

12 May 2023



Jubilee Campaign Statement Commemorating First Anniversary of Lynching of Nigerian Student Deborah Yakubu Emmanuel

On 12 May 2023, Jubilee Campaign solemnly commemorates the first anniversary of the barbaric lynching of Nigerian university student Deborah Yakubu (Emmanuel) by her Muslim classmates on accusations of alleged blasphemy. In the year since the despicable incident by which a young, innocent Christian woman had her life prematurely and horrifically stolen from her, none of the perpetrators have been held accountable despite the video documentation of the atrocity which clearly reveals the culprits' faces and therefore discloses their identities.

Deborah was a bright second-year student of economics at Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto State, northwestern Nigeria. On 12 May 2022, a mob of incensed Muslim students, in a deplorable hate crime, targeted Deborah in response to an allegedly blasphemous comment she made in a WhatsApp messaging group via a voice recording. Days after as Deborah was at her university campus, a mob of classmates began pelting her with stones while exclaiming "Allahu Akbar", brutally killing her before committing one final desecration by throwing rubber tires on and setting fire to Deborah's battered body.

In the aftermath of the murder, only two people were arrested by authorities notwithstanding the presence of several federal police within the vicinity of the university grounds. In an even more egregious miscarriage of justice, the two detainees were arraigned on the grossly inadequate charges of "criminal conspiracy and disturbing the peace", both of which are bailable offenses.¹ Numerous individuals and entities have castigated the lack of murder charges raised against the suspects, a decision which has disconcerting implications for the rampant dispensation for perpetrators of religiously-motivated violence. The Nigerian Bar Association conveyed the collective outcry, stating "the NBA is strongly opposed to a banalisation of the situation" and appealing to the government to "immediately rethink its prosecution strategy and file charges that truly reflect the gravity of the situation".² Christian Solidarity Worldwide echoed this urgency, urging the Nigerian government to duly exercise rule of law by "reviewing these charges as a matter of urgency, and sparing no effort in identifying and arraigning perpetrators identified on video in a manner commensurate with their role in their heinous murder".³ Deborah's killers remain at large to this day.

Jubilee Campaign notes with indignation the Nigerian government's judicial negligence, and we are similarly appalled by the resulting social calamity which has targeted another innocent Christian woman for accusations of blasphemy. While Nigerian authorities have unconscionably failed to prosecute any of the men responsible for Deborah's gruesome death, they have in a ridiculous and impermissible act arrested one woman who forwarded to

¹ Magdalene Kahi, "[Christian Entity Calls for More Arrests, 'murder charge' for Killers of Nigerian Student](#)", *Acia Africa*, 18 May 2022.

² Hillary Essien, "[Deborah's killers can't be charged with public disturbance, NBA warns police, Tambuwal](#)", *Peoples Gazette Nigeria*, 17 May 2022.

³ *Ibid.*

the WhatsApp group of the Primary Healthcare Board of Warji Local Government Area a video of an individual condemning Deborah's murder.⁴ 45-year-old Christian mother of five and healthcare worker, Rhoda Ya'u Jatau, has been detained incommunicado since 20 May 2022 by Bauchi police on charges of "inciting public disturbance, exciting contempt of religious creed, and cyber-stalking"; Rhoda's defense team has been repeatedly denied access to any supposed 'criminal evidence' gathered by the prosecutors, and her trial proceedings have repeatedly been delayed.⁵ The principal absurdity regarding Rhoda's case is that she has incurred the same charges of 'inciting public disturbance' as the perpetrators of Deborah's savage lynching, implying the Nigerian state's repulsive standpoint that expression of 'derogatory' opinions and criminal homicide are transgressions of comparable distinction. In the year since Rhoda's imprisonment, her husband Ya'u Adamu has been devastated, lamenting that "I have known no sleep since she was arrested. All I want is for her to be alive and free". He and the couple's five children have had to sell all of their assets to finance a lawsuit against Rhoda's detention, and as a result, have had to relocate to an unfinished building.⁶

Nigeria is unfortunately one of seven countries which sanctions the death penalty for blasphemy and one of thirteen which sanctions the death penalty for apostasy and/or blasphemy, a grave violation of international humanitarian principles. Nigeria has neither applied the moratorium on the death penalty nor repealed its anti-blasphemy laws. The impunity surrounding the murder of Deborah Emmanuel and preceding cases sets a worrying precedent that Nigeria approves of the implementation of capital punishment for unproven blasphemy accusations, in violation of both its own presiding constitution and international law obligations, and refuses to protect its citizens against violence motivated by such anti-blasphemy laws and concocted allegation. In all, the authorities' inaction to stop the violence committed against Deborah, the lack of comprehensive investigation into the murder and prosecution of perpetrators, the escape of Deborah's friends due to mounting threats, and the arbitrary arrest of individuals who condemned the lynching, altogether amount to a confluence of human rights violations for which Nigerian authorities must be held accountable.

It is incumbent upon the Nigerian government to initiate a comprehensive and multidisciplinary investigation surrounding the circumstances of Deborah's death; provide security, compensation, and counseling to all innocent eyewitnesses and secondary victims of the attack, including Deborah's friends; issue compensation and support to Deborah's family; and remove capital punishment as a sanction for blasphemy, adultery, and other non-violent conduct in Nigeria's northern states, in compliance with its domestic legislation and international commitments.

Deborah Emmanuel is survived by one older sibling, five younger siblings, her mother Emmanuel Garba, and her mother Alheri Emmanuel.⁷



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⁴ Morning Star News, "[Christian Woman on Trial for Blasphemy in Northeast Nigeria](#)", 5 October 2022. ; Barnabas Aid, "[Christians Attacked After Blasphemy Allegation in Bauchi, Nigeria](#)", 24 May 2022.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Masara Kim, "[Husband of Christian woman imprisoned for blasphemy: 'I have not slept since she was arrested.'](#)", *Christian Solidarity International*, 3 November 2022.

⁷ Vivian Chime, "['We take it as \[an\] act of God' - Deborah Emmanuel's parents speak on her murder](#)", *The Cable Nigeria*, 15 May 2022.