

January 2024

To: Deputy Chief David Greene
Department of State
8320 Abuja Place
Washington, D.C. 20521

Dear Deputy Chief David Greene,

We, the undersigned, are a concerned group of _____ + individuals from _____ countries, who are deeply troubled by the detention and treatment of 16 children from the Du Merci orphanage being held in Nigerian government facilities. The children are awaiting their trial date and possible release in February.

The Nigerian government continues to hold the Christian orphans illegally in Muslim-controlled facilities where they are unable to practice their faith and are treated maliciously. Further, the Nigerian Child's Rights Act of 2003 codifies that children are entitled to keep their given birth name, practice their faith, and not be held in police protection after a threat has subsided – the children have had all these rights violated.

In December 2019, Director of Du Merci orphanage, Professor Solomon Tarfa, was arrested on trumped up charges of kidnapping and abduction and running an orphanage illegally. As a result, 27 orphans under his care were confiscated and taken to government-run orphanages. Several of these children were above the age of 18, visiting their parents at home, when they were confiscated by the government illegally. Tarfa was found innocent of kidnapping and abduction but was charged with using a forged document to run the orphanage. This conviction was overturned a year later, leaving Tarfa innocent of all charges yet facing huge financial debts while he was imprisoned for almost two years. In addition, 16 Du Merci orphans are kept illegally in government-run facilities.

While housed in the government-run orphanages throughout the predominantly Muslim north, the children from Du Merci have received egregious treatment. One child was beaten by police, and another sustained third degree burns and was refused treatment. Three children were taken away at age 3, yet their education was neglected over four years, and they can no longer speak in their primary English language.

The Du Merci children are also not able to freely practice their religion. Having each professed their faith in Jesus Christ before leaving their orphanage, the children were given new, Muslim names. They were also denied their Christian faith and forbidden to celebrate Christian holidays.

Therefore, we urge you to release these innocent children from Nigerian government facilities, uphold their right to practice their religion, keep their original name, and return to the custody of Professor Tarfa who has proven himself as a competent and caring overseer.

We encourage you, Mr. Greene, to write to High Court 12 in Kano State about the Du Merci case with utmost importance and grant the demands of release and reparations. We ask that you uphold the Nigerian Child's Act of 2003 that outlines the rights of children who have been severely compromised in this case. You can show the United States' care for the innocent, religious freedom, and human rights especially as it relates to children.

Thank you. Sincerely, International Christian Concern (undersigned)