



Jubilee Campaign returns to in-person advocacy and initiatives...

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IRF Summit 2022 March to the Embassies



Se Hoon Kim, Director, Captive Nations Coalition, Committee on Present Danger: China

Prior to the start of the annual International Religious Freedom Summit, Jubilee Campaign and member organizations of the Global Campaign for Religious Prisoners of Conscience embarked on a march to the embassies of nations whose governments have arbitrarily and unjustly detained faith and belief minorities. Among those embassies we visited were those of Algeria, China, Egypt, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, Vietnam, and more. At each embassy we presented a letter urging the governments to release unconditionally and with immediate effect all religious prisoners of conscience. In total, the march lasted approximately four hours and garnered the participation of some fifty or so individuals. Videos of some portions of the march have even gone on to receive thousands of views and comments on social media.

Among those prisoners of conscience raised during our march are Vietnamese Hoa Hao Buddhist activist Nguyen Bac Truyen; Yemeni Christian convert and human rights activist Abdulbaqi Saeed detained in Egypt; Nigerian humanist Mubarak Bala sentenced to 24 years in prison for blasphemy and allegedly "causing public disturbance"; Uyghur teacher and artist Renagul Gheni detained in China; former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama detained in Indonesia for blasphemy; abducted and disappeared Malaysian Christian Pastor Raymond Koh; and more.



Soraya Deen, Founder & President, Muslim Women Speakers

Faith McDonnell, Katartismos Global

Embassy of Egypt in the United States



Embassy of Nigeria in the United States

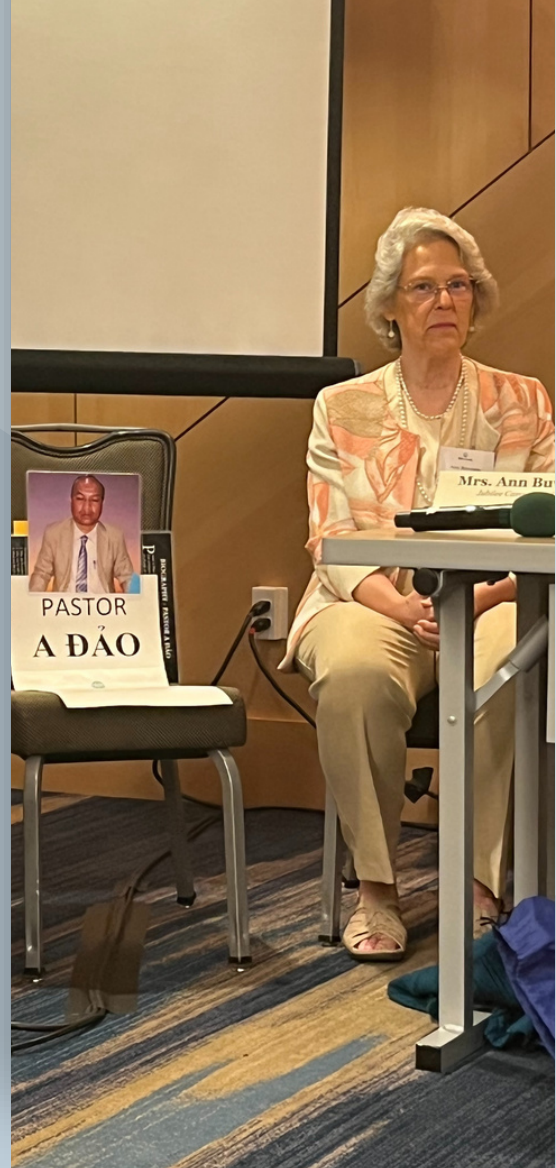
Muhammad Syed, President, Ex-Muslims of North America

Dr. Gloria Puldu, Founder & President, LEAH Foundation

International Religious Freedom Summit 2022

Early on in the first day of the Summit, Jubilee Campaign Executive Director Ann Buwalda spoke at a side event hosted by Advocates for Faith and Justice in Vietnam (AFJV), *Advocacy for Victims of Persecution*, in which she raised our successes in advocating for the release of Vietnamese Pastor A Dao. A Dao, a pastor at the Montagnard Evangelical Church of Christ had initially been arrested and sentenced to five years in prison in 2016 after he returned to Vietnam from an ASEAN civil society conference in East Timor where he spoke about the Vietnamese government's persecution of faith minorities. In the summer of 2020, led by Jubilee Campaign, a group of advocacy organizations met with Wisconsin Congressman Glenn Grothman to urge him to advocate on behalf of a prisoner of conscience due to the large Vietnamese constituency population in Wisconsin. Congressman Grothman eagerly adopted the case of Pastor A Dao alongside USCIRF Commissioner James Carr, and just one month after the two men authored an op-ed on the case, Vietnamese authorities released Pastor A Dao from prison, one year before his sentence was to be completed.

Jubilee Campaign, alongside Boat People SOS (BPSOS) and Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), reached out to Congressman Grothman about continuing advocacy for faith-based prisoners once again in 2021, and we were pleased that in October 2022 Congressman Grothman has taken up the cases of two additional Vietnamese prisoners of Conscience, Y Pum Bya and Y Yich. Y Pum Bya, a Protestant Christian, and Y Yich, a Montagnard Christian, were sentenced to 14 years and 12 years in prison, respectively, for their religious freedom advocacy and criticism of the government's treatment of faith minorities.



Pictured Above: Jubilee Campaign Executive Director Ann Buwalda seated next to a picture of Pastor A Dao, who was released thanks to advocacy undertaken by US Congressman Glenn Grothman, USCIRF Commissioner James Carr, Jubilee Campaign, Boat People SOS (BPSOS), and Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF)



Jubilee Campaign hosted an IRF Summit side event, *Algeria - Free Hamid Soudad*, in which we raised the case of Christian prisoner of conscience Hamid Soudad. In January 2021, Algerian authorities arrested Soudad in regards to an allegedly blasphemous cartoon of the Prophet that he had shared to his Facebook page in 2018. After briefly interrogating Soudad and releasing him, authorities subsequently re-arrested Soudad and charged him with "insulting the Prophet of Islam". With absolutely no access to legal counsel or a fair trial, Soudad was sentenced to the maximum five years' imprisonment by a court in Arzew. By March of the same year, Oran City Court denied Soudad's appeal and upheld his original sentence. Soudad's defense attorney, Farid Khemisti, has expressed his belief that Soudad was targeted specifically because of his faith, as he was arrested a whopping three years after sharing the post in question.

In August 2021, Jubilee Campaign submitted a joint letter - with 22 signatories - to UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression raising that (1) the three-year length of time between the sharing of the post on Facebook by Soudad and his arrest did not meet the legal threshold stating that there must be a direct relationship between the allegedly blasphemous speech and the harm incurred for an individual to be arrested, and that (2) Soudad's five-year sentence for simply sharing the cartoon deviates from precedent by which maximum prison terms are reserved only for individuals who originally create the allegedly blasphemous content.

