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INSTANTLY KILLED!

HOW LAW ENFORCEMENT FAILURES
EXACERBATE NIGERIA'S WAVE OF MOB
VIOLENCE

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34 Colorado Close

off Thames Street, off Alvan Ikoku Way,

Maitama, Abuja-FCT, Nigeria



Cover Illustration: The cover page image is an impression of mob violence in action in Nigeria. It depicts torture and execution of a victim by a mob. © Amnesty International

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1. ABBREVIATIONS

WORD	DESCRIPTION
ACHPR	African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights
ACJA	Administration of Criminal Justice Act
CAT	Convention Against Torture
CCTV	Closed-circuit television
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
FIR	First Information Report
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICED	International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
ICPC	Independent Corrupt Practices Commission
NCAT	National Committee Against Torture
NPF	Nigerian Police Force
OPC	Oduduwa People's Congress
OPCAT	Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture
VIP	Very important person

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between January 2012 to August 2023, a span of 11 years, Amnesty International has recorded at least 555 victims of mob violence, from 363 documented incidents. These are characterized by killings, torture and other ill-treatment¹. The victims of the cases detailed in this briefing are 4 women, 3 children and 8 men. Two among the victims had actual or perceived mental health illnesses and/or psycho-social or intellectual disabilities.²

Mob violence has spread with impunity in Nigeria in the last decade. This upsurge in mob violence, including violence against women and children, has led to nationwide condemnation and calls for justice from surviving victims, their families and human rights advocates.³

This alarming increase in the rate of cases prompted Amnesty International to investigate and document the human rights violations arising from these cases through desk research and fieldwork. During fieldwork conducted as part of this research, Amnesty International documented cases of mob violence in each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones (South-South, South-East, South-West, North-Central, North-West, and North-East). Victims, eyewitnesses, victims' relatives, legal experts, and government officials were interviewed.

Amnesty International observed different patterns across the various documented incidents of mob violence. Many of the victims of mob violence studied by Amnesty International were tortured to death or narrowly escaped being killed after accusations were made about alleged offences such as theft, witchcraft, rituals involving the use of human body parts, or the magical theft of male genitals, and blasphemy. Other triggering instances include allegations of shoplifting, rape, and abduction. Motorists who accidentally injure or kill pedestrians have been beaten, tortured and killed. Family members and associates of the victims were also subjected to public humiliation and stigma in their communities.

The nature and pattern of mob violence differs between the south and the north of Nigeria. In the south, for example, mob violence is mostly targeted against theft and witchcraft allegations. In northern Nigeria, it is mostly used against those accused of blasphemy. The endorsement of mob action by religious clerics on issues of alleged blasphemy is another factor that fuels mob violence.

In this briefing, Amnesty International presents a sample of ten cases out of those documented across the country.

In many of the incidents the violence was usually meted out by angry mobs in crowded areas, such as motor parks, market areas and busy roads. In other instances, violence took place in more remote places, such as small communities and villages. Victims of mob violence were tortured by beating, stoning, or the use of improvised weapons like sticks and metal objects the assailants had to hand. After the victims were weakened by torture, they were sometimes set ablaze using flammable materials such as kerosene, petrol, and vehicle tyres. In very few cases, victims were able to escape. But those survivors live with extreme trauma as the result of such ordeal. Their relatives also suffer trauma, even if they were not present. There are also instances where vigilante groups – community-organised security initiatives, who are supposed to arrest suspects and hand them to community leaders for transfer to the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) – participate in or even lead mob violence.

Many of the victims of mob violence were targeted because of their identities as members of religious or other

1 These figures are in addition to SBM intelligence's "Chart of the week: Mob violence in Nigeria" briefing where a total number of 279 cases and 391 casualties were recorded between 2019 and 2022: SBM Intelligence, "Chart of the week: Mob violence in Nigeria", 30 May 2022, available at <https://www.sbmintel.com/2022/05/chart-of-the-week-mob-violence-in-nigeria/>

2 These victims include Talle Mai Ruwa from the Sade community in Bauchi State, and an unidentified man (whose name remains unspecified) from the Okengwe axis of Okene Local Government Area of Kogi State. Although there is no medical evidence to prove that Talle Mai Ruwa and the Okengwe man were people with mental health illnesses and/or psycho-social or intellectual disabilities, some eyewitnesses to Talle Mai Ruwa's mob violence incident confirmed to Amnesty International that for at least thirty or more years they lived with the victim in Sade village, where he was widely perceived to be a person with psycho-social disabilities. Amnesty International did not conduct primary research on the lynched man of Okengwe axis of Okene and the mob violence incident in which he was killed, but secondary sources revealed that he was widely believed to be a person with psycho-social disabilities.

3 Dakuku Peterside, "Spread of mob justice in Nigeria", Business Day, 23 May 2022, <https://businessday.ng/opinion/article/spread-of-mob-justice-in-nigeria/>, Ernest Ojukwu, Andrew Chukwumerie, Chukwu Emeka Eze, "The rising scourge of mob action in Nigeria", This Day, 6 June 2022, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/06/06/the-rising-scourge-of-mob-action-in-nigeria>

minority groups. Other reasons for targeting victims include attempts to curtail freedom of opinion and expression, and discrimination due to gender or specific conditions, including against women, children, and people with psycho-social disabilities. In the cases documented by Amnesty International, persons with psycho-social disabilities were killed in Bauchi and Kogi states after allegations of blasphemy and witchcraft, respectively.⁴ Women were stripped naked and either killed, or narrowly escaped being killed, in Imo, Enugu, Lagos, and Kwara states. Four children were tortured and set ablaze in two separate incidents in Cross Rivers and Lagos states after allegations of theft were made.

Participants, and others who condone mob violence, often justify their actions by claiming that the legal system is completely broken. Often, suspects regain their freedom if handed over to the police for investigation and prosecution. However, public prosecutors in Lagos and Bauchi state told Amnesty International's researchers that the majority of those accusing the police of freeing suspects – who then become the target of mob violence – were doing so because of a misunderstanding about the law. It is not well understood that the police can only detain a suspect for a limited period to prepare them for court charges.⁵ Further investigations reveal that mistrust of the police, delays and widespread ignorance of the criminal justice system, illiteracy, and failure to hold perpetrators of mob violence accountable, are some of the reasons people take the law into their own hands with little or no consequences.

The fact that these killings have been happening for a long time, with few cases investigated and prosecuted, shows a failure on the part of the authorities in fulfilling their responsibility to protect the people from harm and any form of violence. The failure of law enforcement agencies, especially the NPF, to prevent mob violence, investigate killings and/or torture and other ill treatment arising from it, and bring suspected perpetrators to justice, and the weak and corrupt legal institutions and systems, are all parts of the findings documented in this briefing. This research briefing also contains recommendations for relevant stakeholders regarding preventing human rights violations, including torture, and protecting the right to life.

The Nigerian authorities are failing to protect the rights of victims, and the families of victims. They are failing to ensure justice via prosecution of those who perpetrated these abuses. To compound the problem, senior government officials rarely issue official statements of condemnation against mob violence or call for the investigation and prosecution of offenders. In most cases studied by Amnesty International, the police were not present to detect or deter mob violence. When they were informed, they appeared at the scene long after the incident. In other instances, the police were found to be unprofessional in handling mob violence cases. Amnesty International's fieldwork and desk research reveals that among the 363 incidents examined, the police failed to initially respond in at least 28 instances. They failed to process at least 36 cases to the level of investigation and prosecution. When Amnesty International contacted the NPF to ask why they were unable to protect victims of mob violence, the NPF claimed that they were not permitted to respond. Amnesty International also wrote to the NPF state offices in each of the five states selected for this report only Bauchi State Police Command responded and noted that the case is under investigation.

Amnesty International calls on the local governments to improve the monitoring of mob violence and collection of evidence to prosecute those who engage in these unlawful acts; the federal government should provide effective law enforcement and ensure that public and crowded areas have adequate security. They should also ensure that the arrests and investigations follow the principles of due process and fair trials.

To the public, people should pursue grievances through legal channels, rather than encouraging others to take the law into their own hands and engage in mob violence, as stipulated by the internationally recognized principles of human rights.

4 Including Talle Mai Ruwa from the Sade community in the Bauchi State, and an unidentified man from the Okengwe axis of Okene Local Government Area of Kogi State.

5 Amnesty International's interviews with eyewitnesses in Lagos and Bauchi, 17 May and 18 June 2022.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research briefing is based on Amnesty International's desk research covering January 2012 to August 2023 and field missions conducted in five states of Nigeria, spread across six geopolitical zones, carried out between June 2022 and April 2023.

The 11-year timeframe was deliberately chosen in order to observe the trends, dynamics, and patterns of mob violence across different conditions and circumstances. The five states where Amnesty International examined case studies were: Lagos in the South-West; Cross Rivers in the South-South; Imo in the South-East; Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), in the Middle Belt; Sokoto in the North-West; and Bauchi in the North-East. They were chosen to fairly reflect the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Other considerations that informed the choice of states and case studies included access to victims or their relatives and eyewitnesses for interviews.

In addition to the fieldwork, Amnesty International obtained data through a systematic desk review of relevant sources, such as newspaper articles, journals, and books.

During the fieldwork in the selected states, researchers from Amnesty International took written notes, audio-visual recordings and pictures, consented to by all the interviewees. A total of 30 victims of mob violence, their relatives, or eyewitnesses were interviewed. Others interviewed were legal experts and public prosecutors in Lagos and Bauchi states.

The pictures and videos of victims, incidents and scenes of mob violence used in the briefing were obtained by Amnesty International during fieldwork and desk research. The names of victims and witnesses whose testimonies are included in this research briefing are presented with their understanding and consent to publish their actual names.

Amnesty International sought to interview and obtain evidence from the police divisions and commands in charge of the areas where the mob violence incidents took place as a right of reply.

Letters of reply were sent to the Commissioners of Police of Bauchi, FCT, Cross Rivers, Lagos and Sokoto states requesting to know the action each command took on the specific mob violence case in their respective states. As at the time of writing this report, only Bauchi State Command responded to the letter.

According to the Bauchi Command, the personnel at the police outpost whose jurisdiction cover the location of the violence, made efforts to prevent the violence, but were hindered by the overwhelming angry residents. Although the Area Commander and Divisional Police Officer came to the scene, they arrived after the violence had occurred, due to the distance of their location to the scene of the violence. The Command also noted that the case is still under investigation and no arrest has been made.⁷

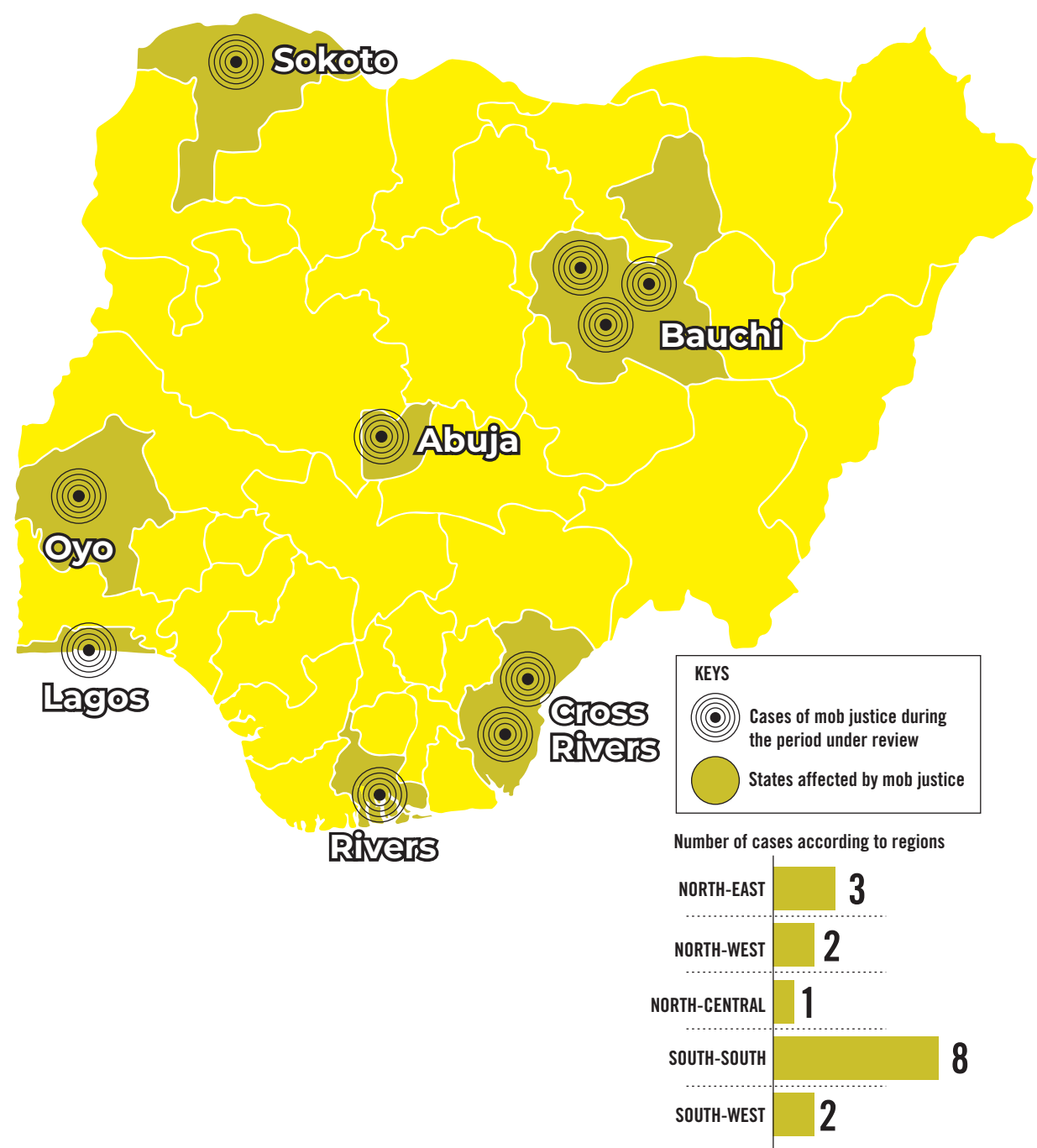
Amnesty International also sent a letter of reply to the Inspector General of Police, requesting to know the efforts made by the Nigeria Police to investigate and prosecute the mob violence cases in the above-named states. The letter detailed the summary of the findings of the research and inquired on strategies deployed by the Nigeria Police to ensure police officers prevent and respond to mob violence and human rights violations.

