



THE BARONESS COX
HOUSE OF LORDS
LONDON SW1A 0PW

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Foreign Secretary
House of Commons

16 May 2022

Dear Foreign Secretary,

Re: Freedom of religion or belief in Nigeria; murder of Deborah Samuel Yakubu

I am writing to commend your colleague, Catriona Laing, for issuing a statement about the brutal murder of Deborah Samuel Yakubu in Sokoto, northwest Nigeria. I urge you to make a similar public statement and to ensure that perpetrators of this horrific act are held to account.

Deborah was a Christian student at Shehu Shagari College of Education. She was murdered on her school campus on Thursday 12 May for alleged blasphemy. Multiple verifiable videos posted online show a crowd beating her with stones and sticks whilst shouting ‘Allahu Akbar’. The perpetrators’ faces are visible, suggesting they did not fear being held to account. Another video shows her body in flames as one of her killers boasts: “I was the one who killed and burnt her with these matches. Allahu Akbar!” Nigerian authorities have since claimed the arrest of two offenders, although the videos show dozens participated in Deborah’s lynching.

Her alleged blasphemy related to a voice note she left on her class WhatsApp group. She reportedly said on Wednesday 11 May that the group should be used for discussions about class assignments and not for “nonsense”, referring to religious messages being posted by other classmates. Relatedly I understand Deborah was asked how she managed to pass her exams if this was a distraction and she replied “Jesus”. A rumour circulated that she had insulted the Prophet Muhammad. The next day she was murdered.

The Governor of Sokoto state, Aminu Tambuwal, did not condemn the murder, promising only “investigations into the remote and immediate causes of the incident.” Meanwhile, President Buhari failed to call for the perpetrators to be punished. He implied that Deborah should have been tried in court for blasphemy, which in Sokoto might carry the death sentence.

Deborah’s killing comes in the wake of numerous similar attacks across northern and central states. Yet perpetrators are rarely, if ever, brought to justice. For example, Nigerian human rights group Intersociety has been monitoring, documenting and exposing the killing of Christians and burning or destruction of their sacred places of worship in Nigeria since 2010. Their report of 3 October 2021 disclosed that Islamist Jihadists, had between January and September 2021, hacked to death no fewer than 4,400 unprotected Christians. And recently, the Stefanos Foundation reported 49

attacks in 28 days in April, with 254 people killed, 61 injured and 168 kidnapped. I therefore urge you to make immediate representations to the Government of Nigeria to enforce the rule of law and guarantee the rights of all citizens, including those who remain vulnerable to FoRB violations, in accordance with international standards. If the authorities do not respond effectively, will you re-consider what measures should be taken to prevail upon the Nigerian Government to do so?

The security situation in northern and central Nigeria is highly volatile. Religious tensions are expected to escalate in the run-up to the 2023 election. I and many colleagues request you to take immediate and effective action as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Caroline". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

Cc:

Vicky Ford MP, Minister for Africa

Fiona Bruce MP, Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief

Catriona Laing, High Commissioner to Nigeria