Jubilee Campaign Government Relations & Special Projects Coordinator, Sydney Kochan, pictured next to an image of Algerian prisoner of conscience Hamid Soudad

Dr. Christine Sequenzia, Policy Director, National Association of Evangelicals; Dr. Gloria Puldu, President & Founder, LEAH Foundation



In between the various plenary sessions of the IRF Summit, we hosted a side event titled *Global Campaign to Eliminate the Death Penalty for Apostasy and Blasphemy*, and we were honored to welcome numerous distinguished speakers to share both their expertise and experiences in the realm of laws criminalizing religious offenses. Jubilee Campaign would not have been able to hold such a fruitful event without collaboration from our friends and partners National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), Set My People Free, Coptic Solidarity, Ex-Muslims of North America, Religious Liberty Partnership, Christian Freedom International, Muslims for Progressive Values, The St. Charles Institute, World Evangelical Alliance, and the International Committee on Nigeria (ICON).

Our first speaker, Dr. Gloria Puldu (President, LEAH Foundation), spoke about the recent tragedy in Nigeria's Sokoto state in which Christian university student Deborah Yakubu Samuel was stoned to death and subsequently set on fire by Muslim classmates. Days earlier, students in the class WhatsApp group chat asked Deborah how she was able to pass her exams; when Deborah responded that she succeeded through prayer to Jesus and questioned why much of the chat had been discussing religious issues rather than school issues, her classmates became angry and accused Deborah of committing blasphemy. A video of the aftermath of Deborah's horrific killing went viral and received global condemnation.

Sumera Shafique, Chairperson of the Minority Rights Community Punjab Bar Council Pakistan, and former Vice President of the Christian Lawyers Association of Pakistan, spoke about the horrors of the nation's blasphemy laws and the extrajudicial killings of individuals accused of blasphemy in Pakistan.

Sudanese activist Mariam Ibraheem raised the issue of the secondary persecution of women according to blasphemy and apostasy laws. Mariam herself was accused of adultery in 2013 after she, who was born to a Muslim father, married a Christian man, which is illegal according to Sudanese law. Despite insisting that she had identified as Christian her entire life, especially as she was raised by an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian mother, the court charged Mariam with apostasy for religious conversion and sentenced her to death. Mariam spent a month on death row, during which she was forced to give birth to her second child while her arms and legs were shackled. Mariam was eventually released in June 2014 in response to international criticism of her inhumane treatment.

United States Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Rashad Hussain, made a special appearance during our event and made clear his commitment to work towards the elimination of apostasy and blasphemy laws. Upon his entry into diplomacy many years ago, Ambassador Hussain worked to get rid of the UN Defamation of Religions Resolution, noting that it emboldened the creation of blasphemy laws which are often used by majority communities to target faith minorities whose beliefs are deemed blasphemous in themselves. The bottom line, Ambassador Hussain highlighted, is that religion itself does not need protection, people do. To replace the Defamation of Religions Resolution, Ambassador Hussain worked to pass Resolution 16:18 to tackle the real issue: intolerance, discrimination, and incitement to violence based on religion or belief.



United States Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Rashad Hussain



Newly-appointed USCIRF Commissioner David Curry (President & CEO, Open Doors USA) spoke at our event regarding USCIRF's initiatives to raise the inhumanity of apostasy and blasphemy laws in their delegations to various countries. He raised numerous relevant cases, including that of Pakistani Christian couple Shagufta Kausar & Shafqat Emmanuel, and Nigerian Muslim gospel singer Yahaya Sharif-Aminu.

His Excellency Amir Othman Mawlud, Director of Religious Coexistence, Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, Kurdish Regional Government, spoke regarding the culture of the Kurdish region and its historical promotion of interfaith harmony and tolerance. As such, constitutional protections of religious freedom solidify the rights of Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, Baha'i practitioners, and the Kurdish region has acted as a safe haven for these communities. H.E. Mawlud's work within the Kurdish Regional Government serves as a model for other nations in working towards expanding religious freedom.

Finally, we welcomed Muhammad Syed, also known as "Muhammad the Atheist", President of Ex-Muslims of North America. Syed spoke regarding his organization's work, including, notably, the need to increase safety for religious minorities and 'dissidents' to express their views online, especially considering the recent use of social media as a tool to repress and even track down vulnerable communities. Syed also introduced his organization's new Persecution Tracker, an interactive map with updated information on various individuals persecuted for their faith across the world.

Jubilee Campaign's final side event at the IRF Summit was *Overturning a Death Sentence and Challenging the Injustice of Blasphemy Laws in Nigeria*. We dedicated the entirety of this event to Nigerian barrister and Director of Operations for Foundation of Religious Freedom, Kola Alapinni, to welcome him to share his work advocating for Nigerian prisoner of conscience and Muslim gospel singer Yahaya Sharif-Aminu.

In 2020, after a series of WhatsApp audio recordings were released depicting Sharif-Aminu allegedly "praising an imam from the Tijaniyya Muslim brotherhood to the extent that it elevated him above the Prophet Muhammad", Kano State authorities arrested Sharif-Aminu and charged him with blasphemy under the state's Penal Code Law Section 382. In August 2020, the Hausawa Filin Hockey Court convicted and sentenced Sharif-Aminu to death by hanging.

Nigerian lawyer Kola Alapinni admits that he was shocked to hear of Sharif-Aminu's sentencing, especially considering most governors - even in Nigeria's predominantly Muslim northern states - are typically reluctant to sign death warrants in modern times. Alapinni decided to intervene and represent Sharif-Aminu when he realized with horror that there was only about one week left before Sharif-Aminu's death warrant would be formally signed. Alapinni traveled to Kano State outfitted with a mask and dressed as a northern Nigerian to avoid suspicion from radical Muslims, and filed an appeal and engaged with the High Court of Kano State. Finally, in January 2021, the court's appellate division overturned Sharif-Aminu's death sentence; however, a retrial was ordered to occur in the very same court that had originally sentenced him. Regarding this decision, Alapinni stated the following:



"The learned judges misdirected themselves in law when they annulled the judgement of the trial court and then ordered for a retrial at the shari'a court in Hausawa Filin-Hockey instead of granting the defendant a discharge and an acquittal. [Moreover], an accused person can only be tried and punished once for a given offence established by law. It amounts to double jeopardy and a miscarriage of justice to allow for a multiplicity of trial for the same offence."



2022 International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief: Civil Society Fringe

From left: Sarah Ourahmane, Amjad Khan (National Secretary for Public Affairs, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA), Jennifer Tridgell (Senior Legal Advisor, Office of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief), Paul Diamond (UK Barrister, Expert on Law & Religious Freedom), Daniel Hoffman (Executive Director, Middle East Concern), Joël Voordewind (Former Member of the House of Representatives, the Netherlands)

In the week directly following the second annual International Religious Freedom Summit 2022, representatives from Jubilee Campaign USA and Jubilee Campaign Netherlands, and one of the co-founders of the original Jubilee Campaign UK, convened in the Palace of Westminster in London, England to host two civil society fringe events to the International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Our first event, *Freedom to Worship for All Algerians*, focused on the expanding religious repression in Algeria. The detention and sentencing of Algerian Christian convert Hamid Soudad for alleged blasphemy comes amidst an increasingly hostile national climate for religious and ethnic minorities and freedom of belief, as illustrated by the similar sentencing of academic Saïd Djabelkhir for blasphemy and the prosecution of Christian political activist Suleiman Bouhafs, a refugee abducted from neighboring Tunisia, on trumped up politically-motivated charges.