The Inspector General of Police replied, acknowledging receipt of our letter and indicated that Amnesty International will be contacted by a designated unit. In relation to that, the Force Criminal Investigation Department (FCID) contacted Amnesty International via phone call to further clarify the content of our letter and promised to revert. Unfortunately, the response is yet to be received.

6 Earlier in 2022, SBM Intelligence reported that in a span of 3 years (2019-2022), there were at least 391 killings from 279 reported incidents: SBM Intelligence, "Chart of the week: Mob violence in Nigeria", 30 May 2022, <https://www.sbmintel.com/2022/05/chart-of-the-week-mob-violence-in-nigeria/>

7 Information obtained from Bauchi State Police Command via a letter of response signed by the Commissioner of Police received by Amnesty International dated 30th September 2024.

Locations of cases/victims in Nigeria investigated by Amnesty International



4. BACKGROUND

4.1. THE CONCEPT OF MOB VIOLENCE

Mob action is when a person disturbs the public peace by using force or violence while acting in concert with one or more other persons outside the bounds of the law (knowingly, purposefully, or carelessly). Other jurisdictions like the United States define it as when a group gathers either with the intent of committing an illegal act, or recklessly gathering a agitated group that goes on to commit a crime.⁸

In a broader sense, mob violence is when the population takes upon themselves the responsibility of inflicting a penalty on an alleged offender without first subjecting the accusation to the correct legal procedure, proving him guilty of the offence. In order words, it is a situation where the masses take it upon themselves to render “judgment” on a matter without hearing, or without giving the accused the right to a fair hearing or defence. This is punishment without trial; In Nigeria this is commonly called “jungle justice” and it often leads to killings by stoning, burning, or beating.⁹

4.1. MOB VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

In 2019, the then UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Agnes Callamard (now Secretary General of Amnesty International), visited Nigeria. At the end of the visit, she concluded:

“Nation-wide and broader regional pressures applied against Nigeria’s diverse eco-political-economic systems are producing localized systems and country-wide patterns of violence, many of which are seemingly spinning out of control. They are claiming the lives of thousands. . . . The warning signs are flashing bright red: increased numbers of attacks and killings over the last five years with a few notable exceptions; increased criminality and spreading insecurity; widespread failure by the federal authorities to investigate and hold perpetrators to account, even for mass killings; a lack of public trust and confidence in the judicial institutions and state institutions more generally.”¹⁰

UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions

Although mob violence in Nigeria has spread across the country, the trends and patterns differ by area or region (100 in the North-West, 98 in the South-West, 82 in the South-South, 43 in the South-East, 42 in North-Central and 26 in North-East)

Mob violence in Nigeria is triggered by rumours, misinformation, disinformation, misperceptions, manipulations, misrepresentations, disagreements, existing malice between persons, quarrels, false accusation, theft or robbery,

8 See, for example, https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/senecail/latest/seneca_il/0-0-0-2328

9 Walters Tohnji Tikum Samah, “Human security and the problem of jungle (mob) justice in Cameroon”, Peace and Conflict Monitor, 27 October 2006, available at <https://ideasforpeace.org/content/human-security-and-the-problem-of-jungle-mob-justice-in-cameroon/>

10 United Nations Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, “End of visit statement of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on her visit to Nigeria”, 3 September 2019, <https://www.sbmintel.com/2022/05/chart-of-the-week-mob-violence-in-nigeria/>

accusations of blasphemy, child abduction, rituals and witchcraft, mutual mistrust, religious fanaticism, lack of fact-checking, and other reasons. Mob violence against alleged blasphemers is supported by some Islamic religious clerics, who claim it has religious backing.

In responding to questions from Amnesty International regarding the reasons people resort to mob violence in Nigeria, many interviewees explained that there is a cycle of impunity whereby victims were not protected by the state, perpetrators were not held accountable, and victims did not get justice.¹¹

Mob violence can be spontaneous and triggered by a group of bystanders who witness a perceived violation of the law and then start the process of violence to remedy the perceived wrong. Some victims of violence barely escaped being lynched by an irate mob.¹² Other victims did not live to tell their stories. Typically, the acts of violence include stripping the victims naked, beating them with sticks or other common objects selected to inflict pain, until they are dead. In many cases, the victims are hogtied and stripped, beaten, wrapped in petrol-soaked tyres, and then set ablaze.¹³ The ability to move quickly is one of a mob's key traits. "Jungle justice" is always arbitrary.

In some areas, mob violence is frequently used by vigilantes or other self-appointed security groups in the name of protecting the populace.¹⁴ For example, the Oduduwa People's Congress (OPC), a purported self-determination and anti-crime militia group in the South-West of Nigeria, is renowned for resorting to mob violence,¹⁵ especially when there are claims of robbery or theft. In northern Nigeria however, mob violence is mostly triggered by accusations of blasphemy.¹⁶

Mob action is a violation of the victim's rights under international human rights law,¹⁷ as well as sections 33,¹⁸ 34,¹⁹ and 36²⁰ of the Nigerian Constitution of 1999 (as amended),²¹ which guarantees everyone the right to life, the dignity of the human person, and a fair hearing. The principal legal framework for Nigeria's international human rights obligations to respect and protect these rights is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Nigeria has ratified. By becoming a party to the ICCPR, Nigeria has committed to respect, protect, and fulfil these rights and to put in place the necessary legislative, judicial, administrative, and other measures, including making changes to existing national laws and adopting such new laws or other measures as may be necessary to fulfil these obligations and give effect to the rights recognised in that treaty. These human rights include the rights to life; freedom of opinion and expression; freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief; life and personal integrity; equality before the law; freedom from discrimination; fair trial; and the prohibition against arbitrary detention.

11 This is supported by the following commentators: "Stemming mob justice in Nigeria", This Day, 5 May 2023, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/05/05/stepping-mob-justice-in-nigeria/>; "Spread of mob justice in Nigeria", Business Day, 23 May 2022, <https://businessday.ng/opinion/article/spread-of-mob-justice-in-nigeria/>; Ernest Ojukwu, Andrew Chukwumerie, Chukwu Emeka Eze, "The rising scourge of mob action in Nigeria", This Day, 6 June 2022, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/06/06/the-rising-scurge-of-mob-action-in-nigeria/>

12 Victor Ayeni, "Mob attack survivors recount narrow escape", The Punch, 10 June 2023, <https://punchng.com/mob-attack-survivors-recount-narrow-escape/>

13 Randall Collins, *Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory*, 23 August 2009.

14 David Pratten, "Introduction: The politics of protection: Perspectives on vigilantism in Nigeria", 2008, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Volume 78, Number 1, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40027361>, pp. 1-15.

15 Human Rights Watch, *The O'odua People's Congress (OPC): Fighting Violence with Violence*, January 2003, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2003/02/28/oodua-peoples-congress-opc/fighting-violence-violence>

16 Ebenezer Obadare, "Gruesome 'blasphemy' killing brings Nigeria's long-running ethno-religious divide into sharp focus", Council of Foreign Relations, 16 May 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/gruesome-blasphemy-killing-brings-nigerias-long-running-ethno-religious-divide-sharp-focus>; Carl Umegboro, "Blasphemy and the rising jungle justice", The Guardian, 9 June 2022, <https://guardian.ng/opinion/blasphemy-and-the-rising-jungle-justice/>

17 Amnesty International, "Africa Regional Overview: 2022", *The State of the World's Human Rights: Amnesty International Report 2022/23*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/report-africa/>

18 "Every person has a right to life, and no one shall be deprived intentionally of his life, save in execution of the sentence of a court in respect of a criminal offence of which he has been found guilty in Nigeria": Constitution of Nigeria, 1999, as amended, Section 33.

19 "Every individual is entitled to the dignity of his person. No person shall be subject to torture, slavery or be required to perform forced labour": Constitution of Nigeria, 1999, as amended, Section 34.

20 "A person shall be entitled to a fair hearing within a reasonable time by a court or other tribunal established by law and constituted in such manner as to secure its independence and impartiality": Constitution of Nigeria, 1999, as amended, Section 36.

21 Constitution of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), available at <https://nigeriarights.gov.ng/files/constitution.pdf>

5. LEGAL CONTEXT

“... it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.”

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

5.1. INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

Nigeria is a signatory to several regional and international human rights treaties that prohibit the use of torture and other forms of ill-treatment. These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention against Torture (CAT), the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICED), and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

According to Article 12 of the CAT “Each State Party shall ensure that its competent authorities proceed to a prompt and impartial investigation, wherever there is reasonable ground to believe that an act of torture has been committed in any territory under its jurisdiction.”

Article 6 of the ICCPR stipulates that every human being has the inherent right to life and that this right shall be protected by law. Further, it establishes that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life. Article 4 of the ACHPR sets out that human beings are inviolable, and no one should be arbitrarily deprived of this right.

Nigeria has also signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

5.2 NIGERIAN LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Mob violence has no explicit prohibition under Nigerian law. The Constitution and the Criminal Code make provisions relating to the preservation of the sanctity of human life. Assault, torture and other forms of ill-treatment are prohibited under Section 34(1) of the Constitution of Nigeria, which provides that “every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person, and correspondingly ... no one should be subjected to torture or cruel or degrading treatment.” Also, Section 17(2)(b) of the Constitution makes it mandatory to recognise, maintain and enhance the sanctity and human dignity of every person.²² Nigeria established the National Committee Against Torture (NCAT) on 27 July 2009 as part of its responsibility to establish national preventative procedures after signing and ratifying the CAT and the Optional Protocol to the CAT (OPCAT).²³ The preamble of the Anti-Torture Act, 2017 penalises acts of torture and other ill-treatment. It prohibits the justification of torture and prescribes 25-year jail terms for persons found liable to have committed any of the acts outlined in this report.

Section 33(1)²⁴ of the Constitution guarantees everyone the right to life: It provides that every person has a right to life, and no one shall be deprived intentionally of his life except in execution of the sentence of a court in respect of a criminal offence of which he has been found guilty in Nigeria. Section 36(1) of the Constitution guarantees in all instances the right to a fair hearing, while Sections 34, 35, and 36 guarantee everyone's right to liberty, justice, and human dignity.

Section 8 of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), 2015 guarantees the right to humane treatment of arrested suspects. Section 8(1) of the ACJA provides that “a suspect shall: (a) be accorded humane treatment, having regard to his right to the dignity of his person; and (b) not be subjected to any form of torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment”, while 14(1) ACJA mandates that an arrested suspect be taken immediately

22 Kivaonyi, “Section 17 & 18 of the 1999 Constitution: State social order and government policy”, The Street Lawyer, 6 March 2021, <https://streetlawyernaija.com/section-17-18-social-order-government-policy/>

23 Amnesty International, Nigeria: Time to End Impunity: Torture and other violations by Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) (Index: AFR 44/9505/2020), June 2020, available at <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1290111/download>

24 Nigerian Constitution, Chapter 4, Section 33: Right to Life, available at <https://nigeriarights.gov.ng/files/constitution.pdf>

to the police station.

