

URGENT ACTION

NIGERIAN SINGER AT RISK OF IMMINENT EXECUTION

Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, a 22-year old singer detained in Kano prison, Kano State, in northern Nigeria, is at risk of imminent execution after an Upper Shari'a Court sentenced him to death by hanging for circulating a song via WhatsApp considered blasphemous. Influential individuals and religious leaders are mounting pressure on the authorities to carry out the judgement as soon as possible. Yahaya Sharif-Aminu is now appealing the sentence. He must be immediately and unconditionally released.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Governor Abdullahi Umar Ganduje
Office of the Governor
Government House
Kano
Kano State, Nigeria
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Email: info@kanostate.gov.ng
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Dear Governor Abdullahi Umar Ganduje,

I am writing in concern for **Yahaya Sharif- Aminu**, a 22-year-old singer sentenced to death. In February 2020, Yahaya Sharif-Aminu composed a song that allegedly contains derogatory comments against Prophet Muhammad SWT. This prompted his arrest in March. Also, his family members were forced to flee their home when on 4 March angry youths protested against the song and set fire to the family's house, located at Sharifai quarters in Kano Municipal Local Government Area, northern Nigeria. No one was arrested or prosecuted for the violence.

On 10 August, Yahaya Sharif-Aminu was arraigned before an Upper Shari'a Court in Kano and convicted of blasphemy. He remains remanded in Kano prison. Following his conviction, there has been a huge outcry by several individuals and religious bodies urging you, the Governor to sign his execution warrant. Yahaya Sharif-Aminu is appealing the death sentence.

I have serious concerns about the fairness of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu's trial and the framing of the charges against him based on his WhatsApp messages. The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. No one should ever be sentenced to death or executed. The imposition of the death penalty following an unfair trial violates the right to life and hasty trials undermine the ability of convicted persons to seek effective remedies for the inadequate legal representation they had received at trial. Moreover, the use of the death penalty for blasphemy violates Nigeria's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which restricts the use of the death penalty to the "most serious crimes", which according to international law are crimes that involve intentional killing.

I therefore request that Your Excellency:

- Refrain from signing any execution warrant for Yahaya Sharif- Aminu;
- Release Yahaya Sharif-Aminu immediately and unconditionally.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 27 August, Kano State government published on its official website a statement that the governor would not hesitate to sign the warrant for Yahaya Sharif-Aminu's execution.

There are serious concerns about the fairness of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu's trial and the framing of the charges against him. Before and during the trial, he was not permitted legal representation. He was granted access to legal advice to prepare an appeal after human rights lawyers and activists pressured the court to respect his right to legal representation. Sharia law, which is practiced in many states in northern Nigeria, provides for the death penalty for blasphemy. The Hisbah, a Kano State-owned security outfit is the body that enforces the Shariah law in the highly conservative state.

The death penalty remains a legal sanction in Nigeria and continues to be imposed throughout the country. In 2019, over 54 death sentences were recorded. In total, over 2, 700 people were under death sentence by the end of the year. In Nigeria, the 2004 National Study Group on Death Penalty and the 2007 Presidential Commission on the Administration of Justice both stressed that the Nigerian criminal justice system cannot guarantee a fair trial and called for a moratorium on the death penalty.

In 2008, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Commission) adopted its second resolution on the death penalty, calling on States Parties to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights – such as Nigeria – to “observe a moratorium on the execution of death sentences with a view to abolishing the death penalty” and to ratify the ICCPR-OP2. In a study published on 19 April 2012, the Working Group on the Death Penalty of the African Commission reaffirmed the necessity of the abolition of capital punishment and suggested ways for its achievement.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: ENGLISH

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 11 DECEMBER 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Yahaya Sharif-Aminu (He, Him, His)