Algeria has unscrupulously classified human rights activists and political dissidents as ‘terrorists’ to justify detaining them. Additionally, as of February 2022, Algerian authorities continue to keep 16 EPA churches shuttered - with an additional ten threatened with closure - and have also been shutting down Ahmadi Muslim houses of worship. Algeria’s violations of religious freedom are also occurring in a wider context of repression. At least 2,000 people are currently being prosecuted for exercising their fundamental human rights. Minorities are increasingly targeted, notably with arbitrary terrorism-related prosecutions and blasphemy charges.

Our side event brought together experts on Algeria as well as representatives of different faith communities to speak about the religious persecution in Algeria. Youssef Ourahmane, Vice President of the Association of Protestant Churches in Algeria, spoke about the harassment faced by Christians and the arbitrary church closures, yet assured that the faith community in Algeria remains steadfast in resisting the government’s attempts at subversion. Daniel Hoffman, Executive Director of Middle East Concern, provided insightful historical background on the persecution of non-Muslim religious communities dating back to a 2006 ordinance, as well as presented other constraints on the manifestation of faith, including laws prohibiting proselytism and the inactivity of a commission tasked with approving faith association applications. Amjad Khan, National Secretary for Public Affairs at Ahmadiyya Muslim Council USA, shed light on the fact that Ahmadiyya individuals are rejected by the broader Muslim community who considers them as non-Muslim and who considers their identity to be offensive in and of itself.

Pictured Above (from left to right): Lord David Alton of Liverpool (Member of the UK House of Lords, co-founder of **Jubilee Campaign UK**), Joël Voordewind (Former Member of the House of Representatives of the Netherlands, representative of **Jubilee Campaign Netherlands**), Sydney Kochan (**Jubilee Campaign USA**)

From left to right: Chiara Porro (Australian Ambassador to the Holy See), Lord David Alton of Liverpool (Member of the House of Lords of the United Kingdom), John Ghanim (Christian convert from Yemen), Rose Parris Richter (Senior Advisor, Office of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief), Joël Voordeewind (Former Member of the House of Representatives, the Netherlands)



2022 International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief: Civil Society Fringe

Later on that same day, Jubilee Campaign joined forces with Set My People Free, Humanists UK, Muslims for Progressive Values, Voice for Justice, and Tahrir Alnisa Foundation to host a second fringe event, *Free to Believe or Not: End Criminalisation of Apostasy and Blasphemy*, featuring numerous reputable experts, survivors, and activists.

We were honored to have our event chaired by Lord David Alton, Member of the UK House of Lords as well as co-founder of Jubilee Campaign UK. Lord Alton provided some insightful opening remarks: *"Whether you call it blasphemy, or whether you call it heresy, or whatever word you want to attach to it, when we fail to live alongside one another in diversity and in respect - learning about coexistence -*

we know from our own history what horrors this can lead to, what we can do to one another. [...] In Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, Christians have reported receiving menacing phone calls threatening revenge for their faith. In Pakistan, tens of Christian converts and Ahmadiyya Muslim minorities are currently on death row for alleged blasphemy. And in one recent and extremely horrific case, 22-year-old Christian university student Deborah Samuel Yakubu was stoned to death and subsequently set on fire by her male classmates after she had criticized her school class WhatsApp group's focus on religious-related content and had stated that Jesus was the reason she was able to pass her exams."

Ms. Chiara Porro, Ambassador of Australia to the Holy See, spoke about Australia's perspective on the death penalty and made a call to action: *"Australia firmly opposes the death penalty in all circumstances and for all people. We support and advocate strongly for the universal abolition of the death penalty and we urge all countries that carry out capital punishment to cease executions and establish a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. At the very least, we call for countries to reduce the scope or incidence of the use of the death penalty, and we strongly oppose the use of blasphemy and apostasy laws to discriminate against religious belief or practice, and the application of the death penalty for these crimes."*

Ambassador Porro also shed light on her government's partnership with Costa Rica in co-leading negotiations on the United Nations General Assembly Resolution for a moratorium on the death penalty. Ambassador Porro and her team are currently working on outreach, in order to increase the number of UN Member States who sign onto the resolution. In 2020, a whopping 147 supported the resolution and 38 voted against. Ambassador Porro hopes to see further success on this resolution in the coming years.



Ambassador Chiara Porro and Lord David Alton



Ms. Rose Parris Richter

Regrettably, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, was unable to attend our event and speak as he fell ill with COVID-19. However, we were honored to welcome his Senior Advisor, Ms. Rose Parris Richter, who spoke about the special rapporteur's mandate and observations with regards to recent trends in apostasy and blasphemy laws: *"Many of you also know that something like 40 percent of UN Member States have anti-blasphemy laws on the books. This is 90 percent of all Middle Eastern and North African countries, 38 percent of sub-Saharan African countries, 34 percent of Asian-Pacific countries, 34 percent of countries in the Americas, and 31 percent of countries in Europe. Those who support criminalizing blasphemy argue that criticism of religion is or defamation of religious figures is a variant of hate speech. These proponents hold the view that there are insufficient prohibitions on speech that negatively stereotype particular religions, and that this poses a threat to social harmony and the rights of individual adherents of those religions. They assert that convictions held in earnest, such as those inspired by religious belief, constitute a foundation of human identity, analogous to race,*

ethnicity, or other immutable characteristics. Such attacks on a defining characteristic such as religion or belief, they say, are grounds for prohibition in the same way that hate speech laws are applied to protect vulnerable persons or groups who are targeted on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. In reality, however, anti-blasphemy laws are generally focused on the degree to which speech causes offense or outrage to religious sentiments, and not to the extent to which that speech undermines the safety or quality [of life] of the individual holding such views."

Mr. John Ghanim, an ex-Muslim Christian convert from Yemen, spoke about his faith conversion, the ministry he has established via social media, and the fact that he was forced to leave his home country due to his newfound religious identity. Mr. Ghanim's entire family formally disowned him, filed a divorce from his wife on his behalf against his will, and took custody of his young daughters, all due to the fact that he decided to convert to Christianity. Mr. Ghanim received weekly death threats for his conversion, both while he still resided in Yemen and even now while he lives in the UK. He explains that many of us would not even be able to imagine the persecution our Christian brothers and sisters face around the world in repressive countries because we are raised to believe that such freedoms are essential and inalienable; therefore, we can hardly envisage an instance in which they are violated or are taken away from us.



Mr. John Ghanim

Our final speaker, Mr. Sam Solomon, is an expert on Islamic jurisprudence who had formally studied Sharia law for fifteen years. Mr. Solomon asserted that "the violation of article 18 is the violation of every article of the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Mr. Solomon went on to explain one current case that is garnering international attention and condemnation. After Sudanese man Hamouda Keffi converted to Christianity in 2018, his Muslim wife Nada's family forced the couple to divorce as Sudanese law prohibits marriages between Muslim women and Christian men. In 2021, following the abolition of Sudan's apostasy law prohibiting religious conversion, Nada herself became Christian and reunited with her husband Hamouda. Regrettably, Nada's family filed a criminal case against the couple, baselessly alleging that Nada's conversion to Christianity was illegitimate and therefore the marriage legally impermissible. Nada and Hamouda are currently facing charges of adultery for their "invalid" marriage, for which the stipulated punishment is 100 lashes. The couple's situation is case in point that even though Sudan's apostasy law has been formally abolished, adultery laws and legislation criminalizing interfaith conversion are applied as *de facto* anti-conversion laws.



