Yahaya. Our prayers are with him, and all who suffer from religious persecution in Nigeria. The Supreme Court's decision could end blasphemy laws not only in his home state, but also lead the way towards further abolishing these laws, which significantly exacerbate societal tensions against religious minority groups," stated Jean-Paul Van De Walle, Legal counsel for ADF International in Brussels.

- ADF International is providing legal support for the case of Sufi Muslim Yahaya Sharif-Aminu at the Nigerian Supreme Court, which could bring much-needed religious freedom improvements to the country's 220 million inhabitants.

More reading

[Nigerian singer death penalty case discussed at the European Parliament](#)
[Death penalty on singer Sharif Aminu](#)

Catholic priest burned to death, another shot in north Nigeria

Reuters (15.01.2023) - Gunmen burned a Catholic priest to death and shot and injured his colleague in northwest Nigeria on Sunday, police said, the latest violence raising concerns about security ahead of an election next month.

Nigerians will vote for a new president on Feb. 25 but kidnappings for ransom and killings by armed gangs in the north have led to fears that polls may not be held in some areas.

The motive for the latest attack was not immediately clear but gunmen have previously targeted priests in the largely Muslim north. Wasiu Abiodun, police spokesperson for Niger state, said in a statement that armed men torched the residence of Father Isaac Achi, of Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church, in Paikoro local government area, after failing to gain entry around 3:00 a.m.

Father Achi was burned to death while another priest identified as Father Collins, who was at the house, was shot and injured as he tried to escape. He is recovering at a local hospital, Adiodun said. "This is a sad moment.

For a priest to be killed in such a manner means that we are not all safe. These terrorists have lost it, and drastic action is needed to end this ongoing carnage," said Niger state governor Sani Bello. Reporting by Maiduguri newsroom, writing by MacDonald Dzirutwe, editing by Andrew Cawthorne