The Criminal Code Act deals with rioting and unlawful assembly, but makes no specific provision for mob killings. Section 69 of the Criminal Code defines a riot as being when an unlawful assembly turns tumultuous and disturbs the peace. It makes no provision for instances where the unlawful assembly turns violent against people. Specifically, Section 76 of the Criminal Code provides that “any persons who, being riotously assembled, unlawfully pull down or destroy, or begin to pull down or destroy any building, railway, machinery or structures are guilty of a felony and each of them is liable to imprisonment for life”, while Section 71 stipulates that any person who takes part in a riot is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for three years. Additionally, Sections 252 and 253 of the Criminal Code prohibit physical assault.

Several other Nigerian laws that appear to prohibit mob violence, albeit without explicitly mentioning it, include Section 315 of the Criminal Code Act,²⁵ which provides that “any person who unlawfully kills another is guilty of an offence called murder or manslaughter, according to the circumstances of the case”. Section 220 of the Penal Code also provides that “whoever causes death by doing an act to cause death or such bodily injury as is likely to cause death, commits the offence of culpable homicide”. Additionally, Section 2(1) of the Violence Against Persons Act outlaws wilfully causing or inflicting physical injury on another person using any weapon, substance, or object.

These gaps in the legal framework for mob violence have led to calls for specific amendments to sections 69, 71, and 76 of the Criminal Code Act to provide for and prohibit mob violence and prescribe punishment for the crime. In this regard, attempts have been made by the Nigerian legislature to amend the extant laws to explicitly prohibit mob violence.

In September 2017, the Nigerian Senate passed the Prohibition and Protection of Persons from Lynching, Mob Action and Extra Judicial Execution Bill, 2017.²⁶ The bill sought to achieve the following: (i) discourage the use of “jungle justice” or extrajudicial process to handle criminal matters and to ensure suspected perpetrators of such crimes are punished; (ii) criminalise any act that would deprive any individual of their right to life through crowd lynching, mob actions or riotous assemblage; and (iii) criminalise any act of law enforcement agent(s) who fail to prevent or protect citizens and non-citizens from crowd lynching, mob actions or extrajudicial killing. Regrettably, that bill was not signed into law and has since been abandoned. In 2021, a bill entitled, “An Act to amend the Criminal Code Act, CAP 38, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004 to further preserve the sanctity of human life and property, and to provide specifically for mob action, prescribe punishment and other matters” was introduced in the House of Representatives, but was later withdrawn.²⁷

25 Criminal Code Act in Nigeria, Section 315: Unlawful homicide, available at https://jurist.ng/criminal_code_act/sec-315

26 Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, “Senate passes The Prohibition and Protection of Persons from Lynching, Mob Action and Extra Judicial Execution Bill, 2017”, 28 September 2017, <https://placng.org/i/senate-passes-the-prohibition-and-protection-of-persons-from-lynching-mob-action-and-extra-judicial-execution-bill-2017/>

27 Ikechukwu Amaechi, “Anti-mob legislation: My Bill has nothing to do with jailing protesters — Rep Chinedu”, 12 July 2021, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/07/anti-mob-legislation-my-bill-has-nothing-to-do-with-jailing-protesters-rep-chinedu/>

6. MOB VIOLENCE CASE STUDIES IN NIGERIA

In this briefing, Amnesty International presents a sample of mob violence incidents, chosen from the incidents most widely reported by the media in Nigeria. The choice of the cases was intended to illustrate the trends and patterns of the mob violence cases in the northern and southern regions of Nigeria. The cases presented reflect the results of Amnesty International's fieldwork and desk research. The narratives of the incidents were compiled based on interview responses from the victims' relatives, eyewitnesses, professionals, and renowned public commentators. The cases describe incidents of mob violence responding to alleged offences such as petty theft, armed robbery, rape, murder, witchcraft, and blasphemy. These cases also reveal a pattern of discrimination against women and children.

6.1 SUMMARY OF CASES INVESTIGATED BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

NAME	IDENTITY	ACCUSATION/ ALLEGATION	DATE	STATE/REGION	VIOLATION	CASE PROSECUTION STATUS PROSECUTION STATUS ²⁸
Chiadika Biringa, Ugonna Obuzor, Lloyd Toku, and Tekena Elkanah ("Aluu Four")	Boys	Theft	5 October 2012	Rivers/ South-South	Tortured to death	Judgment passed ²⁹
Tawa	Woman	Kidnapping	12 February 2019	Oyo/South-West	Tortured	Handed over to the police
Anthony Okpafefufe and two boys	Boys	Theft	19 November 2021	Cross Rivers/ South-South	Tortured to death	Pending in court
Talle Mai Ruwa	Man	Blasphemy	30 March 2021	Bauchi/ North-East	Tortured to death	Under investigation ³⁰
David Imoh	Man	Rituals for personal gain	12 May 2022	Lagos/South-West	Tortured to death	No evidence of arrests made, no justice
Rhoda Jatau	Woman	Blasphemy	20 May 2022	Bauchi/ North-East	Escaped being lynched to death	Released ³¹
Deborah Samuel Yakubu	Woman	Blasphemy	12 May 2022	Sokoto/North-West	Tortured to death	Pending in court

²⁸ Information was not available on the case prosecution status as at the time of publication of this research briefing.

²⁹ Jimitota Onoyume, "Aluu Four: Justice at last", 3 August 2017, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/08/aluu-four-justice-last/>

³⁰ Response from Bauchi State Police Command to Amnesty International in its letter of right of reply dated 30th September 2024.

³¹ Rhoda Jatau was eventually released in December 2023: Nathaniel Shaibu, "Jatau regains freedom after 18 months in detention", Punch, 9 December 2023, <https://punchng.com/breaking-jatau-regains-freedom-after-18-months-in-detention/>

NAME	IDENTITY	ACCUSATION/ ALLEGATION	DATE	STATE/REGION	VIOLATION	CASE PROSECUTION STATUS PROSECUTION STATUS
Ahmad Usman	Man	Blasphemy	4 June 2022	Abuja/ North-Central	Tortured to death	Pending in court
Matina Okey Itagbhor	Woman	Witchcraft	18th June 2023	Cross River/ South-South	Tortured to death	N/A ³²
Usman Buda	Man	Blasphemy	25 June 2023	Sokoto/ North-West	Tortured to death	N/A ³³

TALLE MAI RUWA, ALLEGATION OF BLASPHEMY, SADE, BAUCHI STATE



Talle Mai Ruwa was burnt to death by the mob after being dragged out of the Sade police outpost and brought to the middle of a nearby field. The mob contributed money to buy fuel to set the victim ablaze while chanting “Allahu Akbar”, meaning Allah is great.³⁴

On 30 March 2021, 47-year-old Talle Mai Ruwa of the Sade community in the Darazo Local Government Area of Bauchi State was tortured and burnt to death by a mob. Talle was widely known in the community to have mental health challenges. He was tortured and executed in public. He was said to have blasphemed the Prophet Mohammad.

The incident started when some girls came to fetch water from his bore hole without his consent. He got angry and kicked their buckets away. The girls went back home and told their parents that when they pleaded with Talle to allow them to fetch the water for the sake of Allah and his prophet, he allegedly said “...even the Prophet cannot make him allow them to fetch the water”.

An eyewitness told Amnesty International that Talle Mai Ruwa was later invited by some elders and advised to withdraw his alleged blasphemous reply to the girls. Talle insisted that he didn’t commit any blasphemy because that wasn’t what he said. The elders insisted, but Talle stood his ground.

After about an hour Talle was amazed – according to an eyewitness – when he saw a crowd of people coming towards him chanting “*Allahu Akbar*” [Allah is great]. Talle ran to the police station, chased by the mob who carried sticks and stones. It was a small police outpost that had only three policemen in it. The police were immediately overpowered by the mob and so they failed to protect him from the overwhelming crowd. Even though it was common knowledge in the community that Talle was a person with a mental health illness, he was dragged out of the police room, tortured, and burnt alive by the mob, who then celebrated. As at the time of writing this report, Bauchi State Police Command via a letter from the Commissioner of Police informed

³² Information was not available on the case prosecution status as at the time of publication of this research briefing.

³³ Information was not available on the case prosecution status as at the time of publication of this research briefing.

³⁴ Images sourced from: Vincent Ufuoma, “Man burnt to death in Bauchi for allegedly insult on Prophet Muhammad”, International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 1 April 2021, <https://www.icirnigeria.org/man-burnt-to-death-in-bauchi-for-alleged-insult-on-prophet-muhammad/>

Amnesty International that the “outpost personnel made efforts to prevent the incident, but were hindered by the overwhelming number of angry residents.” The Commissioner of Police noted that, Misau Area Commander and the Divisional Police Officer of Darazo whose jurisdiction cover that area where the violence occurred, went to the scene, but arrived after the violence had occurred due to the distance from the scene to their locations.

AHMAD USMAN, ALLEGATION OF BLASPHEMY, TIPPER GARAGE, LUGBE, ABUJA



The body of Usman on fire after the mob had besieged the vigilante office in the tipper garage, Lugbe District, Abuja. The mob accused Usman of blaspheming the Prophet. The mob besieged the vigilante office and threw stones and other harmful objects. The mob overwhelmed the vigilante group members who tried to protect Usman, seized him, and set him ablaze using tyres and other flammable substances.³⁵

On Friday, 4 June 2022, a blasphemy allegation was made against Ahmad Usman (who was also known as Musa). He was lynched by a mob at the tipper garage in Lugbe District, Abuja.

Eyewitness accounts said Usman, a member of a vigilante group, was on security patrol duty at the tipper garage market that Friday night and attempted to arrest some followers of an Islamic cleric, in particular a man named Malam Lawan, for wandering after midnight. There was a standing rule at the market settlement that no one should operate there beyond midnight, and it was this rule Usman was trying to enforce when he got into a heated argument with another man. It was during that argument he was alleged to have made what was said to be a blasphemous comment. The matter was laid to rest that night, thanks to the intervention of other vigilante group members, but the man he argued with returned early the next day with a mob to attack Usman over the alleged blasphemy.

With the mob gathering in their hundreds, surrounding the vigilante office, the vigilante commander of the tipper garage sought the help of the police. On arrival, the police were overpowered by the mob. The police tried to manage the situation and convince the crowd against taking any violent action, but because they did not have enough personnel nor the equipment to push back the crowd, the police retreated and watched while Ahmad Usman was tortured and set ablaze.

When Amnesty International tried to speak with the leader and three other members of the vigilante group who were said to have been overpowered by the mob, they declined, claiming that they were not permitted to speak on the matter.

35 Images sourced from: “Blasphemy killings”, The Nation, 13 June 2022, <https://thenationonline.ng.net/blasphemy-killings/>

RHODA JATAU, ALLEGATION OF BLASPHEMY, WARJI LOCAL BAUCHI STATE



Scene showing a mob attacking the house of a pastor accused by the mob of speaking in support of Rhoda Jatau, who was accused of making a blasphemous statement against the Prophet in a WhatsApp group for her workplace. The pastor narrowly escaped as the mob injured him and burnt his house.³⁶

On Friday, 20 May 2022, a Christian woman narrowly escaped being killed in Katanga, headquarters of Warji Local Government Area of Bauchi State.

The woman, Rhoda Jatau, a 40-year-old mother of four and a health worker with the Warji Local Government Area, was accused of posting a video on her office's WhatsApp group, which was considered disrespectful to Islam, sparking the fury of the Muslim community.

During the mob rampage, a pastor was injured, some people were macheted, and many houses were burnt.

The interviewees explained that they have little or no faith in the justice system, because they believe that people accused of blasphemy usually escape punishment.

Even though no life was lost in this case, it illustrates the attitude many have towards mob violence, especially those with no faith in the justice system and, in this case, social media as a catalyst for the violation of human rights.

