

**United Nations Human Rights Council, 51st Session  
12 September to 7 October 2022  
Item 4 – General Debate  
Speaker: Humanists UK Representative: Richy Thompson<sup>1</sup>**

It has been nearly six months since Mubarak Bala, the President of the Nigerian Humanist Association, was sentenced to 24 years in prison for posting ‘blasphemous’ content on Facebook.<sup>2</sup> We remain appalled by this outrageous denial of his liberty and his freedom of religion or belief.

In the final hearing, he pled guilty to the charges, after what looked like coercion.<sup>3</sup> The fact that he did so should not be held against him – blasphemy should not be a crime in the first place, and the pressure he was clearly under to plead guilty should properly be understood as a cause for further advocacy on his behalf, not less.

Even ahead of his unconstitutional sentencing, Bala’s case was long plagued with procedural irregularities, including being arbitrarily detained without charge for 462 days, being denied access to his legal team and his family for months, being denied medical care, and having hearings repeatedly delayed. The Abuja High Court also ruled that he should be released on bail, but this was ignored by the authorities in Kano State, where he was held.<sup>4</sup>

We repeat our call for his immediate release, a call supported by many other NGOs and governments. We implore the Special Rapporteurs on freedom of religion or belief, on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and on the situation of human rights defenders, and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, to continue to work towards his release.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Humanists UK is the operating name of the British Humanist Association.

<sup>2</sup> Humanists International, ‘Day of shame for Nigerian authorities’: Mubarak Bala sentenced to 24 years in prison, 5 April 2022. <https://humanists.international/2022/04/day-of-shame-for-nigerian-authorities-mubarak-bala-sentenced-to-24-years-in-prison/>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*