

# Nigerian humanist sentenced to 24 years in prison for 'blasphemy'

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The National Secular Society has condemned a Nigerian court for sentencing a humanist activist to 24 years in prison for 'blasphemy'.

Mubarak Bala, president of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, was arrested in 2020 in connection with a series of Facebook posts that some deemed "blasphemous".

Yesterday the Kano State High Court [convicted](#) Bala of 18 counts of causing a public disturbance.

Bala was arrested after a petition from a group of lawyers, sent to local police, said he had called the Islamic prophet Muhammad "all sorts of denigrating names".

Mubarak pled guilty to the charges in court, which was not part of the agreed legal strategy. Humanists International [said](#) it is likely he was subjected to intimidation, and there have been unconfirmed reports of threats against his family members.

He was [held without charge](#) for 462 days and was denied access to a legal team for over five months. He has also been denied access to medical care. In December 2020 a judge at the High Court in Nigeria's capital, Abuja, [ruled that Bala should be immediately released](#), but Kano State authorities failed to comply.

His court hearing had been subject to repeated adjournments.

Bala was previously arrested and committed to a psychiatric unit by his family over criticism of Islam in 2014. He has also been subject to death threats.

## NSS comment

The NSS has contributed to Humanists International's campaign to release Bala, and in 2021 [urged authorities](#) in Nigeria to release him after he had spent a year in detention.

NSS head of policy and research Megan Manson said: "This is an outrageous and appalling punishment for a crime that shouldn't even be a crime.

"Blasphemy laws of any kind have no place anywhere. They are an affront to the fundamental human rights of freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief.

"Mubarak Bala should be released, and his safety and rights secured, immediately and unconditionally.

"We again join calls for the Nigerian authorities to release Bala and to repeal their blasphemy laws."

Picture [via Humanists International](#).

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