

The Honorable Antony Blinken
U.S. Department of State
Office of the Secretary
Room 7226
Harry S. Truman Building
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Sent electronically to Secretary@state.gov

December 8, 2022

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We write to you with urgency about the case of Rhoda Ya'u Jatau, a Nigerian citizen in Bauchi State who has been imprisoned for over six months on charges of blasphemy.

Jatau, 45, was arrested by agents of Nigeria's Department of State Services on May 20, after she shared a WhatsApp video criticizing the murder of Deborah Yakubu, a Nigerian Christian university student who was herself the victim of blasphemy accusations. She is currently awaiting trial.

On the day she was arrested, a violent mob attacked Jatau's home, seeking to kill her. The attackers burned many houses in Jatau's Christian-majority neighborhood and wounded at least fifteen people.

For sharing the video, Jatau was charged with "inciting public disturbance; exciting contempt of religious creed; and cyber stalking" under Sections 114 and 210 of the Penal Code and Section 24 subsection 1b(i) of the Cybercrime Prohibition Prevention Act of 2015.

Moreover, Bauchi State is one of twelve states in northern Nigeria that have adopted *shari'a* law. In recent years, an alarming number of Nigerians have been charged with blasphemy-related offenses in these states. Some have been sentenced to death on the basis of *shari'a*, even though the Nigerian Penal Code only allows for a maximum sentence of two years for "exciting contempt of religious creed."

On November 7, eighteen members of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA) released a joint statement affirming their "firm opposition to blasphemy laws."

The statement noted that "blasphemy laws impede the freedoms of expression and religion or belief in ways inconsistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," and urged governments to "unconditionally release individuals imprisoned" under these laws.

We respectfully urge you to intervene with the Nigerian authorities at the highest levels to secure Rhoda's freedom. We likewise urge you to make it clear to the Nigerian authorities your "firm opposition" to blasphemy laws.

Respectfully yours,

Individuals

John Eibner, President, Christian Solidarity International

The Baroness Cox, Independent Member of the House of Lords
Lela Gilbert, Senior Fellow for International Religious Freedom, Family Research Council
Scott Morgan, Co-Chair Africa Working Group, IRF Roundtable
William J. Murray, President, Religious Freedom Coalition
Patrice J. Pederson, President, First Freedom Foundation
Gregory Stanton, Founding President, Genocide Watch
Nina Shea, Director, Hudson Institute Center for Religious Freedom
Nguyen Dinh Thang, CEO and President, Boat People SOS
Mark Tooley, President, Institute on Religion and Democracy
Thierry Valle, President, Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de
Conscience

Organizations

ADF International
Anglican Church in North America Global Mission Initiative
Anglican Global Mission Partners
Anglican Persecuted Church Network
Anglican Prayer for All Nations Network
Asian Children Education Fellowship
Boat People SOS – Religious Freedom Project
Christian Freedom International
Christian Solidarity International
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office
Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam
Coptic Solidarity
Family Research Council
Genocide Watch
GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference) Suffering Church Network
In Defense of Christians
Jubilee Campaign USA
Katartismos Global
Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice
New Wineskins Missionary Network
Religious Freedom Coalition

Saint Nicholas Freedom Group

Save the Persecuted Christians

Set My People Free

Voice of the Martyrs Poland (Głos Prześladowanych Chrześcijan)