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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Revised written statement* submitted by Jubilee Campaign, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



The Wave of Kidnapping and Slavery in Nigeria

The United Nations classifies “traditional slavery, forced labour, debt bondage, serfdom, children working in slavery or slavery-like conditions, domestic servitude, sexual slavery, and servile forms of marriage” as ‘contemporary slavery’. Jubilee Campaign would like to raise to the Council’s attention the frequency of mass kidnappings of Nigerian civilians – predominantly children – that lead to instances of sexual exploitation and slavery of girls and child soldiering of boys.

Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)

The Islamist militant group Boko Haram has been a major criminal organization operating within Nigeria and in adjacent nations in the Lake Chad Basin – Cameroon, Chad, Niger – since 2009.¹ The group is most widely recognized for its mass abductions of schoolchildren; in 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped 276 girls from the Chibok Government Secondary School for Girls, and those that have been released in the years since have told of the slavery and servitude they were forced to endure throughout their captivity: Domestic servitude – in the form of cooking, fetching water, and washing clothes for the militants,² forced marriage to Boko Haram fighters, and even forced sexual slavery and impregnation³ were harsh realities for the Chibok girls. In August 2021, seven years following the incident, two women were released who had been forcibly married off to Boko Haram leaders during their time in captivity; sometimes, the militant group will give the kidnapped girls the ‘choice’ of either marrying one of the fighters or being forced to undergo the forms of slavery previously mentioned.⁴

One noteworthy case is that of L.S., who was abducted by Boko Haram faction Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) alongside 108 schoolgirls from Government Girls’ Science and Technical College in Dapchi, Yobe State. In the months directly following the incident, every girl except for then-14-year-old L. was released; the freed students reported that L. remained in captivity because she refused to renounce Christianity and convert to Islam. In the nearly four years that L. has been detained by ISWAP, she has been forced to marry a militant leader and has reportedly given birth to at least one child.⁵

Boko Haram has also amassed a reputation of kidnapping school-aged boys and forcing them to join the ranks. In July 2020, the UN Secretary General published the report *Children and armed conflict in Nigeria*, highlighting that Boko Haram and ISWAP have recruited and used an approximate total of 969 boys which were abducted primarily between 2017 and 2019. While the frequency of abductions of children has decreased dramatically since 2019, those that were kidnapped within the past five years continue to remain in captivity and are forced to work as messengers, bodyguards, and suicide bombers.⁶ Boko Haram has also circulated on social media photos of young boys dressed in identifiably militant clothing and wielding assault rifles and other automated weapons, suggesting that some kidnapped children are trained to become child soldiers for the terrorist group.⁷

¹ Research Service, 26 March 2021.

² Chris Stein & Dionne Searcey, “21 Chibok Schoolgirls, Reuniting With Parents, Tell of Boko Haram Slavery”, *New York Times*, 16 October 2016.

³ Lin Taylor, “From Boko Haram to Islamic State, sex slavery and trafficking fund extremism”, *Reuters*, 9 October 2017.

⁴ *Reuters*, “Second Nigerian ‘Chibok girl’ freed in a week seven years after abduction”, 15 August 2021.

⁵ Percy Dabang, “3 Years After, Parents of Nigerian Girl Abducted by Boko Haram Still Plead for Her Release”, *Voice of America*, 27 February 2021. ; Goodness Adaoyichie, “Leah Sharibu ‘accepts’ Islam, gives birth to baby boy for Boko Haram commander”, *Pulse Nigeria*, 25 January 2020.

⁶ United Nations Security Council Report of the Secretary-General, *Children and armed conflict in Nigeria*, 6 July 2020.

⁷ Sirwan Kajjo & Hassan Maina Kaina, “Experts: Boko Haram Recruiting Children as Soldiers, Suicide Bombers”, *Voice of America*, 4 September 2020.

