

KILLINGS IN CAPTURED TOWNS AND VILLAGES

From July 2014 Boko Haram began to take control of major towns in the north-east. These larger towns typically had a military presence and so usually Boko Haram targeted soldiers first, before moving on to kill civilians. Over the initial hours and days of Boko Haram control, its fighters followed a similar pattern to raids: mainly men of fighting age, civil servants and other groups targeted by Boko Haram were killed; shops, markets and large houses were looted; and some buildings were burned down. Boko Haram fighters rounded up children, women and the elderly, and imprisoned them in large houses or ordered them not to leave their homes. Amnesty International conducted 122 interviews with 110 people about killings after the capturing of 30 towns and villages.

GWOZA: AT LEAST 600 CIVILIANS KILLED

"When Boko Haram attacked Gwoza, they were shooting everywhere. Shooting at the civilians. When running to escape they will shoot you. Those on motorcycles are not attacking the military. It is the heavy vehicles that attacked the military. The motorcycles went to surrounding areas, each street corner, where they will shoot you. They are only shooting the men. Only one woman took a bullet. People said I should close my room so I would not be shot. Boko Haram killed many people."¹¹³

Muktar Yahaya (not real name), a businessman and resident of Gwoza, saw Boko Haram forces attack the town on 6 August 2014 at around 4pm. Amnesty International has interviewed three people who were in Gwoza at the time of the attack, four human rights defenders and one military source.

Residents from Gwoza told Amnesty International that prior to the attack Boko Haram members had sent several warning messages to Muslims in the town. Mustapha Ali (not real name), a resident and retired army officer, said that he frequently spoke to the commander or the intelligence officer in the Pulka base. He told Amnesty International: "Whenever we receive rumours or warnings of pending attacks, I and other men in the community will go to the army and tell them. We'll ask them to come and station in our village, even for the night. They never did. Not once. The soldiers would speak freely to me and complained about the lack of support from Maiduguri."¹¹⁴

Eyewitnesses to the attack told Amnesty International that Boko Haram gunmen fought with the soldiers stationed in the town and overwhelmed the troops, killing an unknown number of soldiers and forcing the rest to flee. Abubakar Lawan (not real name), a brick worker, told Amnesty International that at 5:30pm on the day of the attack on Gwoza, he was on his way home after work. At a military checkpoint in Gwoza, he saw men wearing military uniforms arriving in town on flat-bed trucks and tanks. Initially, he thought that the military were sending reinforcements. He told Amnesty International: "We started seeing motorcycles coming too. Then I thought 'it is not army as they don't have motorcycles, so maybe they are Boko Haram'. As they were driving into town they started shooting and people started running into their houses." Abubakar fled to his house, where he spent the night. "Next morning, in the early morning, I heard gunshots until 9am and went outside to see what's happening. I saw soldiers running away, about 40 soldiers. I asked [one of] them, 'What happened?' He said, 'You too have to escape with your lives'. There is a big mountain in Gwoza, so we went

¹¹³Amnesty International interview, November 2014.

¹¹⁴Amnesty International interview, February 2015.

there.”

After looting the barracks, Boko Haram fighters drove through the streets, shooting civilians as they tried to flee. They broke into shops, took the supplies inside and set fire to the buildings. They also destroyed many homes and stole cars.¹¹⁵ Boko Haram control of Gwoza has made it impossible to verify the number killed. One former resident estimated that at least 600 civilians were killed in the attack, but other residents claim the figure is higher. A woman who assisted with burials said the women of Gwoza buried more than 1,000 corpses.¹¹⁶

Several former residents of the town told Amnesty International that women were burying the dead in mass graves. The bodies were decaying so Boko Haram were digging graves while the women handled the corpses.¹¹⁷

Amnesty International was not able to confirm if the Boko Haram members had a list, but several eyewitnesses said the Boko Haram fighters went to specific houses. Muktar Ibrahim (not real name) said: “When they see a big building, they will enter. When they see a wooden house, they won’t enter. They were looking for their enemies like Civilian JTF. People working for the government.”¹¹⁸

Many women, elderly people and children remained in Gwoza town and were largely allowed to move around freely.

Muktar and his neighbour hid in the loft of his house for 13 days. His wife was able to leave the house and bring them food. He said Boko Haram members went from house to house to kill Civilian JTF members and people who worked for the government. After two weeks Muktar and his neighbour escaped when the Boko Haram fighters told the residents to leave. He walked with a large group of men and women towards Maiduguri. Outside Gwoza, on the road to Kirawa, Boko Haram fighters stopped them, saying they were looking for Civilian JTF members from Gwoza. Muktar said he saw 30 men killed in this incident. Women and children were allowed to go.

¹¹⁵ Amnesty International interviews, August, September and November 2014, with eyewitnesses as well as a military source.

¹¹⁶ Amnesty International interviews, August and September 2014.

¹¹⁷ Amnesty International interviews, August and September 2014

¹¹⁸ Amnesty International interview, November 2014.