



10.13.17

NIGERIA | Journalist Released From Custody

Journalist Luka Binniyat was reunited with his family on Oct. 12, after spending 96 days in custody on charges related to the publication of an incorrect story he wrote about a Fulani attack in Kaduna State.

His release follows a review, by the judge presiding over his case, of stringent bail terms which were set July 20 and provoked public outcry. Initially, Binniyat's release on bail was dependent on two sureties (guarantors) posting bonds of \$31,720, which they would have had to renew every six months, in addition to surrendering their international passports for the duration of the trial.

According to sources close to Binniyat, although these stringent terms were eventually met, Justice Bashir Sukola refused to release Binniyat, insisting that the bank bonds had to be performance bonds from contractors handling government contracts. During a hearing on Oct. 9, the judge instructed the prosecution and defense teams to discuss bail conditions in private and report back to the court. It was then decided that bail would be granted once three sureties presented bank statements with at least \$31,000 in credit. Bail was eventually posted, and Binniyat was released Oct. 12.

Binniyat had been detained since July 12, charged with “breach of the peace” and “injurious falsehood,” in connection with a story he wrote about an attack by armed Fulani herdsmen in southern Kaduna in January 2017 that later proved incorrect, which he tried to pull prior to publication, and for which he also apologized publicly.

His case, which was subject to frequent adjournments and lengthy periods between hearings, highlights eroding press freedom and the seeming inequality before the law of different religious communities in Kaduna State. The case is viewed as the latest in a series of actions by the Kaduna State governor to restrict press freedom and silence

voices that draw attention to violence in southern Kaduna, where for over a year Fulani herder militia have attacked communities, killing over 800 people and seizing land and property with relative impunity.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said: "While we are delighted that Mr. Binniyat is able to return to his family, the fact remains that he should never have been remanded in custody for so long in the first place. It is deeply concerning that someone who poses no danger, and who apologized and corrected his error publicly, has been made to spend 96 days in jail. The charges against Mr. Binniyat are clearly unwarranted, and we reiterate our call for them to be dropped, and for an end to political prosecutions aimed at suppressing press freedom and restricting freedom of expression. We also continue to urge the state government to focus on arresting the real instigators and perpetrators of violence, and on protecting the lives of all citizens, regardless of their creed or ethnicity."