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Statement by Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide on the killing of a female student in Sokoto state, Nigeria on 12 May 2022

(New York, 19 May 2022) The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, is appalled by the killing of Deborah Samuel, reportedly over blasphemy allegations in Sokoto State, Nigeria, on 12 May 2022. Ms. Samuel was a 19 years-old student of Shehu Shagari College of Education, in the city of Sokoto, northern Nigeria, which has experienced tension between Muslims and Christians. The Special Adviser expresses her heartfelt condolences to Deborah Samuel's family and urges the competent authorities to ensure that the perpetrators of this heinous crime are brought to account.

The Special Adviser is also concerned about supposedly organized and destructive demonstrations in Sokoto protesting the arrest of some of the perpetrators of this dastardly act. She hopes that this will not deter the law enforcement authorities from denying impunity to the alleged perpetrators of this crime that strikes at the heart of the diversity of the Nigerian nation.

The Special Adviser recalls that expression of opinion and beliefs – including those seen to offend religious sensibilities – is protected in accordance with international law. “There can be no justification for violence in application of a vicious sense of justice even when a violation of existing norms has taken place or is alleged to have taken place. The right to life is sacrosanct and protected under international law and Nigerian domestic laws. The killing of Deborah Samuel is a crime that must be punished,” said the Special Adviser.

Special Adviser Wairimu Nderitu reiterated her call on religious leaders everywhere to contribute to fostering mutual respect by promoting tolerance and trust. Given their capacity to influence, religious leaders have a special role to play in preventing atrocity crimes. In this regard, the Special Adviser recalled the three core responsibilities of religious leaders under the 2012 Rabat Plan of Action, namely, to refrain from using messages of intolerance or expressions which may incite violence, hostility or discrimination; to speak out firmly and promptly against intolerance, discriminatory stereotyping and instances of hate speech; and to reject violence as a response to incitement to hatred or prior provocation.

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