

FROM: PAEDIATRIC ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA (PAN)

TO: His Excellency, The Governor, Kano State, Nigeria

Date: 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.

### **OMAR FAROUQ BLASPHEMY CONVICTION: PLEA FOR MERCY**

The attention of Paediatric Association of Nigeria (PAN) has been drawn to the news and comments in the various media on the trial and conviction of Omar Farouq, a reportedly 13-year-old boy for blasphemy, and his subsequent sentencing to 10 years imprisonment. It is reported that Omar was tried as an adult based on the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics on his body. The sentence, which was pronounced on 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2020, has started running its course. An appeal has been filed.

Our association is a non-political and non-religious professional group of all paediatricians and other health workers looking after the health of Nigerian children with the primary objective of advocacy for children health and welfare. Based on the training, expertise and experience of our membership, which cut across persons within the teenage age group of 10 to 20 years, we considered it our professional and national responsibility to draw the attention of the Grand Qadi and other stakeholders to some biological and neurodevelopmental processes occurring in the child at this period. This is as could be relevant to this case.

The earliest changes at puberty are the physical secondary sexual changes which, these days, appear in many children by 10 to 12 years. These changes signal the beginning of the transition period from childhood to adulthood that spans over eight to 10 years. Within this

period, many children would question adult norms and may become rebellious even as normal child development. Therefore, in our opinion, the appearance of physical secondary sexual characteristics is consistent with age of 13 years. Furthermore, a child in early to mid-teenage age has not acquired sufficient mental and psychological development to understand the consequences of many of his expressions. Omar is reportedly in early teenage age.

Paediatric Association of Nigeria (PAN) pleads for mercy for Omar Farouq. PAN concedes that it does not have all the facts of the case except as are available to the public through the media. We do not intend to interfere with the ongoing judicial process. However, we believe that as the matter is in public discourse, our professional angle may assist in this process. PAN appreciates the fact that Omar was not sentenced to death, but calls for review of the case in view of the biological and scientific realities.

Please accept the assurances of our highest regards.

Signed:

Prof Edward Alikor, President

Dr Petrolina Tabansi, Secretary

Cc

The Grand Qadi, Shariah Court of Appeal, Kano State.

The Chief Judge, Kano State

The Attorney General and Hon Commissioner of Justice, Kano State

The Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice

Country Representative, UNICEF, Nigeria.