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**JUBILEE CAMPAIGN USA**  
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**Federal Republic of Nigeria**

**A Vital Voice for Those Suffering in Silence**  
**9689-C Main Street • Fairfax, VA 22031-3746 • TEL: (703) 503-2260 • FAX: (703) 503-0792**  
**EMAIL: [jubilee@jubileecampaign.org](mailto:jubilee@jubileecampaign.org)**  
P.O. Box 700 • Addlestone • Surrey, KT15 9BW • United Kingdom  
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**United Nations Human Rights Council  
Universal Periodic Review of the Federal Republic of Nigeria**

**I. Background**

1. **Jubilee Campaign** is a non-governmental organization which holds consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 2003 and whose work focuses on promoting the rights of religious and ethnic minorities and raising the status of vulnerable women and children to protect them from bodily harm and exploitation. Jubilee Campaign submits this analysis of religious freedom and human rights in the Federal Republic of Nigeria as a contribution to the Universal Periodic Review.

**II. Violations of international human rights violations, considering applicable international human rights obligations.**

**A. Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.**

**a. Blasphemy laws and legal cases**

2. Article 38 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria outlines that all citizens “shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.”<sup>1</sup>
3. Twelve out of Nigeria's 36 states [Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, Zamfara] have enacted penal codes based on Sharia law, with punishments ranging from amputation to death by stoning. With the exception of three states [Kaduna, Niger, Gombe], all of the aforementioned twelve Nigerian states enforcing Sharia law are Muslim-majority. Where Sharia penal codes are applied, the death penalty can be a sanction for blasphemy, and such laws have caused the imprisonment and barbaric sentencing of citizens simply for practicing their right to expression.<sup>2</sup>
4. In March 2020 Islamic gospel musician from Kano State, Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, was arrested on blasphemy charges after a series of audio recordings were released in which he had allegedly “praised an imam from the Tijaniyya Muslim brotherhood (Ibrahim Niasse) to the extent it elevated him above the Prophet Muhammed”. In August 2020, a Sharia court in Filin Hockey convicted Yahaya of “insulting the religious creed” and sentenced him to death by hanging.<sup>3</sup> Human rights attorney Kola Alapinni took up Yahaya’s case as the 90-day deadline for appeal neared, and in January 2021 the High Court of Kano State overturned the death sentence; however, the court has “cited irregularities in the Sharia Court’s previous trial” and ordered a retrial. Alapinni reported that this decision is unjust on the grounds that it remanded the case to the court which had originally sentenced Yahaya to death, and that it violates Nigerian law which prohibits double jeopardy.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria](#) [Nigeria], Act No. 24, 5 May 1999.

<sup>2</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom [USCIRF], [Shari’ah Criminal Law in Northern Nigeria: Implementation of Expanded Shari’ah Penal and Criminal Procedure Codes in Kano, Sokoto, and Zamfara States, 2017-2019](#), December 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Eoin McSweeney & Stephanie Busari, [“The WhatsApp voice note that led to a death sentence”](#), CNN, 29 September 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Adeyemi Adesomoju, [“Blasphemy: Kano musician freed of death penalty appeals against retrial”](#), *Premium Times Nigeria*, 25 January 2021.

