

SHEILA JACKSON LEE  
18TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

WASHINGTON OFFICE:  
2160 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
(202) 225-3816

DISTRICT OFFICE:  
1919 SMITH STREET, SUITE 1180  
THE GEORGE "MICKEY" LELAND FEDERAL BUILDING  
HOUSTON, TX 77002  
(713) 655-0050

ACRES HOME OFFICE:  
6719 WEST MONTGOMERY, SUITE 204  
HOUSTON, TX 77019  
(713) 691-4882

HEIGHTS OFFICE:  
420 WEST 19TH STREET  
HOUSTON, TX 77008  
(713) 861-4070

FIFTH WARD OFFICE:  
4300 LYONS AVENUE, SUITE 200  
HOUSTON, TX 77020  
(713) 227-7740

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

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JUDICIARY

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SENIOR WHIP  
DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

**CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE OF TEXAS**  
**REMARKS**

**TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION BRIEFING ON:  
NIGERIA AFTER THE CHIBOK ABDUCTIONS: AN UPDATE ON  
HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE**

**APRIL 13, 2016; 1-2PM**

**SENATE VISITOR CENTER ROOM 215**

- Good Afternoon to you all.
- I would like to thank Representatives James P. McGovern and Joseph R. Pitts, Co-Chairs of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission.
- The work of this Commission, which I belong to is so important-promoting, defending and advocating for the protection of vulnerable persons under internationally recognized human rights norms as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant human rights instruments, in a nonpartisan manner, both within and outside of Congress.

- I want to also acknowledge the important work of Representative Wilson and my other colleagues here in Congress for all of their commitment to keeping the attention on the issue of the kidnapped Chibok girls and the empowerment of the Nigerian government and its regional allies' work in combatting violent extremism in the region.
- I welcome members of the diplomatic corps, community, civil society organizations and peace loving members of the community.
- Today we congregate to reflect upon and discuss strategies for action during today's briefing entitled: **“Two Years After Chibok Abductions: An update on Human Rights and Governance in Nigeria.”**
- **I thank our panelists:**
  - **Omolola Adele-Oso**, Co-founder and Executive Director, Act4Accountability;
  - **Nathan Hosler**, Director, Church of the Brethren's Office of Public Witness;
  - **Madeline Rose**, Policy and Advocacy Advisor, Mercy Corps;
  - **Lauren Ploch Blanchard**, Specialist in African Affairs, Congressional Research Service; and
  - **Moderator-Dr. Carl Levan**, Assistant Professor, School of International Service, American University.

- We gather here today to reflect on how we can advance the protection of the Nigerian people and other regional partners in the Lake Chad Basin from Nigeria to Benin to Chad and everywhere in between.
- Let me begin by acknowledging that our global fight against terrorism is a challenge, but let me note that there is also progress that has been achieved.
- For example, the U.S. has been working actively with the Nigerian government to confront and defeat Boko Haram.
- Additionally, the Nigerian military has made significant gains against Boko Haram in the last 18 months, raiding a number of the sect's camps in Nigeria's vast Sambisa forest, and freeing at least 1000 women and children taken in other mass abductions.
- According to some reports, the African military in the Lake Chad Basin has also rescued over 11,000 civilian hostages in attacks on Boko Haram camps and villages.
- There were recent news reports that Boko Haram was asking for over \$50 million in exchange for the return of the school girls.
- The Chibok schoolgirls are among the victims of Boko Haram which has displaced over 2.5 million people in the Lake Chad Basin of Africa, claiming over 20,000 lives according to some reports.
- Some have argued that employing a “combat fatigue” strategy may be a way to destabilize Boko Haram-that is offering Boko Haram fighters an opportunity to surrender in exchange for shelter, food, clothing and education.

- There are also reports from the World Food Program in West and Central Africa that more than 5.6 million people in areas affected by Boko Haram's violence in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger are facing hunger this year, underscoring the humanitarian crisis Boko Haram is causing in the Lake Chad Basin.
- Although these facts are heart wrenching, we must remain focused and committed to facilitating what the State Department and Secretary Linda Thomas-Greenfield have recommended: to continue to empower the Multinational Joint Taskforce to combat Boko Haram as well as other regional bodies working in coordination to provide humanitarian assistance to the victims of Boko Haram.
- There is no doubt that Nigeria is a regional giant in Africa, given Nigeria's projected population estimated to reach 400 million by 2050, overtaking the United States.
- According to analysts, Nigeria will be the third most populous country in the world, while it maintains its staying power as Africa's largest economy, largest oil producer and one of the top global economies by 2050.
- All this data suggest to us the resilience of the Nigerian people to survive and thrive even in the face of adversity such as violent extremism.
- If we are to learn anything from the recent months and events, from Belgium to San Bernardino, one thing for sure is that terrorist organizations continue to aspire to inspire more violence in more territories across the globe.
- This is why we must stand shoulder to shoulder to combat terrorism.

