

Nigerian Calls for Death of Miss World Article Writer

By Glenn McKenzie
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LAGOS, Nigeria — The deputy governor of a largely Islamic state in northern Nigeria has called on Muslims to kill the Nigerian writer of a newspaper article about the Miss World beauty pageant that sparked deadly religious riots.

"Just like the blasphemous Indian writer Salman Rushdie, the blood of Isioma Daniel can be shed," Zamfara Deputy Governor Mahamoud Shinkafi told a gathering of Muslim groups in the state capital, Gusau, on Monday.

Rushdie, an Indian-born Briton, went into hiding after Iran's late revolutionary leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a 1989 fatwa – or religious edict – against him for allegedly insulting Islam his best-selling novel, "The Satanic Verses." In 1998, the Iranian government declared it would not support the fatwa, but said it could not rescind the edict since, under Islamic law, that could be done only by the person who issued it. Khomeini had died in 1989.

While state officials cannot issue fatwas, the deputy governor, "like all Muslims," considers the death sentence against Daniel as "a reality based on the teachings of the Quran," Zamfara state Information Commissioner Tukur Umar Dangaladima said Tuesday.

Islam's holy book "states that whoever accuses or insults any prophet of Allah ... should be killed," Dangaladima told The Associated Press. "If she (Daniel) is Muslim, she has no option except to die. But if she is a non-Muslim, the only way out for her is to convert to Islam."

Daniel, a Lagos-based fashion writer with ThisDay, reportedly went into hiding after being interrogated by police last week in connection with the article, which suggested Islam's founding prophet Muhammed would have approved of Miss World and might have wanted to marry one of the contestants. Her religion is unknown.

The newspaper has issued repeated apologies for the article, saying the offending portions were published by mistake after earlier being deleted by a supervising editor.

ThisDay officials were not immediately available for comment Tuesday. But one of the paper's columnists, Amanze Obi, suggested Daniel "may have been a victim of excitement."

"I imagine that she may have written that line without knowing it," Obi wrote in Tuesday's edition. "The line was innocuous."

Dangaladima said other ThisDay employees had been spared from the fatwa, which "applies only to the offending pen."

Zamfara was the first of 12 states to adopt Islamic law, or Shariah, after Nigerian military rule gave way to elected government in 1999. Religious clashes since then have killed thousands across the country.

The latest rioting began last Wednesday when Muslims burned down a ThisDay office in the northern city of Kaduna. More than 200 people were killed in the city and rioting also briefly spread to the capital, Abuja.

The violence caused Miss World organizers to abandon plans to hold the pageant in Nigeria and evacuate more than 80 participants to London, where the show will go ahead Dec. 7.

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