5. On April 27, 2020 Mubarak Bala, an atheist from a Muslim background and the president of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, was accused by a law firm in Kano State of making blasphemous posts on the internet denigrating the Prophet Muhammad, and according to The Humanist, “the petitioners alleged that Mubarak’s posts will incite the Muslim community and lead to public disturbance.”<sup>5</sup> The following day, Mubarak was arrested in Kaduna State, Nigeria and was transferred to Kano State following his arrest, though his whereabouts remain undisclosed. Two years later, in April 2022, Kano State High Court convicted Mubarak on 18 counts of public disturbance and blasphemy under state penal code articles 210 and 114, and sentenced him to an unconscionable 24 years in prison.<sup>6</sup>
6. In April 2021 in Bauchi State, Muslim water vendor Talle Mai Ruwa allegedly made blasphemous remarks out of anger when a woman attempted to fill up a bucket of water without Talle’s permission and begged him to give her water for free. Witnesses of the incident apprehended Talle and brought him to the local police station but the following day a mob of angry Muslim youth dragged Talle from the station and into the street where they stoned him until he perished. The perpetrators subsequently set fire to Talle’s body.<sup>7</sup>
7. In July 2021, Kano state charged Nigerian cleric Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara with blasphemy for allegedly making denigrating comments about Prophet Muhammad. Abduljabbar is widely recognized “for his controversial religious commentaries and statements”. In December 2021, Abduljabbar was convicted and sentenced to death.<sup>8</sup>
8. In April 2022, Nigerian sex worker Hannah Saliu was beaten to death and set on fire in a blasphemy-related killing in Lagos. A male customer had paid Saliu 1,000 Naira (≈ USD \$2.50) for her services. However, an argument ensued after Saliu found that 5,000 Naira (≈ USD \$12.00) was missing from her home and confronted her male customer, accusing him of stealing from her. The customer gathered two of his friends and returned with Saliu to her room in search of the missing money; instead, they became angry when they found Saliu to be in possession of a Quran. The three men claimed that it was blasphemous and unjust for Saliu to both engage in sex work and be Muslim, and they subsequently beat and stabbed Saliu to death before setting her body on fire.<sup>9</sup>
9. On 12 May 2022, a mob of incensed Muslim students of Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto State targeted Christian student Deborah Yakubu in response to an allegedly blasphemous comment she made in a WhatsApp messaging group via a voice recording. Days later as Deborah was at her university campus, a mob of classmates began pelting her with stones while exclaiming “Allahu Akbar”, brutally killing her before committing one final desecration by throwing rubber tires on and setting fire to Deborah’s battered body. Authorities only arrested two perpetrators, and in an egregious miscarriage of justice, the two detainees were arraigned on the grossly inadequate

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<sup>5</sup> Rachel Deitch, [“Fighting for Mubarak Bala’s Rights”](#), *The Humanist*, 12 May 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Humanists International, [“‘Day of shame for Nigerian authorities’: Mubarak Bala sentenced to 24 years in prison”](#), 5 April 2022.

<sup>7</sup> OpIndia, [“Nigeria: Man stoned to death, set ablaze in front of police by radical Islamist mob on charges of blasphemy”](#), 4 April 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Sahara Reporters, [“Nigerian Cleric Being Tried Over Alleged Blasphemy, Abduljabbar Kabara Knows Fate Today”](#), 15 December 2022. ; Ted Odogwu, [“Human rights organisations should stop Kano from killing cleric over blasphemy - Brother”](#), *Punch Nigeria*, 25 December 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Nick Mordowanec, [“Sex Worker Allegedly Burned Alive by Customer for Having Quran”](#), *Newsweek*, 14 June 2022. ; Deji Lambo, [“Customer, friends lynch, burn Lagos sex worker for keeping Quran in room”](#), *Punch Nigeria*, 14 June 2022.

charges of “criminal conspiracy and disturbing the peace”, both of which are bailable offenses.<sup>10</sup> By January 2023, the two perpetrators were formally released from prison after the prosecution team failed to attend a court hearing despite their knowledge of the trial date. The Chief Magistrate justified the release of Deborah’s attackers and the disposal of their case by claiming that “it seems to be very clear to this court that the prosecutions have no [] evidence against the defendants”; this disregards the fact that there are multiple video recordings of the attack, the perpetrators’ faces, and Deborah’s charred remains.<sup>11</sup>

10. Just over a week after Deborah’s killing, Bauchi state authorities detained 45-year-old Christian mother of five and healthcare worker, Rhoda Ya’u Jatau, for sharing a video of an individual condemning Deborah’s murder, which police claimed was an act of “inciting public disturbance, exciting contempt of religious creed, and cyber-stalking”.<sup>12</sup> Rhoda’s defense team has been repeatedly denied access to any supposed ‘criminal evidence’ gathered by the prosecutors, and her trial proceedings have repeatedly been delayed. The principal absurdity regarding Rhoda’s case is that she has incurred the same charges of ‘inciting public disturbance’ as the perpetrators of Deborah’s savage lynching, implying the Nigerian state’s reprehensible standpoint that expression of ‘derogatory’ opinions and criminal homicide are transgressions of comparable distinction.
11. On 25 June 2023 in Sokoto State, father of six Usman Buda was stoned to death by an angry mob on accusations of blasphemy. Witnesses of the incident reported that Usman, while working at his butcher stall, encouraged a beggar to “seek alms in the name of Allah rather than the prophet Muhammad”. Immediately, a group of angry Muslims began attacking him, including some children who were goaded to as well, and had beaten him until he fell to the ground bleeding profusely. Usman passed away en route to the hospital.<sup>13</sup>

