

On the Gruesome Killing of Deborah Yakubu

The stoning and subsequent burning of the body of the 25-year-old Miss Deborah Yakubu, a 200-Level Home Economics student of Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto by some Muslim youths over allegations of blasphemy still leave a lot of Nigerians in shock. The problem was said to have started when Miss Deborah allegedly expressed certain displeasure over the use of her class WhatsApp group for a purpose different from the one for which it was created. Some of her Muslim course mates who were said to be angered by her comments on the platform allegedly asked her to apologize but that she refused. Seeing this, the mates mobilized other youths from outside the school that attacked, killed and even set Miss Yakubu's remains ablaze.

This act of the Muslim youths in taking the laws into their own hands is, to say the least, cruel and barbaric and should have no place in the 21st Century Nigeria. A situation where people resort to jungle justice and extra-judicial killings to settle scores, no matter the provocations, is unacceptable and condemnable.

Nigeria is a secular state that is governed by secular laws. Any real or perceived breach of these laws must be submitted to relevant authorities for proper adjudication and punishment. The taking of someone's life without recourse to legally recognized dispute resolution mechanisms amounts to gross breach of the right to life of an individual as enshrined in the country's constitution. No amount of punishment or award can properly compensate for the loss occasioned by this type of infractions.

Indeed, the requirement of a secular state imposes on Nigerians the need to imbibe religious tolerance. Taking the life of a fellow Nigerian on a mere accusation of blasphemy is despicable and smacks of hypocrisy. Over the years, religion has been a very volatile issue in Nigeria and therefore there is the need for everyone to imbibe the spirit of tolerance for a peacefully co-existence.

In view of the foregoing; Lawyers Alert condemns, in the strongest terms possible, the stoning, killing and burning of the body of Miss Deborah Yakubu by certain people alleged to be Muslims youths over her alleged blasphemous comments against Prophet Muhammad (SAW), without any recourse to law.

The organization further denounces the resort to self-help in dealing with people suspected of having committed any crime in any part of the country and for whatever reasons. Building a progressive and virile society requires that we all embrace the 'rule of the law' rather than the 'rule of the mighty'.

Lawyers Alert calls for the institution of a thorough and transparent investigations into the circumstances surrounding the killing of Miss Deborah Yakubu with a view to bringing to book all that are in any way found wanting or culpable.

It is strongly believed that this is not time for religious leaders on both sides to trade blames and try to justify what had happened. It is further believed that we are at a time when both religious and secular leaders should properly educate their followers to sheath their swords and allow peace to reign and commonsense prevail. Doing otherwise will only amount to adding salt to injury.

Although no amount of compensation can adequately make up for the loss of a human life, Lawyers Alert demands that both the Sokoto State and the Federal Government should consider compensating the family that the deceased has left behind. This will go a long way to alleviating the effect of the death of Miss Deborah Yakubu on it.

Lawyers Alert further requests that their Excellencies, the President and the various state Governors direct the relevant agencies of government to embark on massive enlightenment programmes to educate the people on the need to imbibe religious tolerance and broad-mindedness.

Finally, Lawyers Alert urges individuals and groups all over the country to refrain from any form of reprisal attacks as that is capable of conflagrating the already tensed situation.

Lawyers Alert is a National Human Rights NGO which caters for the vulnerable and seeks a democratic Nigeria where the weakest are treated with respect and the dignity of the human person. Lawyers Alert has offices in Makurdi, Benue State and the FCT with members across the country.