DAVID IMOH, ALLEGATION OF RITUALS, LEKKI AREA, LAGOS STATE



Images of David Imoh in Lekki Area of Lagos state. Surrounded by the mob, David was tortured as he pleaded innocence and was eventually set ablaze.³⁷

³⁶ Images sourced from: Godsgift Oyedinefu, "Tension in Bauchi as lady escapes lynching over alleged blasphemy" Business Day, 21 May 2022, <https://businessday.ng/news/article/tension-in-bauchi-as-lady-escapes-lynching-over-alleged-blasphemy/>

³⁷ Images sourced from: Linda Ikeji, "Family release funeral arrangements for sound engineer lynched and burnt in Lekki", Linda Ikeji's Blog, 27 May 2022, <https://www.lindaikejisblog.com/2022/5/family-release-funeral-arrangements-for-sound-engineer-lynched-and-burnt-in-lekki-2.html>



On 12 May 2022, a young sound engineer, David Imoh, was killed by a group of motorcyclists in Lekki, Lagos State.

David Imoh's crime was to attempt to settle a dispute between two of his co-workers – Frank Olatunji and Philip Balogun – and a group of commercial motorcycle taxi riders, called Okada, over a one hundred naira fare. As he was trying to mediate between the disputants, a group of motorcyclists suddenly assembled.

David Imoh became the victim of a lynch mob, comprising commercial motorcyclists and passers-by who gathered in solidarity with the motorcyclists. He was attacked, and they set his body ablaze in the middle of the street. David Imoh's two friends managed to escape with life-threatening injuries, and they subsequently ended up in a hospital, fighting for their lives.

MARTINA OKEY ITAGBOR, ALLEGATION OF WITCHCRAFT, AKAMKPA LGA, CROSS RIVER STATE



A widow accused of being a witch was lynched in the Ebbaken community in the Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross Rivers State. The victim was identified as Mrs. Martina Okey. She was tortured and burnt to death by youths.³⁸

On 18 June 2023, Martina Okey Itagbor was accused of causing the death of two young men who died in a motor accident. Martina Okey Itagbor was accused of witchcraft which was said to be the cause of the accident involving the two people who had lost their lives.

The mob gathered around Mrs Okey and interrogated her. She begged the mob to spare her life because she didn't know anything about the allegations against her. The mob began to collect stones and other harmful objects and Mrs Okey was tortured and burnt alive.

There was no further information available about the origin and full profile of Mrs Okey. Amnesty International could not obtain further information from the police about the legal case of Mrs Martina Okey Itagbor.

38 Images sourced from: Vivian Okpirikhre, "Mother of four accused of witchcraft and burnt to death by youths in Cross River community (Graphic)", Yabaleft Online, 30 June 2023, <https://www.yabaleftonline.ng/mother-four-accused-witchcraft-burnt-d%7%9dath-youths-cross-river-community-graphic/>

CHIADIKA BIRINGA, UGONNA OBUZOR, LLOYD TOKU AND TEKENA ELKANAH (THE “ALUU FOUR”), ALLEGATION OF THEFT, ALUU COMMUNITY OF RIVERS STATE



Four university students were stripped and paraded across the streets by a mob in Aluu Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The “Aluu Four” were tortured. They kept pleading for their lives, but the mob was relentless; they were weighed down with tyres and set ablaze. None of them survived.³⁹

On Friday, 5 October 2012, four young men who were students at the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, in southern Nigeria, went to the nearby village of Aluu to collect a debt from a man named Coxson Lucky. At Aluu, they allegedly tried to manhandle Lucky (how aggressively, no one knows); it seems they also seized some items belonging to him instead of the debt he owed. Lucky raised the alarm, a crowd gathered, and the students found themselves accused of stealing laptops and phones.

The four were immediately set upon by the mob, stripped, paraded through town, and beaten with sticks. They began to plead for their lives and, even as they did so, were weighed down with tyres and set ablaze.

All four of them – Chiadika Biringa, Ugonna Obuzor, Lloyd Toku, and Tekena Elkanah –died there.

TAWA, ALLEGATION OF KIDNAP, IBADAN, OYO STATE



Tawa, suspected of allegedly kidnapping three children in Ibadan, Oyo State, was suddenly surrounded by an angry mob. When she tried to escape, she was stripped naked and beaten before she was handed over to the police.⁴⁰

³⁹ Image sourced from: Facebook Post, “Today in history: Aluu Four lynching happened”, Naira Diary, 5 October 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/nairadiary/photos/a.835668056470677/4326486730722108/?type=3>

⁴⁰ Image sourced from: Adewale, “Female kidnapper stripped unclad in Ibadan after hypnotising children, see pix”, Abuja Reporters, <https://abujareporters.com.ng/female-kidnapper-stripped-unclad-in-ibadan-after-hypnotising-children-see-pix/>

On 12 February 2019, a woman suspected of abduction was apprehended and beaten after she was caught allegedly trying to abduct three children in Ibadan, Oyo state.

It was alleged that the suspect, identified only as “Tawa”, met the children on the street in the Mokola area of Ibadan, Oyo state. Tawa was accused of touching the three children with a charm, hypnotising them, as a prelude to kidnapping them, according to people who had been in the crowd. She was allegedly about to take them out of the vicinity when a trader approached her and asked her what she was doing with the children. She couldn’t give an answer that satisfied the mob, media reports said.

Without any further interrogation, the trader immediately alerted the public. Neighbours and residents, including the children’s parents, descended on the suspect. She was stripped naked and beaten before she was handed over to the police. She was not killed because some people advised that she be handed over to the police.

Her version of events has not been heard.

ANTHONY OKPAHEFUFU AND TWO OTHER BOYS, KILLED AFTER ALLEGATIONS OF THEFT, CROSS RIVER STATE



Two boys were beaten and stripped naked by the mob. They were forced to give the address of their friend, Anthony. When Anthony was later captured and brought to the scene, the three boys were tied together, paraded in the marketplace, and lynched by the mob.⁴¹

On 19 November 2021, 16-year-old Anthony Okpahefufe, was lynched alongside two other as yet unidentified boys, after allegations of theft were made in Okoja, Cross River State.

The two boys were apprehended when a store owner reported that his money had been stolen, and he suspected the two boys. They were subjected to severe beatings and while they were tortured, they were forced to name their close friends as accomplices.

Their friend, Anthony Okpahefufe, was at home with his grandmother when a group of vigilantes arrived, led by the owner of the store from where the money was allegedly stolen.

The vigilantes immediately seized Anthony, who ran to his grandmother for help when he understood he was wanted by the aggressive vigilantes. As he was dragged out of his grandmother’s house into the market where the two other boys were detained, Anthony kept asking what he had done.

He was silenced by the vigilante with slaps and warned not to say anything in his defence.

He was tortured and killed, along with the two boys.

41 Images sourced from: Tessy Igomu, “Cross River jungle justice: Mum of 16-year-old burnt by irate youths over alleged theft cries for justice”, Punch, 26th December 2021, <https://punchng.com/cross-river-jungle-justice-mum-of-16-year-old-burnt-by-irate-youths-over-alleged-theft-cries-for-justice/>

DEBORAH SAMUEL YAKUBU, BLASPHEMY ALLEGATION, SOKOTO STATE



*First picture: Deborah before she was lynched by the mob.
Second picture: One of Deborah's killers bragging about what he did, holding up a packet of matches .
Third picture: The security outpost building of Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto where Deborah was set ablaze.
Fourth picture: Ashes of Deborah's body in front of the security office of the Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto.⁴²*

Deborah Samuel Yakubu, a student of Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto, was killed on 12 May 2022. The horrifying video showing the stoning and burning to death of Deborah Samuel was circulated widely on social media in Nigeria.

Deborah Samuel Yakubu was killed by her classmates for alleged blasphemy. The incident took place in Sokoto, in Nigeria's North-West. Deborah was accused by the angry mob (comprising mostly of students from the school) of posting an audio message on a WhatsApp group that her fellow students deemed intentionally disparaging of religious sensitivities. The students were reportedly upset when her voice memo went viral.

The mob forced their way to the student hostel where Deborah lived. It was said that security personnel at the school tried to rescue Deborah but were overpowered by the mob who were chanting "Allahu Akbar" [Allah is great].

The police were reported to have arrived at the scene after Deborah was already dead. They arrested only two people, and the quest for justice by her parents remains ongoing. The last that was heard of the court case, as one lawyer who was interviewed by Amnesty International said "the police, who are in charge of prosecuting the accused murderers, have been AWOL since the arraignment, which led to the suspects' release."⁴³

42 Images sourced from: Shojobi Abisola, "Alleged blasphemy: Youths plan protest in Sokoto, demand release of suspected killers of Deborah Samuel", Independent, 14 May 2022, <https://independent.ng/alleged-blasphemy-youths-plan-protest-in-sokoto-demand-release-of-suspected-killers-of-deborah-samuel/>

43 This information was revealed by a lawyer who was interviewed by a private human rights researcher on the fate of Deborah Samuel Yakubu's case and shared with Amnesty International by the private researcher (who requested anonymity) in a private conversation: Interview held on 16 April 2023 via phone call with a policeman in Sokoto.

Some human rights lawyers who are providing pro bono services for Deborah’s case said that they received threats to their lives and those of their families, by persons whose identities could not be ascertained.⁴⁴ They expressed their fears over the death threats sent to them via social media, and explained that mobs can pack courtrooms during hearings, creating an intimidating atmosphere for them and the victims’ relatives. According to the UN Human Rights Committee, “A hearing is not fair if the defendant in criminal proceedings is faced with the expression of a hostile attitude or support for one party in the courtroom that is tolerated by the court, thereby impinging on the right to defence”.⁴⁵

USMAN BUDA, ALLEGATION OF BLASPHEMY, SOKOTO STATE



In the first picture, Usman Buda was weak from severe beating and stoning by a mob after being accused of blasphemy. The second picture shows Usman later being lynched by the crowd as they chanted “Allahu Akbar” while Usman was stoned to death.⁴⁶

On 25 June 2023, Usman Buda and his business partners were approached by a vagrant who begged for alms in the name of God and the Prophet. Usman quickly interjected and cautioned the beggar that one can only beg in the name of God, not in the name of the Prophet. A big argument then started. People said Usman had blasphemed against the Prophet by saying that the Prophet could not be relied on to get alms. They went on to inform others that Usman Buda had made a derogatory statement against the Prophet, and it was this accusation that spread through in the crowd, rather than the more nuanced religious discussion. “Many Muslims hold the

⁴⁴ Amnesty International, interviews in person with a private human rights researcher on the fate of Deborah Samuel Yakubu’s case, via phone, 2 March 2022.

⁴⁵ Human Rights Committee, General Comment 32, para. 25

⁴⁶ Images sourced from: Abiodun Sanusi, “Police probe Sokoto butcher’s killing over blasphemy”, Punch, 26 June 2023, <https://punchng.com/police-probe-sokoto-butchers-killing-over-blasphemy/>; “Christian Association, CAN condemns killing of butcher in Sokoto State for blaspheming Prophet Muhammad”, Sahara Reporters, 29 June 2023, <https://saharareporters.com/2023/06/29/christian-association-can-condemns-killing-butcher-sokoto-state-blaspheming-prophet>

same position as Usman and some Islamic clerics even preach against equating the Prophet with Allah”, an Islamic scholar in Kano told Amnesty International.

The mob chased Usman, who hid in one of the market stalls. Three policemen came to where Usman was hiding but they could not protect him from the accumulating mob who fetched him out and began to stone him until he became lifeless.

One of Usman's friends was reported as saying: “There is no way he could make such a statement against the Holy Prophet. ... There must be another reason behind his murder. Because he is very popular in his business of selling cow entrails and was envied by many of his colleagues.”⁴⁷

Usman was later confirmed dead at the hospital.

47 Abdulkadir Salaudeen, “Sokoto blasphemous thugs must be brought to justice”, Opinion Nigeria, 30 June 2023, <https://www.opinionnigeria.com/sokoto-blasphemous-thugs-must-be-brought-to-justice-by-abdulkadir-salaudeen/>

7. MOB VIOLENCE TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN NIGERIA

7.1 THE NATURE OF MOB VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

The mob in Nigeria is commonly understood to be a collection of people that quickly gather to extrajudicially punish a person suspected of a crime. Mob types differ based on the issue type or place. Some mobs gather in crowded places like markets, motor parks, and busy roads. This category often accuses victims of shoplifting, pickpocketing, or the “theft” of male genital parts using magic. This is a phenomenon peculiar to West Africa where feelings of inadequacy or humiliation are physically manifested in the absolute conviction that someone has stolen the victim’s penis.

The other category of group is the community mob. This category includes gatherings which occur in a communal setting, with a mob of people related to or familiar with each other. They normally have a common identity or religion, culture, or tribe that binds them together and makes it easier to segregate strangers. With the development of information and communications technology, members of these mobs have each other’s contacts and share social media spaces. In witchcraft cases, for example, an incident of alleged witchcraft sparks mob violence, but the mob can take time to gather, as the story takes time to spread.