## **b. Militant violence against Christians**

12. Another group responsible for civilian casualties, especially within the past four years or so, are radical Fulani militants, who operate primarily in Nigeria’s Middle Belt, and target predominantly Christian farming communities using sophisticated weaponry such as AK-47s to slaughter hundreds of civilians. It is essential to note that in this submission we focus only on those Fulani who subscribe to a violent Islamist ideology, and not the broader Fulani ethnic group which is largely peaceful and adheres to many different faiths and interpretations.
13. In May 2023, in what the Nigerian organization International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law identified as a possible ‘parting gift’ to exiting President Muhammadu Buhari, Fulani militants had killed approximately 700 Christian civilians across the states of Plateau, Benue, and Kaduna. Intersociety also recorded the destruction of no fewer than 100 churches and the abduction and/or murder of 20 pastors between April and June 2023.<sup>14</sup> Numerous other major attacks on Christians in Nigeria have occurred in 2021 and

<sup>10</sup> Magdalene Kahi, [“Christian Entity Calls for More Arrests, ‘murder charge’ for Killers of Nigerian Student”](#), *Association for Catholic Information in Africa*, 18 May 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Adaji, [“‘Blasphemy’: Two Suspects On Trial For Deborah Samuel’s Murder Set Free”](#), *The Insight Nigeria*, 18 May 2023. ; [Trial Proceedings](#).

<sup>12</sup> Morning Star News, [“Christian Woman on Trial for Blasphemy in Northeast Nigeria”](#), 5 October 2022. ; Barnabas Aid, [“Christians Attacked After Blasphemy Allegation in Bauchi, Nigeria”](#), 24 May 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Hassan Abdulsamad, [“Latest blasphemy killing highlights Nigeria’s problem with religious extremism”](#), *The Guardian*, 14 July 2023.

<sup>14</sup> International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law, [Farewell Gifts to Buhari, Ors: 700 Christians Slaughtered in May, 1,100 in 60 Days and 2,150 in 160 Days of 2023](#).

2022. On Pentecostal Sunday, 5 June 2022, unidentified terrorists stormed St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo, during prayer and worship services and shot indiscriminately at congregants, killing approximately 70. Though no militant group has claimed responsibility for the massacre, Ondo lawyer Adeyemi Olayemi explains that it is highly speculated that the assailants were radical Fulani militants.<sup>15</sup> Such would fit the standard of terrorist activity of Fulani militants who in late October 2021 killed two Christian worshippers and abducted an few dozen additional congregants while attacking a Baptist church in Kaduna State,<sup>16</sup> and who more recently in April 2022 set fire to Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) in Plateau State's Miango District in a widespread attack in which they additionally torched 25 civilian homes and 40 agricultural stores.<sup>17</sup>

