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Third UA: 137/20 Index: AFR 44/9041/2025 Nigeria of February 17, 2025

## **NIGERIA SINGER ON DEATH ROW DENIED MEDICAL CARE**

Yahaya Sheriff-Aminu, a 25-year-old singer, was sentenced to death by hanging in August 2020 for “blasphemy” after sharing a song on WhatsApp. His case remains stalled, with an appeal filed before Nigeria’s Supreme Court in November 2022 still awaiting a hearing date. Meanwhile, Yahaya, who has asthma, remains in a correctional facility without proper access to his medication. Denying him medical care endangers his life. Nigerian authorities must overturn his conviction and grant his immediate, unconditional release. Until then, he must receive the treatment he urgently needs.

### **Write to the Kano State Attorney General & Commissioner for Justice urging him to:**

- Drop all charges against Yahaya Aminu Sheriff and ensure his immediate and unconditional release.
- Set a timely date for his appeal hearing to prevent further delays in justice.
- Ensure his detention conditions meet international standards, in line with the Mandela Rules.
- Grant him immediate access to adequate health care, including necessary medication for his asthma.
- Provide him with sufficient food and clothing to maintain his well-being while in detention.

### **Write to:**

Governor Salomón Jara Cruz  
Kano State Attorney General & Commissioner for Justice  
Haruna Isa Dederi  
Kano State Ministry of Justice  
Audu Baka Secretariat Kano  
15, Club Road, P.M.B. 3352, Kano, Nigeria  
Emails: <https://justice.kn.gov.ng> / [info@justice.kn.gov.ng](mailto:info@justice.kn.gov.ng)  
Salutation: *Dear Attorney General,*

### **And copy:**

Mr. Abba Kawu Zanna  
Minister & Acting High Commissioner  
High Commission for the Federal Republic of Nigeria  
295 Metcalfe Street  
Ottawa, ON K2P 1R9  
Tel: (613) 236-0521,2,3/236-0521 Ext 240 (24h)  
Email: [chancery@nigeriahattawa.ca](mailto:chancery@nigeriahattawa.ca)

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

On August 10, 2020, an Upper Sharia Court in Kano State sentenced Yahaya Sheriff-Aminu, then 21, to death for “blasphemy” after he shared a song on WhatsApp. In January 2021, a High Court overturned his conviction due to trial irregularities and ordered a retrial.

His lawyers opposed the retrial, arguing he would still face the same blasphemy law. They appealed to the Kano Division Appeal Court, seeking to dismiss the case and declare the law unconstitutional. However, in August 2022, the court upheld both the retrial and the blasphemy law. In November 2022, his lawyers escalated the appeal to Nigeria’s Supreme Court, challenging the constitutionality of Kano’s blasphemy laws. Two years later, the case remains stalled, with no hearing date set. Meanwhile, Yahaya remains in detention.

In March 2024, Amnesty International visited Yahaya in prison and found his health in decline. He suffers from severe asthma but lacks regular access to necessary medication. He was also denied proper food and clothing. During a follow-up visit in November 2024, Amnesty International reported some improvement due to medication provided by his family. However, he still lacks consistent medical care.

Nigeria’s detention conditions remain dire, failing to meet the UN’s Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Mandela Rules). Prisoners frequently lack basic necessities, including adequate food and healthcare.

Blasphemy laws violate the right to freedom of expression. Under international human rights law, the death penalty should only apply to the “most serious crimes,” defined as intentional killing. Yahaya’s case has drawn widespread criticism. In April 2023, the European Parliament called for his release. In May 2024, UN experts also demanded his freedom.

Concerns over trial fairness persist. Yahaya was denied legal representation before and during his trial. Only after pressure from human rights activists was he allowed legal counsel for his appeal.

Nigeria continues to impose the death penalty despite calls for abolition. In 2023, courts handed down over 246 new death sentences, bringing the total number of people on death row to more than 3,413. Both the 2004 National Study Group on the Death Penalty and the 2007 Presidential Commission on the Administration of Justice warned that Nigeria’s legal system cannot ensure fair trials. They called for a moratorium on executions, a position echoed by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

International law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), affirms that restrictions on freedom of expression must meet strict legal tests. The UN Human Rights Committee has explicitly stated that blasphemy laws are incompatible with these protections.

Yahaya Sheriff-Aminu’s conviction, death sentence, and prolonged detention violate Nigeria’s human rights obligations. Authorities must ensure his immediate release, uphold fair trial rights, and abolish the use of the death penalty for blasphemy.

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***Please take action as soon as possible until August 17, 2025. The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.***