Suspected Fulani Militant Kidnappings

In recent years, while we have seen a relative decrease in the number of kidnappings attributed to Boko Haram and ISWAP, we have simultaneously observed a growing number of incidents in which gunmen – usually suspected to be Fulani militants – have stormed schools and seizing students in the middle of the night. While graphs show that in 2014 approximately 400 abductions were attributed specifically to Boko Haram, in 2020 the overwhelming majority (approximately 600) were attributed to “communal militias” believed to be radical Fulani bandits.⁸ Furthermore, Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammad Sa’ad Abubakar III, claimed in January 2021 that seven to eight out of every ten kidnappers arrested in Nigeria are from the Fulani ethnic group.⁹ For the purpose of this statement, it is imperative to clarify that Fulani militants who engage in violence are distinct from the broader Fulani ethnic group who are largely peace-loving, and that we do not seek to stigmatize the entire ethnic group.

Radical Fulani militants are believed to be responsible for the 5 July 2021 abduction of 140 Christian schoolchildren from Bethel Baptist boarding school in Kaduna State;¹⁰ while 28 of the kidnapped students have been freed, the rest remain in captivity.¹¹ In April 2021, Fulani militants abducted three students from a Plateau State Christian mission school; while two students were able to escape during the incident and only one was transferred to the Fulani militant camp, it is likely that had it not been for the swift intervention by local security forces, the situation could have become a mass kidnapping of tens or even hundreds of students. In December 2020, one boy who had previously been abducted explained of his captors, “sincerely speaking, they are not Boko Haram... They are just small and tiny, tiny boys with big guns”.¹² Nigerian Information Minister Lai Mohammed confirmed that Boko Haram was not responsible for this abduction, rather it was a bandit gang likely comprised of Fulani militants. Should the testimony of the recovered boy be true, this would suggest that Fulani kidnappers is adopting Boko Haram’s tactic of using abducted children for forced membership in the militant group.

Though there is no evidence yet as to whether Fulani militants have adopted Boko Haram’s use of sex slavery of kidnapped women and girls, it is important to highlight that some recent statements by local leaders and broader organizations have alleged this to be true. Jonathan Asake, president of the Southern Kaduna People’s Union (SOKAPU) highlighted last year in May that Fulani militants have attacked numerous communities, such as Galiwyi in Chikun local government area (LGA), “chased away the men and turned their wives and daughters into sex slaves after occupying the community.”¹³ In June 2021, the Committee to Free Nigerian Slaves (CFNS) issued a public statement that “since 2001, Boko Haram terrorists, Fulani militants, and other extremist groups tied to the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, have raided Nigerian villages, killed tens of thousands, and enslaved an untold number of women and children” in domestic and sexual servitude, while kidnapped boys are “beaten and brainwashed into becoming child soldiers”.¹⁴

Recommendations

Jubilee Campaign urges members and observer states of the Human Rights Council to:

⁸ Neil Munshi, “Why ‘the kidnapping industry is thriving’ in Nigeria”, Financial Times, 26 April 2021.

⁹ Sahara Reporters, “Seven Out Of Every Ten Kidnappers Arrested Are Fulani – Sultan of Sokoto”, 30 January 2021.

¹⁰ Andrew Boyd, “Nigerian Christian children kidnapped by Jihadists”, Anglican, 6 July 2021.

¹¹ Anthony Akaeze, “In latest Nigerian school kidnapping, 28 Baptist students regain freedom, but many others remain in captivity”, Baptist News Global, 26 July 2021.

¹² Anugrah Kumar, “Nigeria: 3 students escape Fulani militants after attack on Christian missions school; 1 remains captive”, The Christian Post, 2 May 2021. ; Morning Star News, “Students Kidnapped in Attack on Christian School in Nigeria”, 30 April 2021.

¹³ AbdulGafar Alabelewe, “‘Bandits have turned our women to sex slaves, cooks’”, The Nation, 14 May 2020.

¹⁴ Ashlianna Kreiner, “Committee to Protest Murder and Enslavement in Nigeria on June 5, Omaha”, CNS News, 4 June 2021.

1. Hold the Nigerian government accountable to its human rights obligations as a State party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights which in Article 5 prohibits "all forms of exploitation and degradation of man particularly slavery, slave trade, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment and treatment".¹⁵
 2. Hold the Nigerian government accountable to its human rights obligations as outlined in Article 34 of the Constitution, which states that "no person shall be subject to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment" and that "no person shall be held in slavery or servitude".¹⁶
 3. Appoint a Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Nigeria.
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¹⁵ Organization of African Unity (OAU), African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter), 27 June 1981.

¹⁶ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria [Nigeria], Act No. 24, 5 May 1999.