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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Jubilee Campaign, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 May 2024]

*Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Highlighting Religious Prisoners of Conscience in Algeria, Egypt, Nepal, Nigeria, and Pakistan

Item 3: Interactive Dialogue on the report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression (HRC res. 52/9)

Background

Jubilee Campaign would like to raise to the Council's attention the numerous cases around the world in which faith minorities and religious converts are detained for 'crimes' of blasphemy on exaggerated allegations, or in which they are imprisoned on the basis of their religion, beliefs, and/or associated activities. We urge the Special Rapporteur and the Council to call for their immediate release and the repeal of anti-blasphemy laws and similar laws used to target these individuals for exercising their freedom of conscience and expression.

Algeria: Youssef Ourahmane

Reverend Youssef Ourahmane, the Vice President of the Église Protestante d'Algérie (Protestant Church of Algeria) has participated in numerous panels addressing religious persecution of Algerian Christians, notably raising awareness to the closure of nearly all of the nation's 47 churches.¹ In July 2022, speaking at a parallel event on the sidelines of the 50th session of the UN Human Rights Council, Pastor Ourahmane spoke about the repeatedly rebuffed attempts of EPA to have its operation license renewed since 2014, leaving it in legal limbo, noting that "The Algerian government wants to keep the church weak and ultimately see it disappear".² In March 2023, Oran authorities apprehended Pastor Ourahmane on charges of "holding an unauthorised religious assembly" and "holding worship in a building not permitted for worship".³ He had organized a brief stay for Christian families on an unrecognized church compound. In September 2023, a court convicted Pastor Ourahmane in absentia and sentenced him to two years' imprisonment which the court reduced to a one-year prison term during an appeal hearing in November 2023. Reverend Ourahmane filed a second appeal which was heard in April 2024; however, the court upheld his original sentencing and added a six-month suspended sentence. Reverend Ourahmane is currently preparing an appeal to Algeria's Supreme Court.⁴

Egypt: Abdulbaqi Saeed Abdo

Egypt continues to detain Yemeni Christian convert and UNHCR-recognized asylum seeker Abdulbaqi Saeed Abdo since December 2021, and authorities subsequently nearly repatriated Abdo to Yemen in June 2022 in contravention of the principle of non-refoulement.⁵ Abdo had originally fled to Egypt in 2014 in search of safety after his conversion to Christianity was disclosed and his Muslim family and in-laws exacted revenge on his first wife, causing a fatal burning accident by replacing her cooking oil with gasoline.⁶ The Egyptian Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) arrested Abdo in December 2021; the following month, his current wife visited him in prison at which point he told her that he was repeatedly interrogated about videos he shared online in which he discussed his conversion to Christianity. Only after Abdo's wife gave birth in April 2022 was she provided with a certificate of her husband's incarceration. The document claimed that Abdo faced charges of "joining a terrorist group"; in reality, however, his 'offense' was his membership in a Facebook community for Christian converts from Muslim backgrounds. Additionally, he faces charges of "contempt of Islamic religion" and

¹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *2024 Annual Report*.

² Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, "[Algeria: Government should amend its national legislation to comply with its international obligations](#)", 7 July 2022.

³ Middle East Concern, "[Algeria: Church leader convicted](#)", 15 September 2023.

⁴ Church in Chains, "[ALGERIA: Rev Youssef Ourahmane loses appeal](#)", 8 May 2024.

⁵ Amnesty International, "[Urgent Action: Human Rights Lawyer Must Be Released](#)", 7 September 2023.

⁶ Morning Star News, "[Woman in Yemen Burned to Death for Her Faith](#)", 29 August 2014.

“discrimination against Islam”.⁷ During his time in detention in Egypt, Abdo has been subjected to solitary confinement and has been denied medication for his heart condition, high cholesterol, and hypertension. Prison guards and inmates have compelled him to recite Islamic prayers and fast during Ramadan. Should Egypt deport Abdo, his wife, and his five children to Yemen, they would face further persecution and violence.

