



PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until Wednesday 10 June 2026

Investigation into ‘Nigeria’s Hidden Gulag’ wins the HART Prize for Human Rights 2026

London, UK – The HART Prize for Human Rights has awarded first place to journalist Mike Odeh James for his investigation *“Nigeria’s Hidden Gulag: Inside the Rijana Camps”*, an exposé documenting alleged mass abductions, detention networks, and survivor testimonies from forest camps in northwestern Nigeria.

The judges said the entry stood out for its rigorous reporting, depth of fieldwork, and careful use of survivor testimony to document patterns of insecurity affecting rural communities.

The investigation describes alleged large-scale kidnapping operations in and around Rijana Forest in Kaduna State, where survivors recount prolonged captivity, starvation, violence, and the trauma experienced by families forced to pay ransom or endure the disappearance of loved ones.

One survivor described being abducted alongside her family and held for months under extreme conditions. She said:

“They tied motorcycle chains around our hands and legs so we could not escape. Beatings and killings happened almost every day. Our captors enjoyed it. They killed my aunt and cut her body into pieces.”

The winning journalist, Mike Odeh James

Mike Odeh James is a veteran frontline journalist from Nigeria. He says: *“The HART Prize is vital because it brings global attention to communities whose voices might not be heard. Journalism is often the only bridge between them*

and the wider world. We're helping to preserve the dignity of survivors, challenge injustice, and encourage accountability."



Mike Odeh James wins first place in the Nigerian Frontline Journalist category of the HART Prize for Human Rights 2026.

Chair of Judges – Caroline Duffield

"Mike's report places significant new information into the public domain," said Caroline Duffield, Chair of Judges and former BBC Lagos Correspondent. "That this many camps exist as far south as Southern Kaduna – in 2026 – shifts our understanding of Nigeria's security picture. The courage, scope and human insight of Mike's writing set a standard that the HART Prize was created to recognise."

HART Patron – Lord Alton of Liverpool

Lord Alton of Liverpool, HART Patron and Chair of the UK Joint Committee on Human Rights, said the investigation highlights the importance of independent journalism in exposing human suffering.

"The testimonies documented in this report underline the urgent need for protection of civilians and accountability for grave abuses. Where entire communities live under the shadow of abduction and violence, silence is not an option. Independent journalism is essential to ensuring these realities are seen and acted upon."

Other award recipients

Second place was awarded to Mary Kiara for *“Father’s Agony as Nigeria Denies Airstrike Killed Civilians”*, an investigation into alleged civilian casualties following a military airstrike in Niger State and wider concerns over accountability in aerial operations.

A special commendation was given to Lawrence Zongo for work examining conflict reporting and identity narratives in Nigeria’s Middle Belt, including the experiences of Fulani Christian communities and the need for more nuanced and evidence-based journalism.

About the HART Prize for Human Rights

The HART Prize for Human Rights recognises outstanding journalism that exposes human rights abuses, amplifies under-reported stories, and promotes accountability, dignity, and awareness of global injustice.

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