In the case of blasphemy however, rumours and whispers ignite the crowd’s anger quickly. The victims usually try to seek refuge, or in some instances they are taken to the police for safety. The mob often overpowers the police, however.

“Mob justice thrives in Nigeria because governance is weak, corruption is prevalent, the criminal justice system is compromised, and people overtime have resorted to taking the law into their hands as an alternative to the rule of law.”⁴⁸

The Punch Editorial Board

In the case of killings connected to accusations of theft, they usually start with a shout of “thief! thief!” Usually, the accused will be immediately grabbed by someone standing close to them, or people will run after them and catch them.

In the case of blasphemy or witchcraft, the accused are usually unsuspecting of the escalation of the allegation, and so they hardly ever have an opportunity to run away. The accused are also often surrounded by the growing crowd in such a way that there is no space for escape.

In a few cases, the mob start by making allegations without room for the accused to respond. Generally, the mob does not investigate, and they do not listen to the accused. Once the accused is caught and surrounded, some among them stay to keep the circle closed, while others scavenge for stones, sticks, tyres, kerosene or petrol, and matches. The accused is then tortured by beating until they are weak, so they cannot stand on their feet, or move to avoid being set ablaze. The mob stands and watches as the victim is immolated. In the case of blasphemy, the mob chants “Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar”, an Arabic phrase meaning “Allah is great, Allah is great!”.

48 Punch Editorial Board, “Nigeria should stop tolerating mob justice”, Punch, 16 April 2023, <https://punchng.com/nigeria-should-stop-tolerating-mob-justice/>

Mob violence in Nigeria has evolved with impunity because of the failure of the state authorities to protect victims and uphold the rule of law. There has also been a failure of the Nigerian authorities to prosecute offenders and protect fragile and vulnerable persons, such as persons with mental health challenges and children. In addition to ignorance and illiteracy, the mob's mistrust, and loss of confidence in the Nigerian state regarding law enforcement, justice, and economic matters, emboldens perpetrators of mob violence in Nigeria.⁴⁹

7.2 THE MOTIVES BEHIND THE USE OF MOB VIOLENCE

Prosecutors, defence lawyers and human rights activists interviewed for this report expressed concerns over the use of mob action by individuals, apparently for ulterior motives, under the guise of protecting property, value, or religious sentiments. Such motives vary but can include gender discrimination, denial of freedom of speech and expression, and hostility towards religious minorities.

In the case of mob violence as a response to allegations of blasphemy, large groups of people or religious congregations are known to have been incited by religious sermons in mosques or religious preaching that go viral on social media.

Cases such as that of Deborah Samuel Yakubu⁵⁰ and Rodha Jatau illustrate the range of circumstances that can lead to an accusation of blasphemy. In Deborah Samuel Yakubu's case, she had allegedly uttered derogatory remarks against the Prophet Mohammad. Since she was a non-Muslim, it was concluded that she had malignant intent and must be punished without hesitation; she was not given a chance to argue or explain her motive. The mob does not provide their suspect with a meaningful opportunity to defend themselves from the accusation, either to deny it altogether or to explain what happened.

“...[M]ost of the tortures or killings by mobs in the name of tackling crimes have hidden motives behind them: hatred, envy, and other forms of identity discrimination, especially of gender and indigeneity, etc.”⁵¹

Mob violence witness, interview with Amnesty International

7.3 THE SOCIAL LICENSE TO KILL FOR BLASPHEMY IN NIGERIA

Most cases of mob violence based on blasphemy are often fuelled by religious clerics who wield significant power because of their perceived authority. The debate about whether the mob should hand over someone suspected of blasphemy, or take the law into their own hands, resurfaced after the lynching of Deborah Samuel Yakubu.⁵² Blasphemy laws have long been controversial in the country. Nigerian law is not based on any one religion, however 12 states in the north with mostly Muslim populations, have Islamic courts that view blasphemy as a crime that is subject to the death penalty.

Support and encouragement by religious leaders create an environment in which the mob and their supporters believe themselves entitled to take the law into their own hands, while the police stand aside. Such endorsements by religious leaders have been used as a cover for perpetrators of mob violence. Usually, the mob is from the same religious faith as the religious leaders. Blasphemy is often weaponized: A small disagreement may arise between people, whereby one accuses the other and says, “he insulted the Prophet”, and then the mob lynches the accused without recourse to investigation or trial, thus depriving the accused of the opportunity of a fair hearing.

49 Punch Editorial Board, “Nigeria should stop tolerating mob justice” (previously cited).

50 Cited in detail in page 23 of this report

51 Amnesty International, interview in person with a mob justice witness, Lagos, 21 March 2023.

52 Cited in detail in page 23 of this report

The case of Deborah Samuel Yakubu arose due to discontent over a religious post by a non-Muslim student on a group messaging app, which was perceived by her Muslim colleagues as blasphemy against Islam. Immediately after the news of Deborah's killing emerged, some Islamic scholars read out a verse of the Qur'an in support, prescribing death for anyone who blasphemes against Islam or the Holy Prophet, according to a media editorial.⁵³

After Deborah was attacked, a renowned Islamic scholar backed the mob's actions, claiming that a red line had been crossed. Furthermore, a group of dozens of lawyers went to the court in solidarity with the alleged killers.⁵⁴

“It appears that most religious leaders have constituted themselves into authorities who issue death sentences at the slightest alleged provocation of blasphemy. They are the police; they are the jury.”⁵⁵

Human rights lawyer, interview with Amnesty International

Following the recent case of Usman Buda in Sokoto, different analysts and public affairs commentators have made attempts to compare the position of religious clerics in Deborah Samuel Yakubu's and Usman Buda's blasphemy cases. While Deborah Samuel Yakubu's killing has received approval and encouragement from religious clerics, Usman Buda's was greeted with condemnation.⁵⁶

7.4 NIGERIA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC REALITIES FUEL MOB VIOLENCE

Illiteracy and ignorance are some of the impediments to the full implementation of the rule of law in Nigeria. The lack of protection of the socio-economic and political rights of the people in Nigeria by the Nigerian government has led to mob violence becoming commonplace. Largely because of their deprived socio-economic status, marginalised in relation to governance, people are acutely aware of how vulnerable they are to mob violence. Getting justice from the courts of law appears impossible. As a result, there is a growing malaise of social angst, frustration, and discontent with society and social systems in the country. People are losing faith in society and are easily provoked and resort to self-help, even in criminal and social justice issues. There is a connection between precarious livelihoods, unemployment and a high level of frustration manifesting in the populace at large.

“Nigeria is sitting on a time bomb. Regrettably, those in government at the Federal, State, or Local Governments, do not seem to fully realise this point or are not prepared to do anything serious about it. It is a situation where unemployment amongst the youth is so high and has the natural tendency to give way to crimes and mob actions at the slightest trigger.”⁵⁷

53 The Guardian: Blasphemy and the Rising Jungle Justice. Carl Umegboro, June 9 2022. Accessed via: <https://guardian.ng/opinion/blasphemy-and-the-rising-jungle-justice/>

54 Deborah: 34 lawyers in court to defend 2 suspects: Vanguard Newspaper, May 17, 2022. Accessed via:

55 Amnesty International, interview in-person with Lagos based lawyer, Lagos, 22 February 2022.

56 See page 25 of this report for details of Usman Buda's case

57 Punch Editorial Board, “Nigeria should stop tolerating mob justice”, Punch, 16 April 2023, <https://punchng.com/nigeria-should-stop-tolerating-mob-justice/>

The Punch Editorial Board

The rate of unemployment in Nigeria is very high.⁵⁸ Hard times have also led to many dropping out of school, especially in the northern part of Nigeria. Many students who drop out end up on the streets where they are considered a social nuisance.

Corruption, embezzlement, and frequent perceived injustices, have entrenched social inequalities and result in limited choices for survival. This pushes young Nigerians toward a vicious circle of crime and gangsterism. A lack of education feeds unemployment and keeps the crime rate in Nigeria high.

People in Nigeria have become filled with frustration, anger, and aggression, which has fuelled intolerance. This tendency is compounded by the fact that the Nigerian state does not comply with its obligations to provide welfare and security to the people. The Nigerian state is responsible for triggering mob violence because they fail to provide an enabling environment for people to make a living. They also encourage it with their failure to protect victims.

7.5 MOB VIOLENCE AGAINST PEOPLE WITH PSYCHO-SOCIAL DISABILITIES

Those with mental health illnesses and psycho-social disabilities are especially vulnerable to violations arising from mob violence or potential abuses by third parties. Many times, persons with physical and behavioural signs of disabilities, particularly those with mental health conditions such as dementia, have continued to be soft targets and victims of mob violence due to accusations of being wizards, practising witchcraft, or even being abductors. They become the targets of mob violence because people want to get rid of them as they are considered a nuisance to their communities, or because they are perceived by the mob as less-privileged persons who can be easily eliminated and who don't have relatives who may seek justice on their behalf.

Information gathered for this briefing has shown that in Nigeria, individuals with mental health illnesses and psycho-social disabilities are at particular risk of being accused of blasphemy.

One such example is the case of Talle, a man with mental health challenges who was tortured and burnt to death by a mob.⁵⁹ A pro-bono lawyer interested in mob violence victims with physical and behavioural signs of mental health illness talked about similar instances and the reasons for them, in cases where there was evidence of the accused suffering from a mental health illness or psycho-social disability.⁶⁰

A further challenge regarding those with mental health illnesses or psycho-social disabilities is that most of them were not able to speak when they were attacked by the mob. Their silence or inability to articulate for self-defence was mostly abused by the mob and used as an admission to the alleged crime, or deliberately interpreted by the mob as arrogance.

Mental health illness is weaponized by the mob to discriminate against the victims.

7.6 THE FAILINGS OF THE NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR

Research and investigations by Amnesty International found that among the major challenges facing the Nigerian police are a shortage or outright lack of inbuilt mechanisms for safeguarding suspects from potential abuses. Law enforcement agents often abandon their primary duty of protecting lives and property by neglecting known crowded places, where mob violence gets easily sparked and swiftly carried out. Police personnel are not always close and when an attempt is made to contact them, they do not normally respond swiftly; when they come, they normally are not able to rescue, they may at best be useful in dispersing crowds after the damage is done, sometimes arresting innocent people for extortion in the process.

58 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/382366/unemployment-rate-in-nigeria/>
<https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/nigerias-dichotomy-low-unemployment-high-poverty-rates>

59 See page 15 of this report on the details of Talle Mai Ruwa's case.

60 Amnesty International, interview via phone with a private lawyer who requested anonymity, 2 March 2022.

During Amnesty International's research, some interviewees alluded to the fact that "the Nigerian state's concept of security is that of securing its territory from external aggression, and then the security of state official and VIPs (very important persons); emphasis is not given to the mass of the people."⁶¹

In most cases of mob violence documented by Amnesty International, either the police are not within the vicinity of the incident, or they are overpowered by the crowd when they arrive, or they rarely take the necessary action as required by the law when the mob violence is reported to them. Sometimes, perpetrators of mob violence are arrested by the police, only to be extorted for their release -not prosecuted. In this way, the police protect perpetrators against prosecution for mob violence charges.

Recourse to mob violence stands as a response to a lack of equity, fairness, and justice for all. Many people, including those interviewed by Amnesty International, say that a perception of the failure of the state to process accused criminals properly contributes to mob violence in Nigeria. A common perception is when criminal suspects are handed over to the police, most of them are released without investigation and are able to seek revenge against those who had given information or witness testimony against them. Repeated incidents, over time, led to the erosion of people's trust in the NPF and the judicial system, and the rise in mob killings. As at the time of writing this report, which is over three years after the mob violence occurred against Talle Mai Ruwa, the police in Bauchi state is yet to conclude investigation of the case and make any arrest. This further reconfirms the unwarranted delay by the justice system.

A public commentator told Amnesty International: "the failure or inconsistency in prosecution is partly responsible for mob 'justice'. It encouraged people to take the laws into their own hands. What is even worse is the lack of timely response by the authorities to mob actions."⁶²

From the desk reviews and interviews conducted by Amnesty International with the surviving victims, their relatives, and eyewitnesses, the majority expressed their dissatisfaction and lack of confidence and trust in the justice system.

Activist Annkio Briggs, who led demonstrations in Port Harcourt to demand justice for the Aluu Four, told the BBC that she did so because "there is a lack of faith in the Nigerian justice system".⁶³ In 2020, Nigeria's anti-corruption agency, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) said the judiciary was the most corrupt arm of government in the country.