2022 End the Persecution of Falun Gong Rally: 23rd Anniversary of Persecution



This year, Jubilee Campaign was invited to present a speech at the 2022 *End the Persecution of Falun Gong Rally* on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. This event was organized in mark the solemn and tragic 23rd anniversary of the start of the Chinese Communist Party's persecution of Falun Gong practitioners. Jubilee Campaign Summer 2022 intern Christina Sturgeon presented on behalf of Executive Director Ann Buwalda, making the following remarks:

"It's widely known that one of the most reprehensible human rights atrocities taking place is the forced organ harvesting of living Falun Gong practitioner detainees in China. What often goes unnoticed though is the subtle messaging and actions that pervade an environment and afford the existence of something as weighty and horrific as forced organ harvesting. The persecution of the youngest and most innocent is very indicative of the country's mentality and capacity for greater harms.

Children of Falun Gong practitioners have to deal with the additional hardship of being separated from their detained practitioner parents, similar to the struggles faced by Uyghur children whose parents and legal guardians are forced into prison camps in Xinjiang. One girl, Yisha, described in a testimony the terror she felt at the onset of the persecution of Falun Gong; throughout her childhood, Yisha continuously feared that her mom would be arrested, and any time her mother did not return from work on time she would look out the window and cry, fearing the "worst case scenario". Eventually, her nightmare came true, as her mother was detained while Yisha was preparing to take China's national college entrance examination.

All of this matters because a threat to one religious person is a danger to us all. Lives are on the line, and we need to keep speaking out."

Among other speakers at the rally were Andrew Bremberg (President & CEO, Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation), Congressman Chabot, Eric Ueland (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom), Annie Boyajian (Vice President, Freedom House), Sean Nelson (Legal Counsel for Global Religious Freedom, ADF International), Piero Tozzi (Senior Advisor, Congressman Chris Smith's office), Arielle Del Turco (Assistant Director, Center for Religious Liberty, Family Research Council), as well as Falun Gong survivors of persecution.



Advocacy Trip to the United Nations in New York

From left to right: Se Hoon Kim (Director, Captive Nations Coalition, Committee on Present Danger: China), Rev. Dr. William (PB) Devlin (CEO, Extreme Faith, Inc.; National President, REDEEM!; Co-Pastor, Infinity Bible Church), Richard Horowitz (Jewish Human Rights Attorney), Dr. Christine Sequenzia (Policy Director, National Association of Evangelicals; Co-Chair, IRF Campaign to Eliminate Blasphemy and Apostasy Laws), Ayodele Ganiu (Executive Producer, Unchained Vibes Africa), Soraya M. Deen (Founder & President, Muslim Women Speakers Movement, Founder & CEO, Peacewrks), Kola Alapinni, Esq. (Barrister & Solicitor of the Supreme High Court of Nigeria; General Counsel, Foundation for Religious Freedom)

As part of our growing campaign to work towards the global and total abolition of laws criminalizing apostasy and blasphemy, Jubilee Campaign has urged the insertion of *specific* language into two influential United Nations General Assembly Resolutions - For a Moratorium on the Death Penalty, and On Extrajudicial Killings - explicitly stating that the death penalty "should never be imposed as a sanction for non-violent conduct such as apostasy and blasphemy". Jubilee Campaign has met virtually with representatives from Costa Rica and Australia - the penholders of this year's resolution for a moratorium on the death penalty - and garnered support among individual religious freedom activists and advocacy organizations across the world for the insertion of such language.



UN Mission of Sri Lanka

- | | | |
|---------|-------------|--------------|
| Algeria | Austria | Australia |
| Belgium | Canada | Denmark |
| France | Germany | India |
| Ireland | Italy | Lebanon |
| Malawi | Maldives | Morocco |
| Nepal | Netherlands | Nigeria |
| Norway | Pakistan | Sierra Leone |
| Spain | Sri Lanka | Sweden |
| Turkey | U. Kingdom | U. States |

Above: List of countries represented among organizational and individual signatories on our proposal to insert language into UNGA Resolutions

On 15 and 16 September, during the 51st Session of the Human Rights Council, a delegation of member organizations from the IRF Campaign to Eliminate Blasphemy and Apostasy Laws traveled to the UN headquarters in New York City to meet with the missions of UN Member States, including

Sri Lanka, Luxembourg, Canada, Nigeria, and Australia. Often in advocacy, notably within the United Nations where political, economic, and bureaucratic obstacles still exist to pressing for changes in resolutions - especially with regards to such controversial topics as apostasy and blasphemy - we have to remain reserved in our expectations in meeting with high-level representatives. However, we were pleasantly surprised with the warm welcomes we received and that these country representatives took time out of their hectic Human Rights Council schedules to discuss with us our UNGA resolutions proposal. Our next step, of course, is to further foster the connections we made in these meetings and urge the countries to vote in favor of inserting our suggested language when the two UN resolutions are up to vote.

Of course, as is to be expected when advocating in any international organization, especially the United

Nations, which convenes representatives from countries from distinctly different geographical regions, economic conditions, government styles, and cultural, ethnic, religious, and ideological traditions, international politics can tend to overshadow genuine and pressing human rights interests. One of the country missions we met with informed us that, while they supported our initiative in principle and in private, they would not be able to vote in favor of it publicly due to their interests in maintaining relationships with certain other countries. We are of the belief, however, that grave humanitarian crises such as the sentencing of religious dissidents to death - the most permanent and irreversible of criminal punishments - for non-violent conduct such as religious expression and identity should always take precedent over national interests and the desire to maintain bilateral and multilateral partnerships.

