



## **Jubilee Campaign Submission to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material**

### ***Kidnapping & Slavery of Nigerian Girls***

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#### **I. Boko Haram and Fulani Militants Engage in Abductions of Children, Including Girls**

Islamist militant groups, most notably Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and Fulani militants, have in the past decade engaged in mass kidnappings of schoolchildren – often girls – from their educational institutions and holding them either temporarily for ransom payments or permanently as sexual and domestic slaves. The incident that sparked this inhumane trend was Boko Haram’s 2014 abduction of 276 predominantly Christian girls from Government Secondary School for Girls in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria. Four years later, in February 2018, ISWAP kidnapped 110 students from Government Girls Science and Technology College in Dapchi, Yobe State; though each of the girls had been released in the months directly following the incident, one lone girl, 18-year-old Leah Sharibu, has remained in captivity nearly four years on. Leah, a Christian, repeatedly refused to renounce her faith and convert to Islam, angering her captors who continue to hold her; it has been reported that Leah has since been coerced into converting to Islam, marrying a militant, and giving birth to two children in ISWAP custody.

In more recent years, however, Boko Haram and ISWAP have played a relatively smaller role in the mass kidnappings, while groups of Fulani militants have taken up the activity with increasing coordination. It is important to highlight that, while many mass abductions are currently attributed to unidentified “armed bandits”, witnesses express their certainty that the perpetrators are radical Fulani militants based on their accents, clothing, and repertoire of tactics.<sup>1</sup> In September 2021, UNICEF reported that Nigeria had seen 20 separate school attacks and abductions this year alone, with 1,436 students abducted in total, 200 of whom remain missing and their health and safety circumstances unknown.<sup>2</sup>

On 17 February 2021, armed gunmen ambushed Kagara State’s Government Science Secondary School, abducting 27 students and 15 others, including teachers; one student was unfortunately

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<sup>1</sup> Chinedu Asadu, [“EXPLAINER: Who are the gunmen abducting Nigerian students?”](#), *Associated Press*, 2 September 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Obiezu, [“UNICEF: 1 Million Children in Nigeria Could Miss School”](#), *Voice of America News*, 16 September 2021.

killed during the raid. After nine days in captivity, the kidnapped students were released on 27 February.<sup>3</sup> In a separate incident on 26 February, armed suspected Fulani militants kidnapped 317 schoolgirls between the ages of 10 and 17 from Government Girls Secondary School in Jangebe, Zamfara State before escaping in pick-up trucks and motorbikes. By 2 March 2021, the militants released 279 of the abducted girls, and 38 remain in captivity.<sup>4</sup>

On 11 March 2021, armed gunmen entered the Federal College of Forestry Mechanization in Kaduna State by boring a hole into the school's perimeter wall, kidnapping 39 students. Another 180 students were rescued by Nigerian military forces who intervened before they were abducted. Captors released five of the students on 5 April, another five on 8 April, and the remaining 29 on 5 May.<sup>5</sup>

On 20 April 2021, armed gunmen forced their way into Greenfield University of Kaduna State and kidnapped "an unspecified number" of individuals, though later estimates revealed that no fewer than 20 students and 3 staff personnel were abducted. In the days following the incident, the captors killed a total of 6 students before releasing the remaining 14 in late May.<sup>6</sup>

On 24 April 2021, armed men kidnapped three students at gunpoint from the Federal University of Agriculture in Makurdi, Benue State. The students were freed three days later on 27 April.<sup>7</sup>

In May 2021, armed bandits on motorcycles entered Salihu Tanko Islamic School in Niger State, where they then killed one individual, abducted three teachers, and kidnapped 136 students, some of whom were as young as 5 years old.<sup>8</sup> Six of the abducted children passed away while in militant captivity, and in August, after three months in captivity, the kidnapers released all of the students.<sup>9</sup>

On 18 June 2021, gunmen kidnapped 70 children from the Federal Government College in Birnin Yauri in Kebbi State and fatally shot one police officer; the perpetrators had escaped with their captives on motorcycles and in vehicles they had stolen from Nigerian security forces who were supposed to be protecting the school. The majority of the abducted students are girls.<sup>10</sup>