Based on past experiences, most Nigerians, particularly those residing in the city, have issues of police distrust. They accuse the police of deliberately arriving after the damage has been done and after perpetrators of criminal acts such as mob violence have dispersed. In very few cases where the perpetrators of crimes have been apprehended, the processes of investigation and trials are usually delayed in the dispensation or conclusion of criminal cases.

Corruption in the form of bribery, extortion or demands for financial gratification, falsification, and alteration of evidence, is rife in the Nigerian judiciary,⁶⁴ and this has further eroded the confidence of the public in the dispensation of justice by state security and law enforcement agencies and the justice system, hence the resort to taking the law into their own hands. The police and the justice system often exhibit a reluctance to undertake thorough investigations and diligent prosecutions of cases.

"Police procedures in mob justice cases fall short of Nigeria's obligations under international standards of fairness and other safeguards. The police officers have been accused of failing to prevent abuses of victims in this regard. Provisions of Articles 9 and 14 of the

61 Amnesty International's interview with a security expert who pleaded anonymity, on February 22 2022, via phone

62 Amnesty International's interview with a public commentator in Abuja, on 12 March 2022

63 Nduka Orjinmo, BBC News, Port Harcourt Aluu 4: Ten years from the lynching that shocked Nigeria: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-63065229>

64 Business Day Newspaper: Official corruption in Nigeria's judiciary, Binzak Azeez July 7, 2023. Accessed via <https://businessday.ng/opinion/article/official-corruption-in-nigerias-judiciary/>

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights are often ignored by the Nigerian police in handling mob justice cases, thereby negating their obligations to ensure the protection of victims.”⁶⁵

Human rights lawyer, interview with Amnesty International

Another factor is the perception that low standards of evidence are required for the conviction of the accused, and allegations are often uncritically accepted by the police, prosecuting authorities, and even judges – who may themselves face threats and intimidation.

The police register the complaint, arrest the accused, and are also responsible for the security of the accused whilst in police custody. The police play a significant role in how mob violence cases are handled; their investigation forms the basis of a trial. The inefficiency and incompetency of the investigating officer in handling a case has serious consequences for the dispensation of justice.

Ordinarily, once the police have completed their investigation of any crime, they inform the prosecutor of the results. If the police find sufficient evidence to prosecute the accused, then they submit a First Information Report (FIR) identifying individuals whom they recommend should stand trial. This is supposed to document the evidence collected by the police and the reasons for their decision, or if the police find there is insufficient evidence for the individual/s to be prosecuted, they submit a report to the prosecutor with a recommendation that the court should cancel the FIR.

Two public prosecutors interviewed by Amnesty International expressed their disappointment over some unprofessional conduct of the police⁶⁶ in mob violence cases. They claimed the police often forward cases to the prosecutor based on unsubstantiated evidence. This can lead to the suspects release, which angers the community where the offence took place.

The apparent inability of the police to tackle crime in crowded public places also contribute to the rise in cases of mob violence.⁶⁷

According to the police and public prosecutors, one of the major difficulties for lawyers representing someone accused of blasphemy is to secure defence witnesses willing to give evidence. Talking to Amnesty International about his client facing blasphemy charges, one lawyer stated that a key witness had refused to give evidence due to security concerns. The lawyer said: “Defence witnesses who know the truth are often too scared to come forward”.⁶⁸

The authorities are unresponsive to requests for further information regarding specific cases or about their reactions to mob violence in general. The refusal of the police and the relevant wider state officers to respond to the queries posed by Amnesty International researchers is itself a failure on the part of the Nigerian authorities.

7.7 DELAY OR DENIAL OF JUSTICE AS A CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE OF MOB VIOLENCE

It is not clear how many of the total documented mob violence cases in Nigeria were handled by the judicial system, nor the level to which any proceedings were taken. However, of the ten sample cases presented in this briefing, only two were confirmed by Amnesty International to be subjected to judicial process. This substantiates the claim regarding the lack of justice for mob violence victims and their families and is partly the reason many have given up the quest for justice.⁶⁹ As at the time of writing this report, Bauchi State Command informed Amnesty International

65 Amnesty International, interview in person with a Bauchi State based lawyer, Bauchi State, 25 February 2022.

66 Interviews conducted by Amnesty International on 17 February 2022 in Lagos

67 Earnest Ojukwu, Andrew Chukwumerie, Chukwu Emeka Eze, “The rising scourge of mob action in Nigeria”, This Day, 6 June 2022, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/06/06/the-rising-scourge-of-mob-action-in-nigeria>

68 Amnesty International, interview with a lawyer representing a client charged with blasphemy, via phone, 14 April 2022.

69 Amnesty International, interviews in person with mob justice victims, Lagos, Abuja and Bauchi, 18 May 2022, 17 June 2022, and 23 July 2022.

that the case of Talle Mairuwa was still under investigation, which is over three years since the violence occurred.

Other than the cases of Anthony Okpahefufe and Deborah Samuel Yakubu,⁷⁰ all the other investigations into incidents presented in this briefing have either been dropped, delayed, or abandoned, or never initiated in the first place. When Amnesty International tried to inquire and obtain further information from the police in Lagos, Bauchi, and Abuja, the police refused to respond, claiming that they were not permitted to speak on the matter. Only two public prosecutors in Lagos and Bauchi agreed to speak with Amnesty International's researchers on why justice is usually delayed or denied for mob violence victims. These prosecutors claimed that most cases of mob violence experience delays because of the refusal of eyewitnesses to come forward and testify before the court, thereby compelling the courts to release the suspects on bail.⁷¹

Amnesty International also found that in several of the illustrative cases documented in this briefing, there were violations of the right to a fair trial. For example, the mother of Anthony Okpahefufe told Amnesty International about the difficulties she faced when trying to obtain a lawyer to represent her so that she could seek justice for her son.

“Mob justice happens in Nigeria because the legitimacy of the Nigerian legal system and law enforcement has been destroyed by dysfunction and corruption. People will frequently turn to mob action because they lose faith in the legal system or law enforcement.”⁷²

Chukwuemeka Eze

Individuals in a blasphemy case who were acquitted by a court, told Amnesty International that for security reasons they were forced to relocate to another part of the city after the accusations. They said that it was not safe to return to the same area, despite having been acquitted. They avoid interacting with their new neighbours because they fear that the blasphemy accusations will become known and put their lives at risk.⁷³

7.8 THE RISE OF VIGILANTE GROUPS AND THEIR ROLE IN MOB VIOLENCE

Mob violence is fuelled by insecurity, impunity and lack of state protection. A poorly equipped police force and inadequate equipment were believed to be the reasons for the proliferation of vigilante groups. The police are overwhelmed, and so communities resort to employing vigilante organizations for local security.⁷⁴

The poor numerical strength of the NPF, their inadequate training, and equipment, as well as inefficiency and widespread corruption, have led local communities create and empower vigilante groups and rely on them for security and crime control. The most prominent vigilante groups are the regional ethnic-linked vigilante. However, instead of assisting the police in securing the communities, members of these vigilante groups have used torture to obtain confessions from crime suspects.⁷⁵ It is reported that suspects were beaten and stabbed with weapons causing external and internal injuries.⁷⁶ This shows that mob violence is not only perpetrated by civilians alone, but also by community vigilante members whose activities are not regulated by the state. In the

70 Cited in pages 22 and 23 of this report

71 Amnesty International, interviews in person with prosecutors, Lagos and Bauchi, 17 June 2022, 18 May 2022.

72 Earnest Ojukwu and others, “The rising scourge of mob action in Nigeria” (previously cited)

73 Amnesty International’s interview with survivors of mob violence in Lagos on 17 February 2022

74 Earnest Ojukwu and others, “The rising scourge of mob action in Nigeria” (previously cited)

75 Human Rights Watch, Nigeria: The Bakassi Boys: The Legitimization of Murder and Torture (previously cited).

76 Human Rights Watch, Nigeria: The Bakassi Boys: The Legitimization of Murder and Torture (previously cited).

case of Anthony Okpahefufe, for instance, the OPC detained him and his friends and tortured, maimed, and killed them. Anybody who tried to intervene while they were dispensing this kind of “justice” would risk sharing the same fate as the victims.

Another trend in terms of mob violence is group solidarity. On different occasions, mere disagreement between individuals easily escalates into conflict. During verbal exchanges, friends and associates of the dominant or more numerous party gather around in support of their group. This has in some instances led to mob violence. In Lagos for example, sound engineer David Imoh was killed by a group of commercial motorcycle taxi riders, who were said to have parked one after the other to form a crowd in solidarity with their colleague in a dispute with David.⁷⁷ The riders had long-term experience being bullied and killed because of their vulnerable status and that was the reason they believed they had to resort to uniting their power for self-protection against perceived discriminatory humiliations and brutality.

7.9 THE FAILURE OF THE NIGERIAN STATE TO CURB MOB VIOLENCE

The government’s reluctance to issue statements regarding mob violence contributes to the circle of impunity that surrounds perpetrators in Nigeria. There are several reasons ascribed to the government’s failure to be decisive on issues of mob violence. Some people think that Nigerian politicians do not want to condemn mob violence because they are avoiding a tendency for public disfavour. The aftermath of the killing of Deborah Samuel Yakubu in Sokoto is a good case in point. In this case, there was no public statement by the police or other law enforcement authorities. The Sultan of Sokoto, His Eminence Sir Abubakar Sa’ad Muhammad, and Sokoto state governor Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, did issue official public statements.⁷⁸ They condemned the mob action and called on the government to investigate and bring perpetrators to justice.⁷⁹ The Sultan was widely condemned by many religious clerics, and a large part of the public in northern Nigeria, for being reproachful of the mob action against Deborah Samuel Yakubu.

In the mob violence cases documented by Amnesty International, the president or governors of the states where incidents have occurred, have occasionally issue statements of condemnation. These statements have been limited to election periods, however. There has never been any practical action, such as prompt, thorough, impartial, independent, and effective investigations into any of the cases of mob violence. This kind of action is needed to understand the dynamics of mob violence, find suspected perpetrators, and provide access to justice and effective remedies for victims. In the case of Deborah Samuel Yakubu and other mob violence cases in Nigeria, Amnesty International called on the government to investigate and prosecute offenders and to respect its obligations to protect the human rights of all the people within its territory.⁸⁰

When Amnesty International questioned the factors responsible for the proliferation of mob violence in Nigeria, different respondents corroborated the fact that the NPF personnel are, apart from ill-equipped and overstretched, disproportionately distributed between attachments to government officials and crowded public spaces that need the permanent presence of the police. When Amnesty International asked on how best to prevent mob violence, Bauchi State Police Command stated that the Command requires “adequate manpower, logistics, technology/technical tools for intelligence gathering and resources for discreet investigation and prosecution of related cases”.

“Nigeria has less than 400,000 police officers and

⁷⁷ The sound engineer whose case appears in page 18 of this report

⁷⁸ “‘Blasphemy’: Sultan condemns killing of Sokoto college student as police arrest two suspects”, TheCable, 12 May 2022, <https://www.thecable.ng/blasphemy-sultan-condemns-killing-of-sokoto-college-student-as-police-arrest-two-suspects/>.

⁷⁹ Eniola Olatunji, “Sultan condemns killing of Deborah Yakubu”, Business Day, 13 May 2023, <https://businessday.ng/news/article/sultan-condemns-killing-of-deborah-yakubu/>; Abubakar Auwal, “Sultan, Tambuwal, Kukah condemn killing of student accused of blasphemy”, Daily Trust, 13 May 2022, <https://dailytrust.com/sultan-tambuwal-kukah-condemn-killing-of-student-accused-of-blasphemy/>; “Sultan of Sokoto condemns killing of female college student for alleged blasphemy”, Sahara Reporters, 12 May 2022, <https://saharareporters.com/2022/05/12/sultan-sokoto-condemns-killing-female-college-student-alleged-blasphemy>.