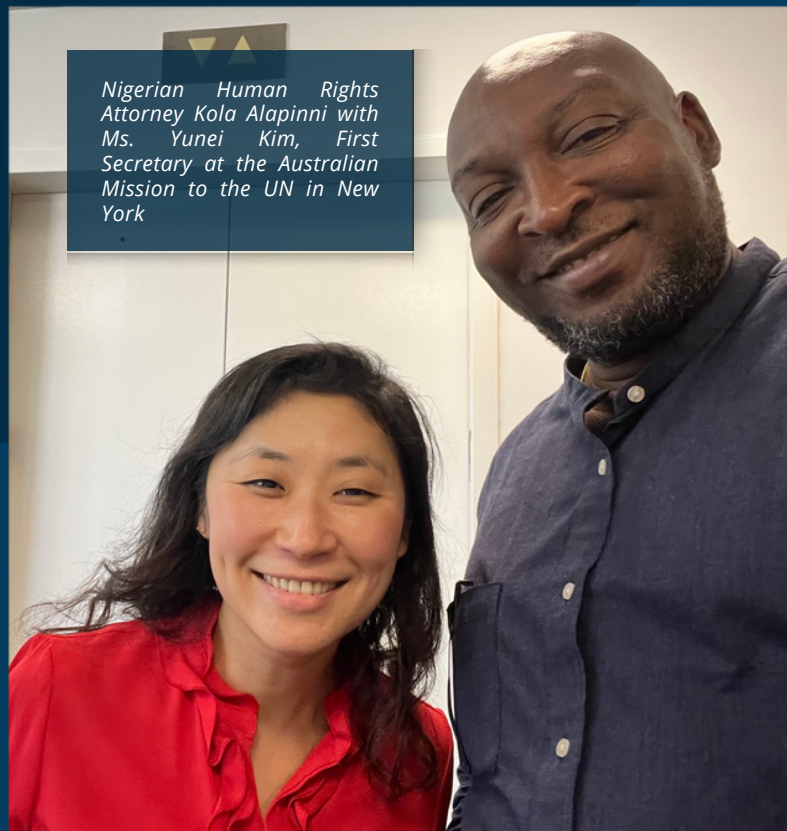
The issue of capital punishment for apostasy and blasphemy is particularly contentious in the realm of international human rights. Out of the 13 nations who maintain the death penalty for apostasy and/or blasphemy - Afghanistan, Brunei, Iran, Libya, Maldives, Mauritania, two states in Malaysia (though dormant), Nigeria (12 northern states), Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, and Yemen - *all* are members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and *nearly all* have at some point served as members of the UN Human Rights Council (with the exception of Brunei Darussalam, Iran, and Yemen). In fact, four of these nations are *currently* members of the Council. The Council claims that the fact that 123 diverse nations have served at some point lends credence to the Council and provides it with "legitimacy when speaking out on human rights violations in all countries". However, we find it *reprehensible* that nations who maintain the death penalty for apostasy and blasphemy can even be presented the opportunity and esteemed position of serving in the highly regarded Human Rights Council.

In our numerous discussions with experts on UN mechanisms and processes and even representatives from member states, the consensus seems to be that the interest is in gaining *as many country signatories as possible* onto the two UNGA resolutions. Our position as civil society, however, is that the predominant goal should be to gain *meaningful signatories*. There unfortunately exists some reluctance in adding specific language on apostasy and blasphemy due to fears that it would prevent some nations - mostly Muslim - from signing onto the resolutions. We argued that nations that have a *true commitment* to eliminate the death penalty in all instances would not hesitate to sign onto our revised resolution drafts. In other words, any country that signs the original resolutions but refuses to sign the revised resolutions due to its inclusion of condemnation of capital punishment for religious offenses cannot be taken at their word that they are committed to working towards the elimination of the implementation of the death penalty and related extrajudicial killings *in all cases*.

Our delegation in the office of the Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the UN



Nigerian Human Rights Attorney Kola Alapinni with Ms. Yunei Kim, First Secretary at the Australian Mission to the UN in New York



Our delegation in the office of the Permanent Mission of Luxembourg to the UN



In November 2022, we learned that, although our *exact* language suggestions that "the death penalty should never be imposed as a sanction for non-violent conduct such as apostasy and blasphemy" were not included in the UNGA Resolutions, some variations of our recommended language were added. The UNGA Resolution on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, for example, for the first time ever included reference to the right to freedom of religion or belief, creating visibility for victims of apostasy and blasphemy laws in the preambular paragraph. The revised resolution, now expressing "concern about acts that can amount to extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions committed against persons exercising their rights to peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and *freedom of religion or belief*" was voted favorably by 131 Member States, more than two-thirds of the United Nations. Additionally, the UNGA Resolution for a moratorium on the death penalty, now including an additional clause stipulating that capital punishment must "not be applied on the basis of discriminatory laws, *including laws which target individuals for exercising their human rights*", was voted favorably by 126 UN Member States.

Countries that Maintain the Death Penalty for Apostasy and/or Blasphemy



Following our our advocacy against blasphemy and apostasy laws at the IRF Summit in Washington, DC, the International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief in London, and at various Mission offices at the United Nations in New York, we were pleased to hear that 18 member nations (right) of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA) published a statement coinciding with our initiative:

"[We] unequivocally call for the end of the death penalty for any activity categorised as blasphemy, apostasy, or speech that might 'defame' or 'insult' religious sentiments;"

"[We] call for the repeal or reform of blasphemy laws, as such laws are often used as a pretext to justify vigilantism or mob violence in the name of religion as a pretext to pursue retribution related to personal grievances;"

"[We] urge governments to impose moratoriums on executions for blasphemy or related offences, and unconditionally release individuals imprisoned based on their views on matters of religion or belief that may differ from official narratives or the views of majority populations;"

"[We] call on all states to support the UN General Assembly resolution 'Moratorium on the use of the death penalty', contributing to progress towards global abolition;"

-  Australia
-  Costa Rica
-  Croatia
-  Cyprus
-  Estonia
-  Greece
-  Hungary
-  Israel
-  Latvia
-  Lithuania
-  Malta
-  Norway
-  Netherlands
-  Poland
-  Romania
-  Slovakia
-  Sweden
-  Sweden



Commission on the Status of Women

Every year, Jubilee Campaign submits reports to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women regarding the plight that North Korean women face in their home country as well as abroad, particularly in China and South Korea. While we rarely seen any drastic changes in North Korean women's hardships from one year to the next, the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus the worsening starvation and destitution, has caused some new trends in discrimination and rights violations against women. For example, the North Korean government over the past two years has forcibly conscripted rural, married, and elderly women to engage in strenuous labor such as building border walls, brick building and laying, and doing night-time construction work on apartment complexes. Meanwhile, the Socialist Women's Union of [North] Korea sent out guidelines requiring all women to donate large portions of their saved materials and foodstuffs to the government for redistribution, and many were instructed to meet a quota and donate no less than one kilogram's worth of silk cocoons per month. One anonymous Women's Union member stated "women are destined to suffer until they die in this country."

While the number of defections from North Korea to neighboring nations such as China and South Korea have rapidly declined during the COVID-19 pandemic - as well as in response to the North Korean government's recent creation of a shoot-on-sight protocol for individuals caught in the borderlands near China - it is still important to highlight the difficulties the defectors that do currently reside in China and South Korea face. Similarly to the situation of North Korean women in their home country, defector women have faced new hardships resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic in China and South Korea. In China, for example, authorities have reneged on its commitments of *non-refoulement* by monitoring, arresting, and repatriating large groups of defectors - including young mothers, elderly women, and even pregnant women - back to North Korea despite that they will inevitably face horrible



punishment such as physical torture, prolonged imprisonment, forced abortions, infanticide, and even execution. Even those North Korean defector women who are permitted to remain in China still struggle for fair treatment; some have reported that they are not able to receive medical care or vaccinations for COVID-19 simply because they are considered "illegal aliens" rather than legitimate refugees. These COVID-19-specific rights violations occur against a backdrop of other persistent and egregious atrocities perpetrated against North Korean women and girls in China. Many are trafficked into forced marriages with Chinese men and are bound by domestic and sexual servitude, while others are sold into prostitution or the lucrative and horrific cybersex industry through which they are forced to perform sex acts on camera.