On 5 July 2021, suspected Fulani militants kidnapped 140 Christian students from Kaduna State's Bethel Baptist High School in Maraban Rido, while another approximately 25 students were able to escape.<sup>11</sup> By September 2021, more than 90 of the kidnapped students were released, while over 30 remained in captivity. It was reported that the recovered students appear to be weak, exhausted, and sick following their release.<sup>12</sup>

On 1 September 2021, armed bandits ambushed Government Day Secondary School in Kaya in Maradun Local Government Area of Zamfara State and kidnapped 75 schoolchildren. The town in

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<sup>3</sup> Isaac Abrak, Stephanie Busari, & Nimi Princewill, "[At least 27 students kidnapped as armed men storm Nigeria school](#)", CNN, 17 February 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Ahmadu Maishanu, "[UPDATED: 279 of the kidnapped Jangebe schoolgirls freed \(PHOTOS\)](#)", *Premium Times Nigeria*, 2 March 2021.

<sup>5</sup> CBS News, "[Gunmen attack school and kidnap at least 30 students in Nigeria](#)", 12 March 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Nimi Princewill, "['They threatened to kill my sister and post it on YouTube,' says brother of abducted Nigerian student as ransom deadline passes](#)", *CNN World*, 7 May 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Duru, "[Three Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi students kidnapped by gunmen](#)", *Vanguard*, 26 April 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Sam Olukoya, "[Officials confirm 136 students abducted from Nigeria school](#)", *Associated Press*, 3 June 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Chinedu Asadu, "[Gunmen release students in northern Nigeria 3 months later](#)", *Associated Press*, 26 August 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Sam Olukoya, "[Scores abducted in latest school kidnapping in north Nigeria](#)", *Associated Press*, 18 June 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Evangelical Focus, "[Gunmen kidnap 140 Christian high school students in Nigeria](#)", 6 July 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Evangelical Focus, "[Two months later, 57 kidnapped students of Bethel Baptist High School freed](#)", 2 September 2021.

which the mass abduction was carried out is the hometown of the state's Governor Bello Matawalle. All 12 students were released from captivity twelve days later.<sup>13</sup>

## II. Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Testimonies of survivors of Boko Haram captivity have shed light on the practice of sexual exploitation and sexual enslavement that women and girls in captivity are forced to endure. Upon kidnapping and incorporation into Boko Haram camps, girls and young women who are found to be pregnant upon their arrival are often forced to undergo abortions, as militants view the woman and baby to be infidels.<sup>14</sup> Then, masses of kidnapped girls and women are forcibly married off to militant men, at which point they are tasked with being sexually subservient to their husbands and raising children who will be the next generation of militants. Even unmarried women and girls are not safe from sexual exploitation; one man who spent a brief period in Boko Haram captivity recalled that each night he witnessed militants enter the women's quarters to pick individuals to have sex with.<sup>15</sup> These individuals had been sexually abused so often that they themselves have come to terms with the fact that they could engage in unwanted sexual activity in exchange for food and other goods and ultimately use sex as a "mode of exchange".<sup>16</sup> As a result of the often unsafe and forced sexual activity, women and girls in Boko Haram camps face a higher risk of unwanted pregnancies as well as sexually transmitted infections.

In May 2015, Nigerian soldiers found a 23-year-old mother of four, Asabe Aliyu, vomiting blood at the time of her rescue; she explained that during her time with Boko Haram, militants took turns raping her relentlessly, that she was impregnated, and that her captors were attempting to coerce her into an unwanted marriage at the time of her escape. Only days later, another rescued captive girl revealed that she was raped 15 times a day by 15 Boko Haram terrorists "throughout the time she was with the Islamic insurgents before she could escape from their den".<sup>17</sup>