### III. Other human rights concerns

14. Boko Haram, in the height of its terrorist activity around 2014 and 2015, engaged in mass kidnappings of students. Though the group has largely ceased such practices - though they have recently been taken up by Fulani militants - numerous girls kidnapped in these previous incidents remain captive by Boko Haram. In these militant camps, for example, girls and women are often forced to marry their captors and give birth to multiple children to be raised in the terrorist group's community, and they face sexual violence and rape at the hands of their 'husbands'. One Christian woman Leah Sharibu, who was originally abducted from her school in Dapchi in 2018 at the age of 14, is now 20 years old and has been forced to marry a Boko Haram commander with whom she has reportedly borne two children.<sup>18</sup> Many women and girls who have escaped Boko Haram or have otherwise been released by the group have often been through at least one forced pregnancy and have developed sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS, Gonorrhea, and Hepatitis.<sup>19</sup> In addition to sexual slavery and violence, women and girls are confined to domestic servitude, held responsible for cooking, cleaning, maintaining weapons, child rearing, fetching water, and more.<sup>20</sup>
15. Fulani militants are the repeatedly suspected perpetrators of the frequent mass abductions of students from educational institutions, such as the following incidents: three Christian students and a teacher from Prince Academy School; 27 students and 12 staff from Government Science College in Kagura, Niger State; 279 students from Government Girls Science Secondary School in Zamfara State; 39 students from Federal College of Forestry Mechanization in Kaduna State; 20 students from Greenfield University in Kaduna State; three students from Federal University of Agriculture in Benue State; 136 students from the Salihi Tanko Islamic School Tegna in Niger State; 100 students from Federal Government College in Kebbi State; 180 students from Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna State; 15 students from College of Agriculture in Zamfara State; 9 students from Islamiyya School in Katsina State; 73 students from Government Day Secondary School in Zamfara State.

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<sup>15</sup> Jayson Casper, ["Owo Church Attack Kills Dozens of Nigerian Catholics on Pentecost Sunday"](#), *Christianity Today*, 5 June 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Evangelical Focus, ["Two Christians killed, dozens abducted in attack on church in Nigeria"](#), 4 November 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Andrea Morris, ["Fulani Extremists Kill 3, Burn Church Site in Latest Attack on Christians in Nigeria Villagers Say Gov't Doing Nothing"](#), *CBN News*, 7 April 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Timothy, ["Leah Sharibu turns 20 but remains in captivity - all because she bravely raised her hand to say she's a Christian"](#), *Open Doors UK*, 12 May 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Funmilayo Idowu Agbaje, ["The objectified female body and the Boko Haram insurgency in northeast Nigeria: Insights from IDP camps in Abuja"](#), *African Security Review*, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Joe Parkinson & Drew Hinshaw, ["Freedom for the World's Most Famous Hostages Came at a Heavy Price"](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 24 December 2017.

16. In December 2022, Reuters published a series of stories in which they revealed that, in an alleged effort to combat Islamic insurgency and identify militants, the Nigerian military has committed violence against women and extrajudicial killings of unborn and living children. In one fragment of this operation, Nigerian soldiers conducted covert, unsafe, illegal, and forced abortions on at least 10,000 pregnant women and girls. The military specifically targeted women and girls who had been previously kidnapped by Islamic State West Africa Province/Boko Haram and subjected to rape in captivity; military forces consider these innocent unborn children as future Islamist insurgents that must be eradicated.<sup>21</sup> In its follow-up report, Reuters interviewed 40 former Nigerian soldiers who witnessed the killing of children by military forces, or otherwise committed such murders themselves. Similar to the ridiculous and indefensible rationale of aborting ‘future militants’ in order to combat insurgency, the military, in a program called Operation No Living Things, targeted living children who were children of Boko Haram militants, were located in conflict zones, or were suspected of being currently involved in or predisposed to Islamic militancy.<sup>22</sup>

#### IV. Noncompliance with UPR recommendations

17. Nigeria’s persecutory practices and disinclination/inability to counter violence perpetrated by non-state actors against faith minorities exhibit its failure to observe the Universal Periodic Review Working Group’s 2018 recommendations<sup>23</sup>, notably:

