



**Hauwa Ibrahim**

Hauwa Ibrahim comes from a small village in Northern Nigeria, Gombe. She was born into a culture that did not encourage schooling for girls beyond elementary school, but her mother permitted Ms. Ibrahim's older sister to attend high school. Through sheer persistence and the gracious support of others, Ms. Ibrahim attended high school, a teachers college for women, the local university in Jos, and continued to law school.

Hauwa Ibrahim is a senior partner and the Pro Bono Legal Aid Counsel in the General Law Practice of the Aires Law Firm, located in Garki Abuja, Nigeria. She serves as a consultant to many human rights and non-governmental organizations. Since 1999, Ms. Ibrahim has served as defense counsel in 47 cases implicating the Sharia law, many of which have involved women accused of adultery and subject to death by stoning. Prior to launching her practice in 1999, she was a prosecutor in the Ministry of Justice in Bauchi State.

She is one of only a few woman lawyers practicing in northern Nigeria. She speaks Hausa, a native language in the north, and also recites some Arabic. Recognizing a disparity in representation for women and the marginalized, Ms. Ibrahim's practice has evolved through significant representations of people who can not afford legal representation but whose basic human rights depend on the intervention of a legal representative. She says that she was called, in a truly vocational sense, ultimately to represent the marginalized members of society who are entitled to justice, but for whom the system of justice can be frightening and anything but protective of their civil and human rights. Ms. Ibrahim is deeply concerned that after the first innocent woman is stoned, there may be no stopping other women from being stoned.

Hauwa Ibrahim was propelled into the media and international limelight while representing Safiya Hussaini. Although alleging that her pregnancy had resulted from rape, Ms. Hussaini was convicted of adultery and sentenced to death by stoning on October 9, 2001. Pursuant to the Sharia Penal Code, which several northern states in Nigeria have adopted, pregnancy outside of marriage constitutes sufficient evidence for a woman to be convicted of adultery. Ms. Ibrahim and her team obtained an acquittal based upon substantive and procedural due process arguments, sparing the young mother's life.

While returning home from the Hussaini case, Ms. Ibrahim learned of another case of alleged adultery and a sentence of death by stoning. Ms. Ibrahim accepted the case. The case of Amina Lawal received international attention. Ms. Ibrahim and other counsels argued that the Sharia Penal Code established certain procedures and elements of the charge that had not been followed or proven. These included the right to understand the charges in one's own language, receive a properly constituted trial panel, representation, and to recant a confession. The defense also raised the issue of the role of the police in enforcing the Sharia Penal Code. On September 25, 2003, the highest Sharia court in Katsina state dismissed the charges against Amina Lawal. The court's decision established important precedent for Sharia cases.

Ms. Ibrahim handles these pro bono cases at tremendous personal risk. She has received several employment offers from international organizations and has been offered financial support for her pro bono services, but has declined such support out of concern that acceptance of such support would affect her credibility and effectiveness before the courts of Nigeria. A firm proponent in the rule of law, she has been persuasive because she has argued successfully that the Sharia law, notwithstanding its harsh punishment, requires the Sharia courts to respect the procedural and substantive rights guaranteed by the Sharia law as well as the Nigerian Constitution.

Ms. Ibrahim recently completed a year-long Humphrey Fellowship at the Washington College of Law at the American University, where she studied human rights law, and is preparing to resume her practice in Abuja. Ms. Ibrahim desires to contribute to a culture of human rights and respect for the rule of law in Nigeria.