North Korean defector women in South Korea similarly have faced difficulties due to the pandemic and resulting COVID-19 mitigation efforts. Because defectors do not have the specialized education required to engage in South Korea's highly-technological business culture, many - including predominantly women - instead work in retail, dining, and hospitality, businesses which are not deemed essential and therefore suffered the most from pandemic-related temporary closures. Korea Hana Foundation found that the employment rate of North Korean defector women in 2020-21 was only 52.3% in comparison to the male defector employment rate of 70.7%. This is only further exacerbated by the fact that South Korea is the OECD country with the highest gender wage gap and the most pervasive obstacles to women's safe and equitably employment (i.e., workplace sexual harassment and discrimination). In one terrible example of the struggle North Korean defectors face in adjusting to life in South Korea, in July 2019 defector woman Han Sung-ok and her 6-year-old son Dong-jin were found deceased in their apartment complex after having likely succumbed to starvation.



Report: Imposition of Capital Punishment for Apostasy, Blasphemy, and Religious Offenses in the 21st Century

This year, Jubilee Campaign released a comprehensive report of the the 13 nations that uphold the death penalty for apostasy and blasphemy. In addition to discussing the nation's problematic apostasy laws, we highlighted the following important recent and historic death penalty cases.



Nigerian Islamic gospel singer **Yahaya Sharif-Aminu** was sentenced to death for blasphemy after audio recordings were circulated in which he allegedly praised an imam greater than the Prophet (to be discussed in greater detail later in this newsletter)



In 2012, after a Pakistani Islamic cleric reported receiving blasphemous text messages, authorities arrested **Zafar Bhatti**, a door-to-door salesman and peaceful evangelist, despite his absolute lack of connection to the alleged incident. After nearly a decade in pre-trial detention, during which he was subjected to physical torture and intimidation as well as developed heart disease and suffered three heart attacks, Zafar Bhatti was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death by hanging in January 2022. Bhatti now sits on death row while Pakistani and international activists lobby for his immediate acquittal and release.

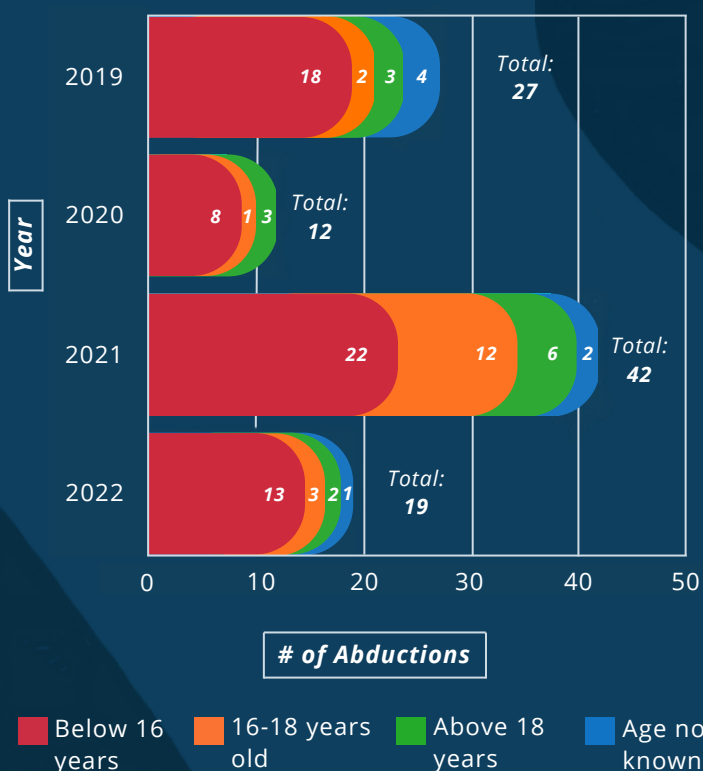


In June 2021, after seven years of imprisonment on death row for alleged blasphemy, Pakistani Christian couple **Shafqat Emmanuel and Shagufta Kausar** were acquitted of their charges and released from their separate prisons. In 2014, the couple was convicted of blasphemy after a Muslim couple falsely accused them of sending blasphemous text messages, a claim which was later disproven.

Report: Conversion without Consent

In November, Jubilee Campaign collaborated with Voice for Justice to release the report *Conversion without Consent: A report on the abductions, forced conversions, and forced marriages of Christian girls and women in Pakistan*. Horrifically, over the past handful of years we have witnessed thousands of cases in which young Christian and Hindu girls and women are kidnapped from their homes, from their jobs, and even from roadsides, and are then transported to locations far from their homes, forcibly converted to Islam, and forced to marry Muslim men much older than them. Our report sheds light on geographic hot spots, intersectional vulnerabilities (i.e., gender minority status, faith minority status, poverty), the complicity of state and non-state actors (i.e., police officers, investigators, neighbors, Islamic clerics), and, most importantly, outlines actionable items that the government of Pakistan must take to eradicate this sinister trend.

Figure 1. Forced Conversions by Year and Age of Victims



Between January 2019 and October 2022, there were in total 100 reported cases of abduction, forced religious conversion, and child marriage - 27 in 2019, 12 in 2020, 42 in 2021, and 19 in 2022. It is important to note that, due to lack of access to police and reporting mechanisms, as well as fear of retribution, many victims' families likely have not raised their cases to public attention and the true number of total cases is therefore estimated to be much higher.

Throughout the observation period, the primary targeted age range of victims was under 18 (61% of all cases), followed by between 16 and 18 years old (18%), and above 18 years of age (14%). 7% of victims were of unknown or unreported ages. Conversely, the ages of perpetrators were remarkably higher, with the average age difference between victims and perpetrators (conducted on a small sample size of cases) being 29.9 years. In many cases the perpetrators are already married with a family and children of their own; some have sons and daughters around the same age as their new victim brides, while others have coerced their original wives to act as accomplices to their crimes.

