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PUBLIC STATEMENT

LATEST DEVELOPMENT
January 7, 2025

Mubarak Bala's release must be followed by reforms in Nigeria

Amnesty Freedom welcomes the release of Nigerian humanist Mubarak Bala and calls for changes to the laws and practices that enabled his detention.

What we know

Police arrested Mubarak Bala in April 2020 over Facebook posts. A federal court's release order was not implemented, and on April 5, 2022, a Kano court sentenced him to 24 years. The sentence was reduced to five years on appeal. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found his detention arbitrary. Humanists International reported on January 7, 2025, that he had been freed, and states that he was released on August 19, 2024. [1–5]

Our position

No one should be jailed for what they believe or do not believe. We welcome Bala's release, but a release does not undo years of detention or remove the laws and practices that made it possible. Nigeria is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. [2, 6–7]

Our calls

Amnesty Freedom calls on the authorities to:

1. Review laws used to criminalize peaceful expression about religion, at both the federal and state levels.
2. Enforce court orders on detention and guarantee prompt access to a lawyer.
3. Act on the UN Working Group's findings and provide an effective remedy to Bala.
4. Investigate credible threats against people targeted for their beliefs or nonbelief.

Supporting information

1. Mubarak Bala - Humanists International
2. UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinion No. 9/2024 concerning Mubarak Bala
3. Mubarak Bala | Freedom Now
4. Mubarak Bala | USCIRF
5. Nigeria: humanist leader freed at last
6. United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
7. UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 34 on freedom of expression

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Note to editors: *This statement is based on the public sources listed above. The date shown is that of the most recent development recorded in those sources; later developments may not be reflected.*

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