⁸⁰ Earnest Ojukwu, Andrew Chukwumerie, Chukwu Emeka Eze, “The rising scourge of mob action in Nigeria”, This Day, 6 June 2022, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/06/06/the-rising-scourge-of-mob-action-in-nigeria>

men, most of whom, though ill-equipped and poorly motivated, are expected to police the country's over 200 million population with a land mass of 923,768 square kilometres... It is estimated that Nigeria has a police officer to citizen ratio of 1:540, below the United Nation's recommended ratio of 1:450. Sadly, in Nigeria, in our view, the police are short of manpower, underfunded and poorly equipped. These factors have contributed significantly to impeding their ability to perform their constitutionally assigned duty of securing lives and property within the civil society. Despite the alarming rate of crimes in Nigeria, a large number of the Nigerian police are attached to either private businessmen, large companies, corporate organisations, government officials and or VIPs leaving an insignificant number to ensure peace and protect lives and property of the citizens.”⁸¹

Leadership Editorial

81 Return The Police To Their Duty”, 23 February 2024, <https://leadership.ng/return-the-police-to-their-duty/>

8. THE CONSEQUENCES OF MOB VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

8.1 GRIEF AND TRAUMA FOR THE SURVIVORS AND RELATIVES OF MOB VIOLENCE VICTIMS

Survivors or the relatives of victims of mob violence display a range of different reactions to their horrific experiences. In all the cases that Amnesty International investigated, the families and relatives of the victims said they experienced immediate and long-term impacts, including persistent fatigue, sleep disorders, nightmares, fear of recurrence, anxiety focused on flashbacks, depression, and avoidance of emotions, sensations and anger, fear, sadness, and shame.

Amnesty International researchers interviewed medical doctors in Abuja to seek their opinion on the feelings expressed by survivors of mob violence and their relatives. One of the doctors⁸² explained that such feelings amount to trauma, although victims may encounter difficulty themselves in identifying any of these feelings as trauma, most likely due to lack of experience with or prior exposure to emotional expression in their family or community.

Some survivors and relatives of victims⁸³ told Amnesty International that their grief and emotions due to the mob violence meted out to them or their loved ones, resulted in their poor productivity at home or work, and their condition had prevented them from socializing as usual and caused them shameful feelings when with their relatives and community members.

Amnesty International notes that the condition of grief and trauma expressed by mob violence survivors and relatives of victims amounts to a violation of their right to health, including mental health.

The pregnant wife of Ahmad Usman,⁸⁴ killed for alleged blasphemy in Tipper's Garage in Abuja, told BBC that:

“...the most painful and heart-breaking thing to me is when I remember that he was killed for blasphemy allegation. ...as if it was enough, all after they burnt him, they went on to cut the veins in his dead body, For God's sake, what kind of hatred is this? The hatred is too much! ...[T]hose who did this to him I will never forgive them. They have robbed me of him, they have robbed his parents.”⁸⁵

Zainbah Ahmad, Ahmad Usman's widow

Alheri Emmanuel, Deborah Samuel Yakubu's⁸⁶ mother lamented in tears while she narrated her ordeal to the BBC:

82 Amnesty International, interview with Doctor Michael Musa and Alice Kantiyok, via phone, Abuja, 25 August 2022.

83 Amnesty International, interview with Davi Imoni's wife and Anthony Okpahefufe's mother and grandmother, Lagos, 17 May 2022.

84 Details of AhmadUsman Musa's case is in page 16 of this report

85 BBC News Youtube Channel, "Mob killing reignites blasphemy law debate in Nigeria", 21 July 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GprX6BHIn4>

86 Cited in detail in page 23 of this report

“...on the day of the incident, seeing how people trooped to my house, I asked a girl, what’s going on? “They killed Deborah”, she said. I felt like an arrow had struck my chest.”⁸⁷

Alheri Emmanuel, mother of Deborah Samuel Yakubu

In each of these cases, representatives of the government have nominated themselves as spokesmen or the point of contact for relatives. The way these representatives originally treated the survivors shaped how those survivors interpreted and felt about their subsequent experiences, especially their experiences of the justice system. When survivors were involved in making decisions and following developments, it gave them a sense of purpose and dispelled the notion that nothing they said or did mattered.

It is telling that David Imoni’s wife initially declined to grant Amnesty International an interview regarding what happened to her husband.⁸⁸ It was not until the day after the initial request that David Imoni’s older brother informed the Amnesty International research team that the widow was willing to speak after being told that Amnesty International was a human rights organization, not government officials.⁸⁹ She said:

“...when I was told that my husband was lynched, at first, I thought they were mistaken, but when his senior brother later told me he had confirmed that he was lynched, I was immediately hit by dizziness. Every day, I remember him and how he bathed and played with the children, every day I cried. ...I’m now a widow left with children who will never see their father. The government of Lagos state through its information commissioner lied and deceived us by going to the media to say they visited us and are discussing with us on giving us justice and modalities for compensation.”⁹⁰

David Imoni’s wife

The criminal justice system in Nigeria is plagued with delays, is controlling of victims and their families, and the undue delay of the justice process may sometimes impede recovery. Because of these factors, it has a significant impact on the well-being of victims of mob violence and their families. Some survivors feel they have delayed living their own lives, often for years, due to the belief that their recovery wouldn’t start until after they have sat through protracted legal waiting periods.

From the reports gathered all the victims that were lynched died claiming they were innocent of the allegations and pleading to be spared. Those left behind who suffer the consequences of these unlawful acts may reach a breaking point and seek revenge for these deaths.

87 BBC News Youtube Channel, “Mob killing reignites blasphemy law debate in Nigeria”, 21 July 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GprX6BHIn4>

88 News Editor, “The menace of Okada riders in Lekki area worrisome, government should come to our aid – LERA chairman”, The Street Journal, 16 May 2022, <https://thestreetjournal.org/the-menace-of-okada-riders-in-lekki-area-worrisome-government-should-come-to-our-aid-lera-chairman/>

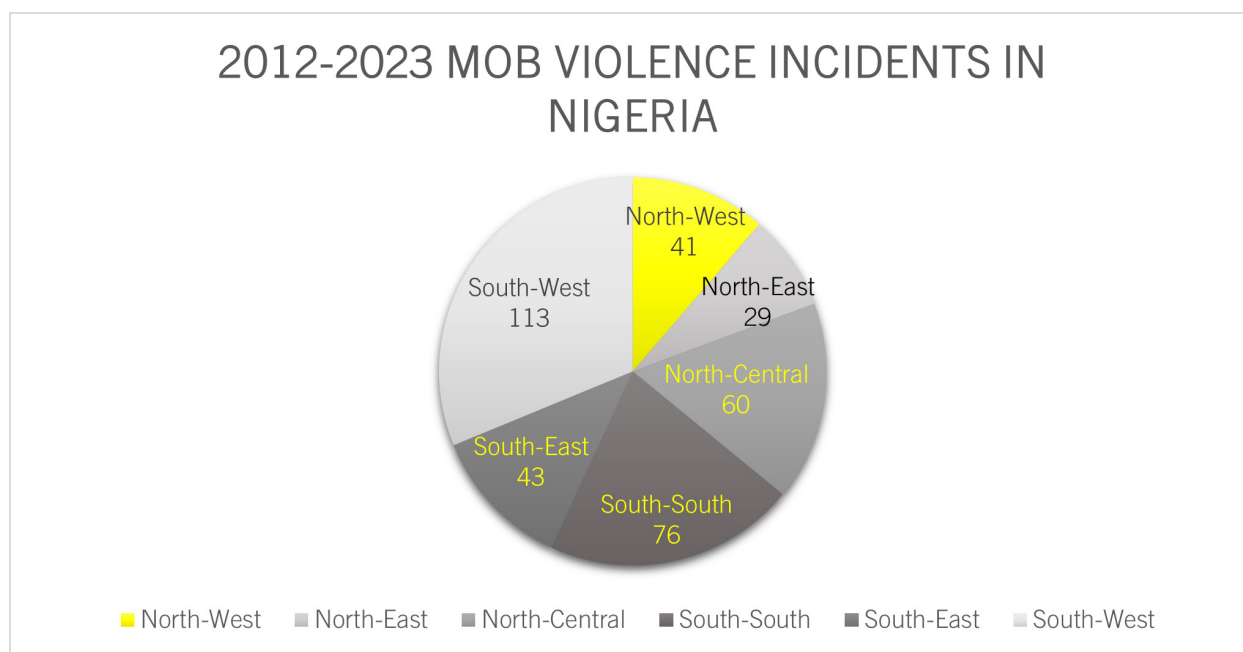
89 Amnesty Internal, interview with David Imoni’s wife, Lagos, 17 June 2022.

90 Amnesty International, interview with David Imoni’s wife, Lagos, 17 May 2022.

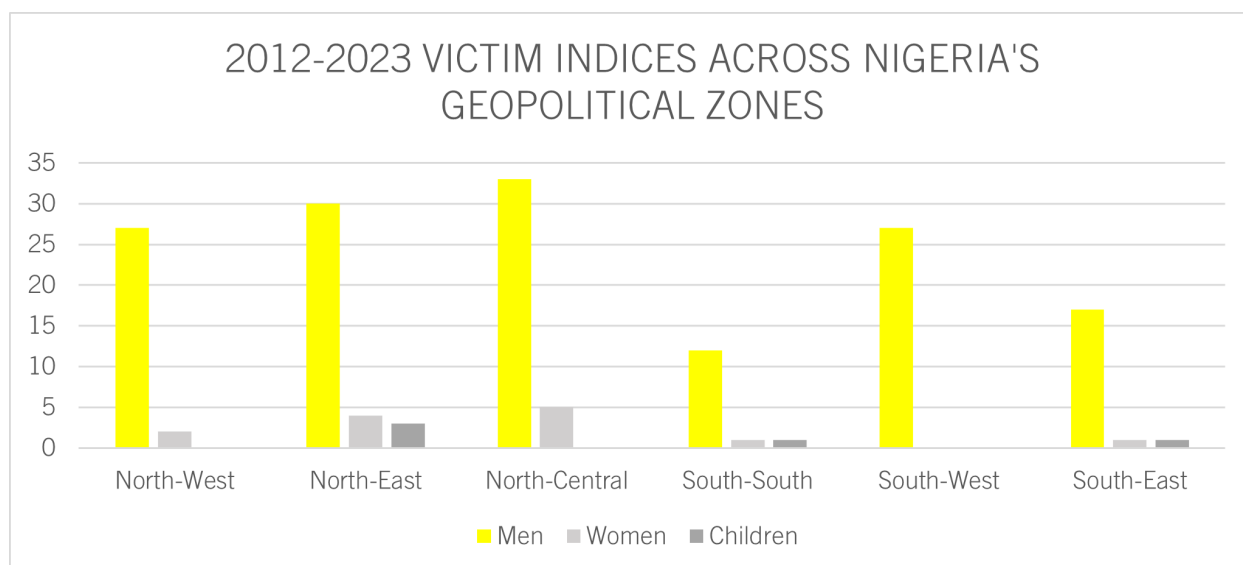
9. QUANTITATIVE DATA ON MOB VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

The data presented in the pie and bar charts below are computations from Amnesty International's desk reviews of mob violence incidences across Nigeria, and field research conducted in Lagos, Abuja, and Bauchi states.

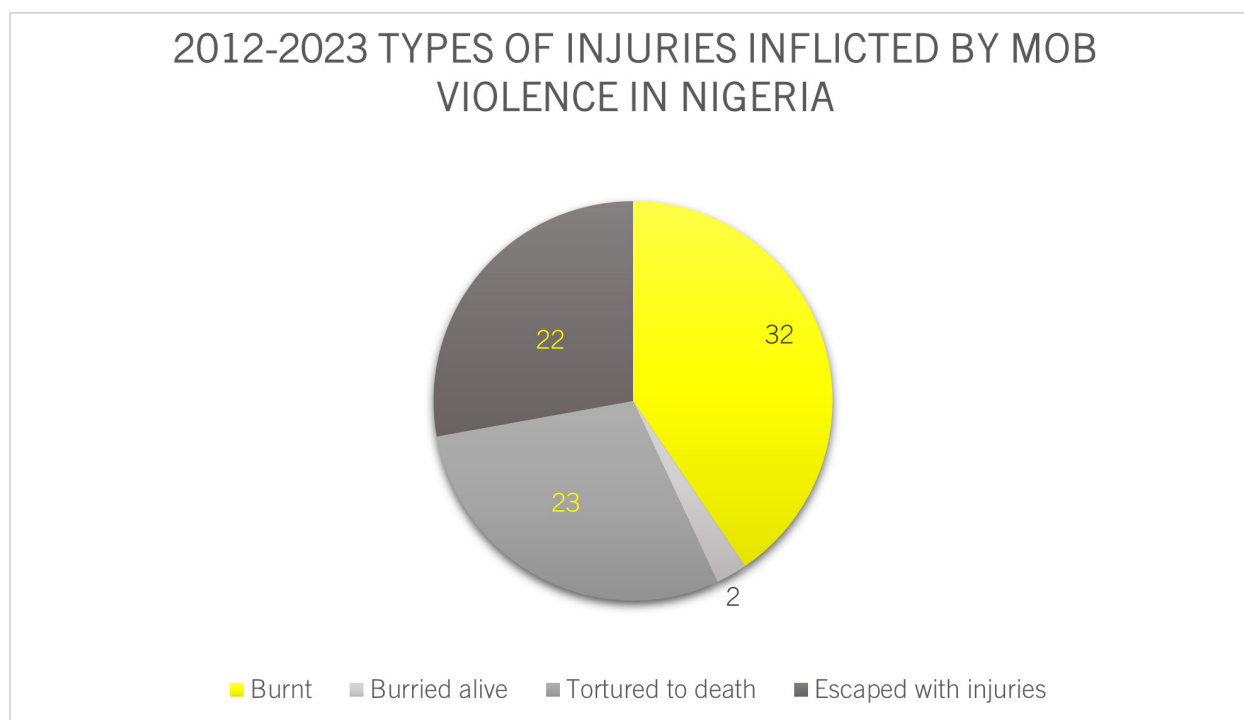
9.1 2012-2023 INCIDENTS OF MOB VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA



9.2 VICTIM INDICES OF MOB VIOLENCE ACROSS NIGERIA'S GEOPOLITICAL ZONES



9.3 TYPES OF INJURIES INFLICTED BY MOB VIOLENCE



10. CONCLUSIONS

- There are observed patterns of mob violence in Nigeria, caused in part by the authorities' failure to enforce the laws.
- Mob violence in Nigeria is triggered by many factors, including rumours, misinformation, disinformation, misperceptions, manipulations, misrepresentations, disagreements, existing malice between persons, quarrels, false accusation, accusations of theft/robbery, blasphemy, child theft, rituals, and witchcraft, mutual mistrust, religious fanaticism, lack of fact-checking, etc.
- Mob violence as a response to alleged blasphemy is backed by the support of some Islamic religious clerics.
- Mob violence allegations arise from verbal exchanges, text messages, content on social and mass media, and the "desecration" of pages or books containing religious text.
- Most of the mob violence cases in the North were related to allegations of blasphemy. Stonings and beatings with harmful objects constitute torture, as does the eventual setting ablaze of the accused person, resulting in death. Many of the cases examined were believed to have been related to discrimination.⁹¹ Victims included both adults and children.⁹²
- In the southern part of Nigeria, most mob violence cases were usually related to allegations of theft and witchcraft. Mob violence in these instances was characterized by torture, including the use of harmful objects for lynching,⁹³ and setting the accused ablaze, leading to death. The victims included adults, women, and children.⁹⁴
- Many of the perpetrators of mob violence, including vigilante groups, have no confidence in the police and judicial systems of Nigeria. The perpetrators of mob violence behaviour also benefit from impunity as a result, which is inextricably linked to a lack of trust in the police and Nigeria's justice system in general.
- Mob violence is characterized by violations of human rights guaranteed by International human rights law and Nigeria's domestic laws. The subjection of mob violence victims to torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, and killings is a violation of their rights to life, fair trial and due process, and the freedom to express themselves.
- The frequency of mob violence in Nigeria is an indication of the NPF and the Nigerian authorities' failure to prevent, protect, and ensure the human rights of everyone, as guaranteed in the Nigerian constitution and international human rights instruments ratified by Nigeria. Police personnel are not always close to the scenes of crime, and when an attempt is made to contact them, they do not respond swiftly; when they come, they normally are not able to rescue. Response from Bauchi State Police Command indicates that the distance between the scene of violence and police post responsible for that area is far from the police division and area command. The area commander and divisional police officer arrived the scene of the violence after the violence had occurred. They are at best able to disperse crowds after the damage has been done, and sometimes even arrest innocent people instead of the actual perpetrators of the crimes.
- Although there are sections in the Nigerian laws that guarantee human rights, these laws are not applied in practice. Even where arrests were made, Amnesty International heard serious allegations that those arrested were either released or the whole case was jeopardised. This shows the Nigerian authorities' failure to take the measures needed to fix this dangerous situation and put an end to unlawful mob violence.
- There is a lack of a consistent, robust, and timely response by the authorities to situations of mob violence. The lack of response, and the failure to bring suspected perpetrators to justice and ensure access to justice and effective remedies for victims and their families, leads to a climate of impunity for perpetrators and contributes to the recurrence of mob violence.

91 Discrimination based on gender, minority, or religious status.

92 The case of Talle Mai Ruwa, the case of Deborah Samuel Yakubu, the case of Mrs Bridget Abahime, for instance, were cases in point

93 See, for instance, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Necklacing>

94 The case of the Aluu Four; the case of Anthony Okpahefufe; the case of David Imoni; all cited in this briefing, and many others, are all cases in point.

- In the cases studied by Amnesty International, victims of mob violence and their loved ones were left helpless in a state of grief and trauma. In addition to their tragedy, they were left without justice, and without compensation for their loss. When they see or hear the stories of the suspects of mob violence walking freely on the streets, their grief is renewed. After failing to obtain justice, some families of mob violence victims say they simply “leave everything to God”.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International makes the following recommendations:

11.1 TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA

- Mob violence should be treated as a national issue, respecting the need for collaboration between the Nigerian government, civil society organizations, activists, and other interested parties.
- The authorities should provide safeguards against mob violence. The government should enact anti-mob violence laws to strengthen the legal frameworks and institutions. The abandoned mob violence bill must be passed to cover all the circumstances and dynamics of mob violence specifically and holistically.
- Given the incompatibility of the blasphemy laws with international human rights law, the authorities should immediately work towards their abolition.
- The authorities should ensure the effective implementation of laws and effective protection against violence in the name of religion.
- Nigerian authorities should control the spread of small arms and other offensive weapons and objects that are easily accessed and used by mobs for torture.
- The government must make urgent reforms to the legal frameworks to ensure that, in all cases, the NPF and the wider state can carry out their functions impartially and effectively. The authorities should ensure that the arrests and investigations in all cases are conducted by competent police officers, to prevent mob violence.
- Nigeria is estimated to have a population of over 200 million which is projected to reach 300 million soon. A police force of less than 400,000 personnel is grossly inadequate considering the 2016 United Nations recommendation of one police officer per 100,000 people. To meet this standard, Nigeria needs to have an average of 2.5 million police officers across the nation to ensure effective policing.
- To provide adequate and effective security and law enforcement, the federal government should ensure that all the nation's towns and villages have police officers or soldiers to protect them.⁹⁵
- The government should provide logistics, technology/technical tools for intelligence gathering and resources to ensure effective investigation and prosecution.
- The criminal justice procedures should be overhauled by the government to ensure that suspected criminals are not only apprehended by law enforcement agents but also tried in fair trials with due process.
- More awareness needs to be created about the provisions of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015, which was passed primarily to solve the backlog in Nigeria's justice system.
- To entrench human rights laws and culture, there is a need to introduce the subject of human rights at every level of education nationwide. Education and awareness-raising campaigns through the mass media, public lectures, seminars, and symposia, among others, should be frequently carried out to enlighten traders and artisans, among other people, on the problems of mob violence.

11.2 TO THE STATE GOVERNMENTS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

- Improve monitoring of mob violence and collection of evidence to prosecute those who engage in these unlawful acts. For example, the provision of CCTV cameras installed in public areas can facilitate the recording of evidence and subsequently ease the processes of investigating and arresting suspected perpetrators of mob action for prosecution.
- Enhance community awareness regarding the problems of mob violence. For example, the people in their

95 Fatima Shu'aibu, "Police inadequacy: Why Nigeria hardly achieves peace", Daily Trust, 6 November 2022, <https://dailytrust.com/police-inadequacy-why-nigeria-hardly-achieves-peace/>

communities should be made aware of the terrible effects of mob violence through faith-based organizations, traditional leaders, and community development organizations.

- Blasphemy laws are incompatible with international human rights law and should be repealed. The government should make urgent reforms to the legal framework to ensure that in blasphemy cases, authorities can carry out their functions impartially and without fear or intimidation. Law enforcement authorities should ensure effective protection against violence in the name of religion, threats, and intimidation against those accused of blasphemy.
- As an interim measure leading up to the repeal of legislation incompatible with international human rights law, several key safeguards must be introduced. For example, safeguards are needed against the incidence of false accusations. These often arise because a wide range of people can register complaints with the police, including those who are not direct witnesses to the alleged blasphemy. In some cases, the delays between when the alleged incident occurred and when the case is registered with the police by the complainant raise questions about the credibility of the allegations, especially when coupled with weak evidence against the accused.
- Authorities responsible for schools and other facilities attended by persons with disabilities must heighten their security measures to ensure children with disabilities are protected.

11.3 TO THE NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE

- Effective 24-hour security and law enforcement patrols should be institutionalized to thwart mob violence and other criminal activities. With police presence in identified hot spots, extrajudicial executions will be reduced to the barest minimum, if not stopped completely.
- The investigation, prosecution, and conviction of suspects involved in committing acts of mob violence must be prioritised by the police.
- The police should be more professional in carrying out their duties. When angry mobs are hard to control, appropriate reinforcements should be requested and provided.
- The police should create toll-free emergency telephone lines available for citizens to report ongoing mob activity and should be matched with the necessary corresponding swiftness in responding.
- Refusal on the part of the authorities to prosecute crimes and mob violence, and failures to uphold justice, might spark class identity reprisals and civic disobedience. This promotes impunity for mob violence and encourages people to act against both the constituted authorities and other fellow citizens.
- In most blasphemy cases, the police are permitted to arrest the accused and begin their investigation without a warrant. In some cases, police have even arbitrarily detained family members to locate the accused when he or she could not be found. This is often due to pressure from the complainant and others in support of the blasphemy laws. In this regard, the police should be professional in discharging their duties without fear or favour. They should be able to resist pressure from religious clerics who wield significant power and tend to justify mob action in cases of allegations of blasphemy.

11.4 TO THE PUBLIC

- Internationally recognized human rights principles provide the required standards of protection for suspects of crimes. Rather than encouraging people to take the law into their own hands and engage in the extrajudicial torture and killing of suspects, provisions should be made to allow people to file complaints against suspected crimes with the police.
- Citizens can assist law enforcement by reporting crimes and effecting arrests in the absence of law enforcement agents, however nobody has the right to kill. Under the law, every suspect is presumed innocent until proven otherwise by a court of law. Arrested suspects should be handed over safely to the police, to undergo a fair trial with all due process protections.
- Although it is possible that people are frustrated and might have a deficit of trust in both the police and the judiciary, taking the law into their own hands is itself a criminal act, inexcusable in the eyes of the law. The right to life, prohibition against torture, and right to fair trial, are inalienable. Mob violence contravenes

these. Whenever there is a basis for the allegation, instead of resorting to the unlawful act of mob violence, a citizen's arrest without violence can be made, and the suspect must be immediately handed over to the police to begin the process of lawful investigation and subsequent trial by the courts. Other measures such as petitions, campaigns, or peaceful protests are alternatives that can be followed to ensure that the rule of law is followed and effectively applied.

- Following the concerns of the public prosecutors in Nigeria regarding the reluctance of witnesses to appear before the courts of law and provide evidence against the accused, witnesses should be encouraged to courageously assist the law by providing the court with the necessary testimony to be able to complete the judicial process. The system should also provide for an effective witness protection mechanism that will protect witnesses who testify. This will go a long way to ensure justice is appropriately dispensed.

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS.
WHEN INJUSTICE HAPPENS
TO ONE PERSON, IT
MATTERS TO US ALL.**

CONTACT US



info@amnesty.org.ng



+234 (0)-909-0866-666

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INSTANTLY KILLED!

HOW LAW ENFORCEMENT FAILURES EXACERBATE NIGERIA'S WAVE OF MOB VIOLENCE

Incidents of mob violence in Nigeria have escalated significantly over the last two decades, and the Nigerian state's failure to protect victims has created a culture of impunity. Amnesty International has recorded at least 555 victims from 363 incidents of mob violence between 2012 and 2023, along with patterns of human rights violations including discrimination and curtailment of freedom of speech and expression. The police, judiciary and other relevant authorities have failed to protect and uphold justice for victims of mob violence. Lack of prosecutions, delays in the criminal justice system and lack of compensation means mob violence escalates while survivors and victims' relatives never get justice. Killings by violent mobs have been happening for a long time across Nigeria. Many of the victims of mob violence studied were tortured to death or narrowly escaped being killed after accusations were made about alleged offences such as theft, witchcraft, blasphemy, rituals involving the use of human body parts, or the 'magical' theft of male genitals. Other triggering causes include allegations of shoplifting, rape, and abduction. The fact that only few cases were investigated and prosecuted, shows a failure on the part of the authorities in fulfilling their responsibility to protect the people from harm and any form of violence.

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