

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing of the United States Congress: Nigeria after the Chibok Abductions: An Update on Human Rights and Governance

**Statement by Omolola Adele-Oso, Act4Accountability
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Good afternoon Mr. Chairmen, Honorable Congresswomen, Members and Staff of the Commission, other Congressional Staffers, Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for this opportunity. I am Omolola Adele-Oso, a Nigerian citizen, a member of the diaspora, and the Executive Director of Act4Accountability, an African diaspora nonprofit committed to building a culture of accountability among Africans and the diaspora through civic engagement.

The kidnappings of the 276 girls from Chibok and the failure by the previous Nigerian administration to treat their abductions with the urgency they deserved was the impetus for creating Act4Accountability almost two years ago. Chapter 2, section 14.2 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution of clearly states that the "*Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a State based on the principles of democracy and social justice*" whereby "*the security and welfare of the people is the primary purpose of government.*" On April 14, 2014 and thereafter, the local and state governments in Northern Nigeria, as well as federal government have struggled to deliver on their primary objective.

Nigeria, as a young democracy is challenged with the tough realities of unifying a nation that has been plagued with conflict in many regions of its territory, since its Independence. Like other democracies, Nigeria continues to cautiously navigate her way toward a civil society where accountability, transparency, and good governance are its foundation.

Last year, then- presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari promised the nation that the rescue of the missing schoolgirls would be a priority for his administration. Since then, families of the missing girls as well as advocates in Abuja have had several meetings with the administration with no outcomes. Act4Accountability and the global network of the BringBackOurGirls movement call on the President of Nigeria to fulfill his promise to rescue and reunite the kidnapped schoolgirls with their families, as well as all abductees currently being held by Boko Haram.

Thanks to the April 7, 2016 article by the NY Times "Boko Haram Turns Female Captives Into Terrorists", we have confirmation on what many have suspected. The article clearly depicts the strategic plan of using women and girls as weapons through food deprivation, rapes, and promises of eternal life, if they fulfill suicide missions. The tactics described including the use of the term "wife" mirrors the stories from women raped by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda. This detailed account of what a

victim endures at the hands of Boko Haram is truer than any information previously publicly offered by the Nigerian Security Forces or Federal Government, where truth is often optional.

The carnage inflicted by the insurgency is not the only issue of concern for Nigeria. The Niger Delta conflict, ongoing sectarian violence in other parts of the north, and reported human rights violations by Nigerian Security Forces as documented by Amnesty International have yet to result in any prosecutions or the removal of suspected insurgency sympathizers within the armed forces.

This conflict is not Nigeria's problem to bear alone; it has become a regional one. Boko Haram does not exist in isolation and the fight to rid communities of their terror will require the sustained commitment from our neighbors, the African Union, and allies. In UNICEF's latest report, nearly 1 IN 5 SUICIDE BOMBERS was a child and 75% of these children were GIRLS. In 2015, 89 SUICIDE BOMBINGS were carried out in Nigeria. Nearly 1.3 MILLION CHILDREN have been displaced. About 1,800 SCHOOLS are closed – either damaged, looted, burned down or used as shelter by displaced people.

The practice of labeling liberated women and girls as “Boko Haram wives” and their isolation in internally displacement camps or abandoned buildings, by the Nigerian military must be stopped and investigated. What hope is there for reintegration, if victims are shunned at every turn with people in fear of them?

In closing, we recognize the challenges of protecting human rights and good governance in times of conflict, however the women and girls human rights must be preserved at all cost. We look forward to working with and empowering the Nigerian government on the the following recommendations:

1. The Chibok schoolgirls and all other subsequent abductees still in captivity must be rescued.
2. The Nigerian Federal Government must create a national communication platform that informs the public on safety measures being taken to protect Nigerian citizens from escalating violence.
3. In the United States, the Department of Justice and State Departments must do a better job of sharing information with each other, while leaning on the access to information available from human rights and humanitarian groups working in Nigeria.
4. We commend the progress made by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) in the counter insurgency of Boko Haram, and greater transparency is needed from the Nigerian Government by its allies and the Nigerian public. We urge the US government adopt Secretary Lind Thomas-Greenfield's recommendation to continue to empower the Taskforce in combating Boko Haram.
5. Nigeria must adopt and implement the Verification, Authentication, and Reunification System (VARs), which includes establishing a Missing Persons Register, designed by the #BringBackOurGirls advocates in Abuja.

6. Boko Haram militants must be prosecuted for their crimes against humanity in a transparent judicious process open to the public. Witness protection must be provided to Boko Haram victims, who testify against their captors.

Finally, each of you has a wristband with Hope Endures written. We ask you to join us tomorrow on the anniversary by posting on social media, images of you wearing it using the hashtag and BringBackOurGirls. Thank you.