Nepal: Keshav Acharya

In March 2020, pastor Keshav Acharya of Abundant Harvest Church was arrested shortly after he and his wife, pastor Junu, had responded to a house call from a local man asking for the couple to pray with him for the recovery of his ill wife who was suffering from COVID. Authorities detained Pastor Acharya, charging him with spreading misinformation about the virus. After his wife posted bail, however, the Kaski District Administration filed new charges of “outraging religious feelings” and “attempting to convert” others to Christianity by disseminating religious materials. After numerous releases on bail and a temporary term of detention in a prison in the remote Dolpa district, Pastor Acharya was convicted of proselytism by Dolpa District Court in November 2021 and sentenced to two years’ imprisonment. The following month, he was released on bail in time to spend Christmas with his family, and his charges were dropped in June 2022. Regrettably, Jumla High Court reviewed the Dolpa court’s verdict and reaffirmed Pastor Acharya’s proselytism conviction, sentencing him to a one-year prison term. Despite the pastor, the pastor’s wife, the representative lawyer, and human rights advocates noting that Pastor Keshav’s distribution of religious pamphlets is a lawful manifestation of faith and does not necessarily indicate attempts to convert others, in October 2023 the Supreme Court rejected the appeal. Pastor Keshav was summoned in January 2024 to serve his prison term but has not been apprehended.⁸

Nigeria: Yahaya Sharif-Aminu

A young Sufi Muslim musician, Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, was sentenced to execution by hanging for alleged blasphemy in August 2020 by the Hausawa Filin Hockey Upper-Sharia court, in accordance with the Kano State’s sharia penal code. They charged Sharif-Aminu for sharing a song via WhatsApp which they considered derogatory toward the Prophet. The same month of his arrest, Aminu’s family was forced to flee their home as a mob of angry Muslim youth set fire to their home as revenge for Aminu’s song.⁹ In February 2021, the Federal Kano High Court overturned the original death sentence on procedural grounds, but still sent it for a retrial in the same lower court for the same offense, which Aminu’s lawyer Kola Alapinni condemned as an unlawful act of double jeopardy.¹⁰ In 2022, the Kano State Court of Appeal upheld Aminu’s sentence and concluded that the state’s Sharia penal code was legal, despite widespread consensus that blasphemy laws are in contravention of international standards of freedom of religion or belief.¹¹ ADF International has collaborated with Alapinni to file another appeal to the Nigerian Supreme Court against Aminu’s unjust sentencing, which is currently in process while the defendant awaits a retrial. In May 2024 five UN experts, including the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and opinion whose report this present written submission addresses, called upon the Nigerian government to overturn Aminu’s conviction and release him from custody, and additionally to repeal the death penalty for blasphemy, as such conduct is protected under freedom of expression and religious belief.¹²

Pakistan: Anwar Kenneth

Anwar Kenneth, a former officer at Pakistan’s Fisheries Department, has been on death row for more than two decades on conviction of blasphemy. In September 2001, Kenneth had

⁷ *UA EGY 4/2022*, 30 January 2022.

⁸ Church in Chains, *Keshav Raj Acharya*, 28 February 2024.

⁹ Amnesty International, “Urgent Action: Nigerian Singer at Risk of Imminent Execution”, *AFR 44/2968/2020*, 4 September 2020.

¹⁰ ADF International, “Musician Sentenced to Death for Blasphemy Appeals to Nigerian Supreme Court - ADF International Supporting Potential Landmark Case”, 14 November 2022.

¹¹ Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), “UN experts call for the release of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu”, 17 May 2024.

¹² OHCHR, “Nigeria: UN experts demand release of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu”, 16 May 2024.

written a response letter to Muslim scholar, ulama Haji Mehmood Zafar, in which he divulged his beliefs as a practitioner of Christianity. In July 2002, an Additional Session Court in Lahore found Kenneth guilty of “defaming” and “insulting” the Prophet, sentencing him to capital punishment and a fine of 500,000 Pakistani rupees. The defendant’s case was only reviewed after more than a decade, at which point in 2014 the Lahore High Court upheld Kenneth’s conviction and remanded him to death row where he would remain for another ten years, until the present. Within the past twenty years, Kenneth’s health has deteriorated, his son has been forced to flee Pakistan due to death threats by radical Muslim community members in connection with the defendant’s case, and his elder sister has reached her 80s and prays that she will see him released from prison in her lifetime.¹³ The Supreme Court of Pakistan was to hold its final appeal hearing for Kenneth’s case in mid-April 2024, though it was indefinitely postponed.¹⁴

¹³ Jubilee Campaign, “[Urgent Call for Intervention in the Case of Pakistani Christian Anwar Kenneth, Unjustly Imprisoned 22 Years on Death Row for Expression of Religious Belief](#)”, 3 April 2024.

¹⁴ Morning Star News, “[Hope for Christian 22 Years on Death Row for ‘Blasphemy’](#)”, 25 March 2024.