- Working towards full abolition of the death penalty (recommended by: Australia, 148.140; Austria, 148.144; Benin, 148.1; Cabo Verde, 148.124; Czechia, 148.141; Estonia, 148.2; France, 148.143; Georgia, 148.8; Greece, 148.139; Holy See, 148.131; Honduras, 148.9; Hungary, 148.132; Iceland, 148.135; Italy, 148.138; Liechtenstein, 148.136; Mexico, 148.137; Moldova, 148.129; Montenegro, 148.4; Mozambique, 148.133; New Zealand, 148.134; Portugal, 148.128; Romania, 148.125; Rwanda, 148.127; Sweden, 148.130; Uruguay, 148.126);
- Eliminating violence against women and children (recommended by: Argentina, 148.261; Austria, 148.206; Bahrain, 148.149; Belarus, 148.207; Cabo Verde, 148.262; Cameroon, 148.204; Côte d’Ivoire, 148.38; Cyprus, 148.42; Denmark, 148.44; Finland, 148.51; France, 148.52; Gabon, 148.209; Germany, 148.53; Greece, 148.199; Holy See, 148.198; Honduras, 148.54; Iceland, 148.260; Indonesia, 148.201; Japan, 148.49; Lesotho, 148.200; Madagascar, 148.257; Maldives, 148.208; Namibia, 148.50; Nepal, 148.210; Palestine, 148.205; Philippines, 148.47; Portugal, 148.39; Republic of Korea, 148.48; Rwanda, 148.43; Saudi Arabia, 148.247; Sierra Leone, 148.202; Slovakia, 148.41; Slovenia, 148.40; Spain, 148.46; Thailand, 148.45; Tunisia, 148.248; United Kingdom, 148.203);
- Protecting the lives of innocent civilians while “fighting insecurity” and ensuring state actors’ compliance with human rights obligations (recommended by: Afghanistan, 148.102; Australia, 148.103; Belgium, 148.145; Brazil, 148.120; Bulgaria, 148.121; Cyprus, 148.105; France, 148.108; Ireland, 148.146; Lebanon, 148.107; New Zealand, 148.17; Portugal, 148.104; Slovakia, 148.165);

<sup>21</sup> Paul Carsten, Reade Levinson, David Lewis, & Libby George, [“The Abortion Assault”](#), *Reuters Investigates*, 7 December 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Carsten, Reade Levinson, David Lewis, & Libby George, [“Smothered, Poisoned and Shot”](#), *Reuters Investigates*, 12 December 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Council, [Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Nigeria](#), A/HRC/40/7, 26 December 2018.

- Opposing and eradicating terrorism and violent extremism (recommended by: Belarus, 148.119; Burundi, 148.110; Cameroon, 148.118; Chad, 148.114; China, 148.116; Comoros, 148.111; Egypt, 148.109; Guyana, 148.117; Kuwait, 148.115; Pakistan, 148.122; Portugal, 148.164; Turkmenistan, 148.148; United Arab Emirates, 148.112);
- Investigating and prosecuting state and/or non-state perpetrators of violence against civilians (recommended by: Argentina, 148.172; Canada, 148.173; Holy See, 148.170; Republic of Korea, 148.174; Switzerland, 148.175; United States of America, 148.171);
- Securing the right to freedom of religion or belief (recommended by: Chile, 148.187; Holy See, 148.188; Kenya, 148.188).

## V. Recommendations

With consideration of the above violations of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, we propose that the following recommendations be raised to the Federal Republic of Nigeria by the UN Universal Periodic Review Working Group:

18. Take measures to encourage the twelve northern states of Nigeria to abolish blasphemy laws as they (1) violate the right to freedom of religion or belief as outlined in domestic legislation and international accords; (2) lead to the unjust and prolonged imprisonment of faith minorities for nonviolent conduct such as expressing their beliefs; and (3) embolden non-state actors to engage in violence against faith minorities on accusations of blasphemy;
19. Acquit and release all religious prisoners of conscience, including Mubarak Bala. Discard blasphemy cases such as that against Rhoda Jatau, Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, and Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara.
20. Establish an independent, impartial commission of inquiry to investigate atrocities and crimes against humanity perpetrated by all sides in Nigeria, including: mob violence against and killing of faith minorities accused of blasphemy; vicious militant attacks against predominantly Christian communities and houses of worship; and military violence against civilians during anti-terrorism campaigns.
21. Take measures to enhance security in regions and locations vulnerable to terrorist attacks, including educational institutions, IDP camps, and Christian communities. Additionally, improve training to state actors regarding preemptive response to early-warning systems.
22. Develop a comprehensive plan and/or policy to address and eradicate the violence against faith minorities perpetrated by Islamic jihadist Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province, and Fulani militants. Ensure that such a program does not enable state actor atrocities mentioned in this submission, including forced abortions and extrajudicial killings.