

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

7 April 2010
AI Index: AFR 44/002/2010

Nigeria: Amnesty International condemns ban on internet debate

Amnesty International today said it condemned the ruling of a Shari'a court which banned a rights group from holding internet debates on amputation. The court missed the opportunity to reaffirm the Constitutional and internationally recognized rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of information.

On 30 March 2010, the Shari'a Court in Magajin Gari Kaduna ordered nongovernmental organization Civil Rights Congress (CRC) to immediately stop opening an online forum "on facebook, twitter, or any blog for the purpose of the debate on the amputation [of] Mallam Bello Jangebe". CRC had started the debate marking ten years after Jangebes right hand was amputated.

"There is no justification for preventing people from expressing views on the internet about a judgement that was decided in court and issued in public," said Tawanda Hondora, Deputy Africa Director at Amnesty International. "This ruling does not reflect the Nigerian Constitution and the country's international human rights obligations and commitments."

Freedom of expression constitutes one of the basic conditions for each individual's self fulfilment and development. It is the touchstone of all internationally recognized human rights.

"The internet is a valuable space for free debate that should be protected. An order that stops people from commenting on a judgement in this way undermines the right to information and to openly express views and opinions."

The Nigerian government has the responsibility to ensure that citizens are not restricted from receiving information.

Section 39 of Nigeria's Constitution guarantees the freedom of expression and the freedom to receive and share information. It also allows any person to "own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions". Discussion in an online chatroom is clearly consistent with the realisation of these rights.

No sentences of amputation or stoning have been carried out in recent years but prisons visited by Amnesty International in 2007 held several inmates awaiting amputations.

"The use of amputations or other corporal punishment constitutes torture and inhuman or degrading punishment, which is prohibited by the Nigerian Constitution and international human rights treaties to which the country is a party," said Tawanda Hondora.

Corporal punishment, including flogging, amputation and stoning to death, remains lawful under Shari'a law, which was introduced in twelve northern Nigerian states since 1999.

Amnesty International urged the government to immediately review and commute all sentences of amputation and stoning.

/ENDS

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5810 or email: tom.mackey@amnesty.org

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK
www.amnesty.org