In March 2021, the United Nations Secretary-General in their report to the Security Council revealed that Boko Haram and its relevant factions and splinter groups continued to engage in mass abductions in the northeastern and northwestern regions of Nigeria; "the Government's special investigations panel on sexual and gender-based violence documented 210 cases of conflict-related sexual violence committed in 2020, including rape and forced marriage, affecting 94 girls, 86 women and 30 boys, noting that such crimes continue to be chronically underreported owing to stigma and harmful social norms". Regrettably, while the Office of the Attorney General established a special unit to evaluate sexual crimes committed by Boko Haram and its factions, no prosecutions have been made to date.<sup>18</sup>

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

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<sup>13</sup> Abubakar Ahmadu Maishanu, "[75 students abducted from Zamfara school freed](#)", *Premium Times Nigeria*, 13 September 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Funmilayo Idowu Agbaje, "[The objectified female body and the Boko Haram insurgency in northeast Nigeria: Insights from IDP camps in Abuja](#)", *African Security Review*, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Sam Olukoya, "[Women and Girls 'Preyed on as the Spoils of War'](#)", *Inter Press Service News Agency*, 25 April 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Funmilayo Idowu Agbaje, "[The objectified female body and the Boko Haram insurgency in northeast Nigeria: Insights from IDP camps in Abuja](#)", *African Security Review*, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Christiana E. Attah, "[Boko Haram and sexual terrorism: The conspiracy of silence of the Nigerian anti-terrorism laws](#)", *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, [Excerpt from Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council](#), S/2021/312, 30 March 2021.

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."<sup>19</sup> Researchers Abdulbarkindo Adamu, Alupsen Ben, and Gloria C. stated the following:

*"More often than not, kidnapping is accompanied by bodily injury, sexual assault, or a demand for ransom. Interviews with women in Ladugga axis of Southern Kaduna, Numana in Sanga LGA as well as Godogodo in Jema'a LGA reveal that Christian women in the aforementioned locations have been kidnapped for varying periods, ranging from some days to months. It was revealed that the kidnapped Christian women were often subjected to sexual assault. Some of the affected women were kidnapped by [radical/militant] Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen either on their farms or on their way to fetch water in the evening."*<sup>20</sup>

While these researchers remark specifically on the Fulani militant kidnapping of Christian women from their communities, we remain concerned that these tactics could be used specifically against girls kidnapped from educational institutions and who remain in Fulani militant custody for months until their release following ransom payments.

During a side event titled "On Stemming the Role of Criminal Groups in Contemporary Slavery within Nigeria", Mr. Teyei Pam of International Committee on Nigeria (ICON), revealed that while Boko Haram has historically been at the forefront of mass kidnappings and enslavement of women and girls, Fulani militants have played a greater such role in recent years. Mr. Pam's cousin's six-year-old daughter, in fact, was kidnapped by Fulani militants following an attack on a community; it is unknown what type of slavery the girl was forced to endure, but usually women and girls are retained by militants as sexual and domestic servants until large ransom sums are paid for their release.<sup>21</sup>

### III. Best Practices and Recommendations for Nigeria

- Push for an independent, impartial commission of inquiry to investigate atrocities and crimes against humanity perpetrated by all sides in Nigeria.
- Provide financial and material support to NGOs and other relief-focused civil society organizations in Nigeria that assist survivors of abduction and slavery at the hands of militants. Similarly, engage with journalists and other activists involved in evidence-gathering and reporting of such atrocities.
- 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".<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> AbdulGafar Alabelewe, "[Bandits have turned our women to sex slaves, cooks](#)", *The Nation*, 14 May 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Abdulbarkindo Adamu, Alupsen Ben, and Gloria C., [Nigeria: Southern Kaduna and the atrocities of Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen \(May 2016 – September 2017\) Volume 1](#), January 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Jubilee Campaign, "[UNGA76 3<sup>rd</sup> Committee Side-Event: the Role of Criminal Groups with Regards to Slavery in Nigeria](#)" [video], YouTube, 1 November 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Organization of African Unity (OAU), [African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights \(Banjul Charter\)](#), 27 June 1981.

- 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”.<sup>23</sup>
- Call for the appointment of a United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Nigeria.

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<sup>23</sup> [Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria](#) [Nigeria], Act. No. 24, 5 May 1999.