

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

Your Excellency,

I am writing in concern for Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, a 22-year-old singer. On 10 August 2020, an Upper Shari'a Court in Kano state convicted Yahaya Sharif-Aminu of blasphemy for circulating a song on WhatsApp that was considered blasphemous against Prophet Muhammad and sentenced him to death. He remains held in Kano prison.

Yahaya Sharif-Aminu and his lawyer appealed the sentence. On 21 January, the Appeal Panel, presided by the Chief Judge of Kano State, ordered the retrial of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu's case. The Panel ordered that the case be returned to the same Upper Shari'a Court where Yahaya Sharif-Aminu was sentenced but should be retried by a different judge on the basis that the defendant was not represented by a legal representative throughout his trial, adding that it was the duty of the court to ensure that he was duly and legally represented especially given the magnitude of the case, which involved the death penalty. The Panel therefore submitted that the failure of the defendant to be represented by a legal representative during the trial at the Upper Sharia Court was a clear omission which renders the proceedings of the case a nullity. The Appeal Panel's decision for Yahaya Sharif-Aminu to be retried provides a significant opportunity for him to be provided access to legal representation and ensure he receives a fair trial.

Yahaya Sharif-Aminu should never have been sentenced to death in the first place. No one should be sentenced to death for freely expressing their opinions. The imposition of the death penalty following an unfair trial violates the right to life and hasty trials undermine the ability of defendants to seek effective remedies for the lack of legal representation during trial. Moreover, the use of the death penalty for blasphemy violates Nigeria's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which restricts the use of the death penalty to the "most serious crimes", which according to international law are crimes that involve intentional killing.

I therefore request that you:

- Drop all charges against Yahaya Sharif-Aminu
- Ensure immediate and unconditional release of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu

Yours sincerely,