- This is why I stand shoulder to shoulder with the Nigerian people across the diaspora and in Nigeria with realistic and cautious optimism of doing all we need to do to partner together and combat Boko Haram, so that Nigeria can build upon its many gains towards peace and prosperity and hold its position as a leader in the world.
- It is in the world's and Nigeria's interest that we combat Boko Haram.
- Boko Haram, much like ISIS seeks to capitalize on ethnic tensions and economic struggles to utilize religion to commit atrocities against the people of Nigeria and their regional neighbors.
- As we reflect on two years since the Chibok incident and over five years since Boko Haram began its evil actions, we must pursue on with grit, determination and partnership.
- In fact, through partnership and participation in the recent Nuclear Security Summit and the U.S.-Nigeria Bi-National Commission meeting in Washington, DC this year, the Nigerian government continues to show its commitment to a secure and prosperous Nigeria through the building of bilateral and multilateral friendships.
- **I commend the Obama Administration's commitment to countering Boko Haram with a strategy that transcends borders:**
  - focused on assisting the efforts of Nigeria and its neighbors in the fight by helping them weaken Boko Haram's capacity, financing, and cohesion;
  - counter and prevention efforts to combat attraction to violent extremism;

- the promotion of a more inclusive and capable local governance to address the underlying drivers of insecurity;
  - responding to the humanitarian needs of civilians affected by Boko Haram;
  - provision of security assistance and ramping up information-sharing efforts; and
  - a commitment to the provision of support to the Multinational Joint Task Force, which includes soldiers from Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, and Benin.
- **Let me also add that it would great to see the U.S. government work with the Nigerian government in drafting and implementing a Women Peace and Security National Action plan (pursuant to UN Council Resolution 1325), just as the U.S. government has created an action plan to that effect to integrate the voices of women in combatting violent extremism and bringing about peace and prosperity in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, by employing the expertise of women who tend to be disproportionately affected by violent extremism.**
  - Moreover, through the Administration's Security Governance Initiative, which President Obama launched in 2014 with six African partners, including Nigeria, the United States is exploring ways to enhance the management of security and justice systems so the Government of Nigeria can provide these services, including in the northeast, more efficiently and effectively.
  - Boko Haram and other terrorist organizations seek to erode our sense of normalcy and fundamental human rights.

- The Chibok girls and other victims of Boko Haram have the fundamental human right to freedom of movement, to education, and to the full realization of their human potential.
- To keep these girls on our minds, all of us here in Congress have worn red every Wednesday to signal the urgency of rescuing, recovering and reintegrating these young women and others affected back into the arms of their parents.
- I have met with the Nigerian President and was part of a delegation to Nigeria to engage local leaders, activists, businesses and families of the kidnapped girls on strategies for recovering and reintegrating the Chibok girls and many others who have been kidnapped.
- I remain steadfast in my commitment to working with President Buhari in his efforts and respective of and encourage the undertakings of the regional multinational taskforce.
- The Chibok girls and other families in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Chad and Benin ravaged by the violence of Boko Haram are not throwaways and the world cannot and should not forget them.
- As founder and Co-Chair of the Caucus on Nigeria and Co-Chair of the Congressional Children's Caucus, supporting Nigeria's efforts to combat violent extremism and the promotion of peace and prosperity in Nigeria has always and continues to be my top priority.
- I believe that with our commitment, just as the Aboke girls were recovered after being kidnapped in Northern Uganda by the Lord's Resistance Army, the Chibok girls will be rescued, returned home and reintegrated back into the human family.

- Here in the U.S. Congress, my colleagues and I dedicate every Wednesday to reflect and take action against the kidnapping of the girls by speaking out, acting and introducing legislative measures.
- For example, I have introduced the bipartisan measure H.Res 528: Victims of Terror Protection Fund to provide humanitarian assistance to Boko Haram victims and military technical assistance to be provided to Nigeria and its neighbors to combat Boko Haram.
- I also launched a United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security briefing series here on Capitol Hill, highlighting the role women play in building peace and security in the world.
- It is human to feel fatigued by the fight ahead, but history will judge us harshly if we fail to act.
- Also, our values obligate us to defend the vulnerable and those in suffering.
- It has been two years, and we must continue to fight for the return of the girls just as strong as we started.
- We must continue to fight for the freedoms of the least among us, whether those for whom we fight are out of sight, such as the kidnapped teenage girls from a boarding school in Chibok, the young boy in the Democratic Republic of Congo, or educated medical doctors fleeing violent extremism in Syria.
- The bottom line is that our obligations in the human family must revolve around and be grounded in our conviction and commitment to the rights to freedom of movement, freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and the freedom from fear or terrorism, among others.

- We must remain steadfast in guaranteeing these fundamental freedoms and protect the human rights of all to achieve peace and prosperity in our world.
- We must not and cannot forget Blessing Abana, Deborah Abari, Rebecca Mallum, Naomi Luka, Esther Markus, Zara Ishaku, Ruth Joshua, Grace Paul, Rebecca Luka and the others.
- The Chibok girls have garnered attention, but we must also recognize that thousands more lives have been affected in the Lake Chad Basin in Africa.
- To the others who remain in the claws of Boko Haram, the international community has not forgotten about you, nor have we once stopped fighting for your safe return.
- We are counting on you to remain strong, and be assured that help is on the way.
- Thank so much and I look forward to a very productive briefing today as we work together to bring our girls back home.