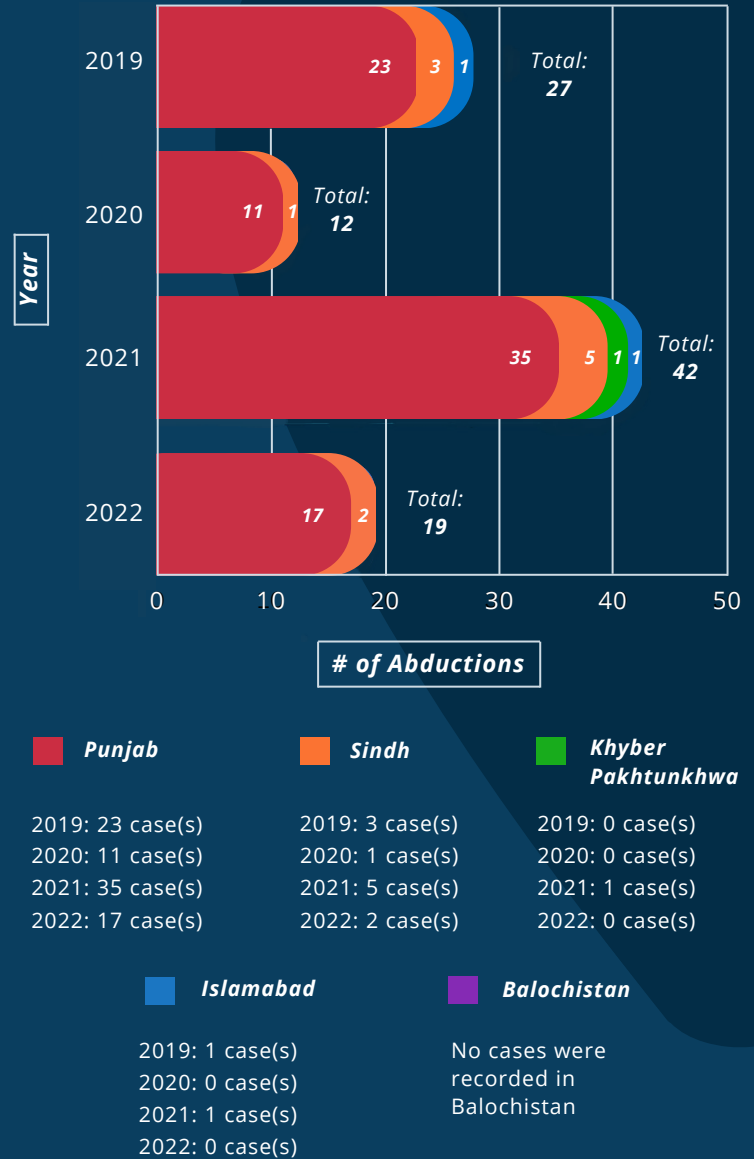
Some victims face a litany of additional human rights abuses following their kidnapping, conversion, and forced marriages; these include surveillance, coerced drug/alcohol ingestion, rape, sodomy, electrocution, forced domestic and/or menial labor, being burnt, forced pregnancy, physical restraint, etc.

Victims also face some indirect secondary repercussions of the crimes committed against them, including higher likelihood of school incompleteness, lower labor force participation, lower earnings, and more. This is further exacerbated in cases in which the child brides become pregnant during their forced marriages. Additionally, victims unsurprisingly are predisposed to the development of mental illnesses resulting from the trauma they face during their abductions, conversions, and marriages, including: insomnia and more general sleep disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic illnesses.

Reprehensibly, numerous state and non-state actors have been observed to be complicit in either the crimes themselves (of kidnapping, faith conversion, and child marriage) or in the failure to enact justice. In numerous cases, local Islamic clerics permitted forced religious conversions and provided conversion certificates, as well as solemnized marriages of men to girls they knew were minors. Political parties, mosques, seminaries, and even NGOs conspired to produce fraudulent birth certificates and faith conversion documentation. Police often delayed or outright refused to file First Information reports (FIRs) on behalf of victims' families and failed to fully investigate claims of abduction. Court authorities permitted perpetrators to maintain custody of their victims prior to trial, allowing further abuse and probable intimidation of victims to provide false testimonies. Many judges overlooked the 1929 Child Marriage Restraint Act, accepted evidently coerced victim statements in favor of their captors, dismissed legitimate cases, and ignored evidence of the victims' underage status in the form of legitimate birth certificates and school records provided by victims' families.

Among the recommendations we present in our report are: (1) the creation of a bill to introduce safeguards against forced faith conversions; (2) increased training of state actors (authorities; judges) in laws against child marriage; (3) proper investigations of disappearances of young girls and claims of abduction; (4) exercise of due diligence in reviewing birth certificates, faith conversion documentation, and school records; (5) extending protection for victims and, when necessary, protective custody, to ensure that there is no coercion involved in the development of their testimonies.

Figure 2. Forced Conversions by Province



Prisoners of Conscience Updates

In March 2020, during the outset of the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, Nepalese pastor Keshav Acharya of Abundant Harvest Church in Pokhara was detained by authorities without warrant, in his home and in front of his family, after a video circulated in which he encouraged his church congregation to pray against the coronavirus and rebuked COVID-19 in the name of Jesus Christ. Authorities had initially charged Pastor Keshav with spreading false information about the pandemic and making unsubstantiated claims that Jesus could stop the virus; this is despite that Pastor Keshav simply encouraged prayers and in no way discouraged congregants from also seeking out necessary medical intervention and treatment in the case that they became ill themselves. Pastor Keshav was detained under these bogus charges for two weeks until he was released on a 5,000 rupee bail (\approx USD \$37) in early April 2020. Reprehensibly, directly following his initial release from prison, Pastor Keshav was immediately re-arrested, this time on similarly spurious charges of "outraging religious feelings" and "attempting to convert" people to Christianity. According to Articles 156 and 158 of Nepal's Penal Code, blasphemy and proselytism are criminalized with two years' imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 rupees (\approx USD \$151), and five years' imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 rupees (\approx USD \$378), respectively. Under these *combined* charges, however, the District Court on 19 April set Pastor Keshav's bail at 500,000 rupees (\approx USD \$3,783) which he was unable to pay in order to be released from prison. One month later, Pastor Keshav's wife posted bail and Pastor Keshav was released once again. Shockingly, authorities arrested Pastor Keshav for a third time, after which they transported him in a 72-hour grueling journey to detention in Dolpa where he was had his hands chained behind his back and was denied food for some time.

Pastor Keshav Acharya Nepal



In November 2021, Pastor Keshav was found guilty of his multiple charges, however, in mid-December we were heartened to learn that he had been granted bail and was permitted to freely spend Christmas with his family. Following this great news, Jubilee Campaign and 17 human rights and religious freedom organizations sent a letter to Nepalese Attorney General Mr. Khamma Bahadur expressing that while we were grateful for Pastor Keshav's bail, we urge for his immediate and just acquittal. We similarly called upon the Nepalese government to review the constitutionality of its criminal code and its laws prohibiting blasphemy and proselytism, both of which infringe upon the right to freedom of religion or belief. Regrettably, in mid-July 2022, we received news that Jumla High Court formally convicted Pastor Keshav and sentenced him to one year in prison and a fine of 10,000 rupees (\approx USD \$76). The most recent news we have received regarding Pastor Keshav's case was in early December 2022 when we learned that a group of United Nations representatives, including Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Ms. Nazila Ghanea, Special Rapporteur on minority issues Mr. Fernand de Varennes, and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, sent a letter to President Bidhya Devi Bhandari of Nepal (1) outlining the violations of Pastor Keshav's rights to freedom from arbitrary detention and freedom of religion or belief, (2) requesting information on the legal grounds - if any - of Pastor Keshav's repeated arrest and harassment by authorities, and (3) urging a review of Nepal's unjust anti-blasphemy and anti-proselytism laws.

In late August 2021, Suleiman Bouhafs (also Slimane) was abducted by presumed plain-clothes police in a black car outside of his home in Tunis, Tunisia. Bouhafs, an Algerian citizen, had originally been arrested in September 2016 in Algeria and convicted on blasphemy charges - "harming the image of the prophet" and "offending Islam" - for a Facebook post he had made which were critical of Islam. Bouhafs served two years in prison in Algeria until 2018, when he was handed a presidential pardon and released. Following his acquittal, Bouhafs fled to adjacent Tunisia and obtained refugee status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2018. Even outside of his home country, however, Bouhafs faced surveillance by the Algerian government, which had accused him of being a political terrorist for his alleged membership in an Amazigh self-determination organization. It is widely speculated that Bouhafs' abduction from Tunisia in August 2021 was conducted either by Algerian authorities or Tunisian authorities working in collaboration with the Algerian government, as days later Bouhafs reappeared in Algiers. Collusion of the Tunisian government would be utterly unacceptable, as the nation is signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, both of which prohibit nations from repatriating a legitimate refugee to his or her home nations where "his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."



