

NSS urges release of Humanist leader after a year in detention

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The National Secular Society has urged authorities in Nigeria to release a Humanist leader who has been in arbitrary detention for a year after being accused of insulting Islam's prophet Muhammad.

Mubarak Bala, the president of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, has been held without charge since he was [arrested on 28 April 2020](#).

He was arrested after petitioners objected to some of his Facebook posts. For much of his time in detention, he has been denied access to legal counsel.

He has been held in the state of Kano, where the petition against him was launched, after being arrested from his home in the state of Kaduna.

Sharia courts operate alongside secular courts in Kano state, and blasphemy can be punishable by death. Bala has also received many death threats.

In December a judge at the High Court in Nigeria's capital, Abuja, [ruled that Bala should be immediately released](#).

NSS letter

The NSS has today written to the governor of Kano to urge him to secure Bala's "immediate release and safety".

The society's letter raises the concern that Bala has been "targeted for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and religion or belief".

It says his continued incarceration without charge violates the fundamental rights guaranteed under Nigeria's constitution.

It adds that if charges are brought, Bala should be transferred to a territory where it is more likely he will receive a fair trial and his wellbeing, safety and access to legal counsel must be guaranteed.

Explaining the decision to write the letter, NSS chief executive Stephen Evans said: "Mubarak Bala's continued detention is a blatant violation of his fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of expression and freedom of belief.

"And it has now cost him a year of freedom. He should be released and his rights guaranteed, without delay."

International efforts to secure release

Humanists International (HI), which is coordinating efforts to secure Bala's fundamental rights, has today published an open letter to the governor of Kano state [calling for his immediate release](#). The

NSS is among signatories to the letter.

HI is also urging people to share calls for Bala's release under the hashtag #FreeMubarakBala on social media.

The UK government [took up the case last year](#) after lobbying from a range of groups, including the NSS and some of its supporters.

Update: On Wednesday seven UN human rights experts [condemned Nigerian authorities](#) for failing to release Mubarak Bala, describing it as a "flagrant violation of fundamental human rights".

Read more about Mubarak Bala's situation in Humanists International's [briefing](#).

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