Suleiman Bouhafs
Algeria

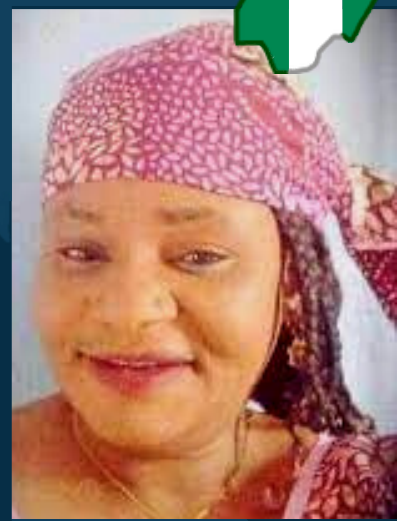
Days after his refoulement to Algeria, Bouhafs was slapped with a litany of ridiculous criminal charges against his lawful political activism and religious affiliation, including "glorification of terrorism", "undermining the integrity of the national territory", "offense against the Prophet of Islam" "publication of false news", and "inciting hatred and racial discrimination". Interestingly, Bouhafs faces a renewed blasphemy charge despite that Algeria is signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which in Article 14(7) prohibits double jeopardy, stating that "no one shall be liable to be tried or punished again for an offence for which he has already been finally convicted or acquitted". Despite numerous global and high-level campaigns for Bouhafs' acquittal and release - by Jubilee Campaign, Middle East Concern, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International - Bouhafs remains imprisoned.



Deborah Samuel
Nigeria

In May 2022, the world was horrified to see a viral video circulated online in which 19-year-old Nigerian Christian woman Deborah Samuel Yakubu was viciously stoned to death by her very own classmates and on the premises of Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto where she was enrolled as a second-year student. Deborah's attackers accused her of blasphemy after she had previously criticized Muslim classmates' misuse of their classroom WhatsApp group, which was formed for academic purposes, to engage in religious discussion and debate. She additionally had angered her Muslim peers by stating that prayers to Jesus had aided in her passing of last semester's difficult exams. Days later, Deborah's assailants ambushed her on their college campus, stoned her to death while she pleaded for her life and spoke her final words, "what do you hope to achieve with this?", and set her body on fire, all of which was filmed and posted on social media. Despite international calls for Deborah's killers - identified in the video - to be duly prosecuted for murder, Sokoto authorities had reprehensibly opted to charge them only with "criminal conspiracy and inciting public disturbance", both of which are bailable offenses.

Rhoda Jatau
Nigeria



Just over a week following Deborah's killing, police in Bauchi state arrested 45-year-old Christian woman and mother of five, Rhoda Ya'u Jatau, after she had shared a video condemning Deborah's senseless murder. Authorities ridiculously claim that Rhoda herself had committed blasphemy and charged her with "exciting contempt of religious creed." Regrettably, Rhoda remains in custody on false charges seven months later, and her husband and children have had to relocate to another city for safety.



Yahaya Sharif-Aminu
Nigeria

Another individual who has consistently been the subject of Jubilee Campaign's and Foundation for Religious Freedom's advocacy is 24-year-old Nigerian Yahaya Sharif-Aminu. Yahaya, an Islamic gospel singer of the Sufi Tijaniyya tradition, was arrested in May 2020 after a recording of his music circulated in which he allegedly committed blasphemy by praising an imam "to the extent [that] it elevated him above the Prophet." Prior to his arrest, Yahaya fled his local community in response to his family home being burnt down by an angry Muslim mob. After being detained in May, in August 2020 a Sharia court in Filin-Hockey convicted Yahaya of blasphemy and barbarically sentenced him to death by hanging. Coincidentally, around that time, Nigerian human rights and religious freedom lawyer Kola Alapinni heard that the deadline for Yahaya to make an appeal against his sentence was nearing, and he decided to bravely take up his case. Alapinni traveled covertly to Kano State and even dressed as a Northern Nigerian in order to take up his case; in Nigeria, like in many other nations, providing legal counsel to an individual charged with blasphemy is seen as an act of blasphemy itself and angers certain Muslim individuals. Alapinni, along with some like-minded lawyers and partners already residing in Northern Nigeria, worked to submit an appeal swiftly and, in the meantime, collaborate with SaharaReporters to publish the details of Yahaya's case in order to spark outrage among the international human rights community.

Alapinni's appeal of Yahaya's charges were partially successful, though the exact desired results were not achieved. Though Kano State High Court overturned Yahaya's death sentence in January 2021, "citing irregularities in the Sharia Court's previous trial", it remanded the case for retrial back in the very same court that originally convicted and sentenced Yahaya. Kola filed a secondary appeal of this decision for a retrial, stating that it would amount to double jeopardy, but it was ultimately rejected in March 2022, after which Kola decided to appeal to the Supreme Court of Nigeria, not just for Yahaya's immediate acquittal and release, but also for a decision that Kano State's blasphemy laws are incompatible both with the Nigerian Constitution's provisions on freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and international human rights standards.

Thank You!

We were incredibly blessed throughout this past year to have numerous opportunities to raise the plight of our persecuted brothers and sisters on international stages and to expand our network of advocacy to include new like-minded partner organizations and activists. While the COVID-19 pandemic uprooted much of our in-person advocacy and activism

throughout all of 2019, 2020, and much of 2021, we were finally able to resume many of our yearly delegations to the United Nations in New York and annual conferences in the United Kingdom. Regrettably, certain unanticipated events - such as the Russian invasion and violent occupation of Ukraine and prolonged construction at the United Nations in Geneva - have presented some obstacles to our physical engagement at the UN and participation in colloquiums abroad in 2022. However, we are confidently anticipating that 2023 will be one of the most productive years of advocacy for Jubilee Campaign with projects planned for the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and Human Rights Council, as well as the International Religious Freedom Summit, IRF Ministerial, and Religious Liberty Partnership.

Our successes in 2022 would have largely remained un-realized without your dedicated prayers and generous financial contributions. Similarly, we desperately need your support for us to carry out our myriad projects in 2023. By assisting Jubilee Campaign financially and prayerfully, you are playing a crucial role; you are helping us offer legal services to individuals in Pakistan and Nigeria imprisoned for their religious beliefs. You are helping us bring to global stages the individualized and personal stories of Algerian Christians who are unable to worship as their churches are being closed by the government, North Korean defector women who are subjected to abuse both in North Korea and in their destination countries, and the thousands of vulnerable faith minority girls in Africa and Asia who are kidnapped, forced or sold into fraudulent marriages, and made to abandon their faith. You help us act as a vital voice for those suffering in silence. We thank you deeply and wish for you a wonderful 2023.



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