



Boko Haram fighters destroyed most of the properties belonging to the school. © Private

NGOSHE: IMPRISONMENT OF HUNDREDS OF WOMEN

The makeshift prison in Ngoshe served as a transit point for newly captured detainees: young men who refused to join Boko Haram were killed; young women who converted to Islam were transferred to houses in surrounding towns, where they were detained; and the remaining women who refused to convert and the elderly were detained in Ngoshe.

Amnesty International interviewed 20 women who were detained in this makeshift prison, which opened around the time Boko Haram took over Gwoza LGA in September 2014. The prison consisted of a fenced compound of three houses owned by a local official. The women interviewed said that the prison held at least 200 people, mainly women of all ages and some older men. Each house had four to five rooms which were used as cells; each room could hold approximately 20 detainees. The interviewees said that most detainees came from villages and towns in Gwoza LGA, an area with many Christians.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ Amnesty International interviews, February and March 2015.

Rona Ali (not real name), a 55-year-old woman from Halgwa, Gwoza LGA, was detained in Ngoshe prison. Boko Haram members abducted her on 4 November 2014 when they attacked Gavva, Gwoza LGA. "I was on my way out when they caught me. They took me to Ngoshe prison where I spent 22 days." Rona was released with 10 other older women kept in the same building.²¹⁰

The young women were kept in a separate cell from the older women. The women in the prison were told to convert to Boko Haram's interpretation of Islam. If they agreed, Boko Haram fighters transferred them to houses in Gwoza. Amnesty International has received numerous testimonies about such houses, used by Boko Haram fighters to detain the women while they received religious instruction classes. From these houses they were often forced into marriage.²¹¹

Most women interviewed by Amnesty International told Amnesty International that they were given food once a day but that they had suffered from lack of safe drinking water. Most of them complained about the well at Ngoshe prison, which they said caused illnesses. **They said many of the women who drank the water died.**

"Some women advised us not to drink the water from the well. **Those who drank the water from the well were dying in the camp. About 15 people died in my building alone.**" Rona Ali told Amnesty International. One woman described how her "stomach got swollen", she had a high temperature and started vomiting. Boko Haram took her to hospital and she recovered.

Maryamu (not real name), a 15-year-old girl, said: "**The first day about 11 people died after drinking water. The second day eight people and the third day seven people.**"²¹² Another woman told Amnesty International that many women were pleading with the Boko Haram fighters to be transferred to another place because of the water. She said the fighters told them that those who refused to join them would die in Ngoshe.²¹³

Maryamu and her family were with a group of hundreds of people from Gavva trying to escape when Boko Haram fighters attacked the village in October 2014. They tried to cross the border to Cameroon but the group was ambushed by Boko Haram gunmen. Maryamu's parents and her four siblings managed to escape but she was seized with her four-year-old brother along with some 200 people and taken to Ngoshe. She said: "They asked us to sit down and said we should bring out all the money we have. They said 'If you don't bring it out and we find it later we will kill you.'" When they arrived at Ngoshe prison, all their luggage was taken and searched for money and valuables. The women were told to convert, Maryamu said: "they said... if you don't convert to Islam you are definitely going to have a problem... If you don't convert, we will kill the infidels."

After one week, Maryamu said she wanted to convert so that she was taken to a house in Gwoza with her brother for Qur'anic classes. From the house, she managed to escape with her brother, who was already sick. **He died before she was reunited with her family in a refugee camp in Cameroon.**²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Amnesty International interview, February 2015.

²¹¹ Amnesty International interviews, August 2014 – March 2015.

²¹² Amnesty International interview, February 2015.

²¹³ Amnesty International interview, February 2015.

²¹⁴ Amnesty International interview, February 2015.

When Boko Haram fighters attacked her village Gavva on 14 November 2014, Raki (not real name), a 43-year-old woman, fled to the hills with her youngest son, seven-year-old Haruna, and hid in a cave with six others. She was followed by a Boko Haram fighter who told them to come out. "All the others came out immediately. I stayed with my child. I thought he would think that was all [the people in the cave]. And then he opened fire into the cave, my son screamed and started crying. We then came out and joined the others... They insulted us, calling us infidels, saying they'll kill all of us. Five of them took me away to join some other women. They took us to Ngoshe and kept us in the prison."²¹⁵ Her son was taken away.

Raki tried to hide in the room with the elder women. "I was always crying and thinking of my children. If they come to the room and saw me crying, some of the commanders will slap me and tell me to shut up." Boko Haram members in control of Ngoshe prison started releasing some elderly women by the end of November 2014. Raki was transferred to a house in Gwoza where she was kept with 60 other women. Raki said they were allowed to move around the town since this transfer. She managed to escape on 14 January, while the Boko Haram gunmen guarding them were praying. Her son also escaped and she was reunited with all her children in Zhelevid village, in Cameroon. At the time of the interview, her mother was still detained by Boko Haram.

Some former detainees told Amnesty International that at Ngoshe prison they witnessed the executions of young men captured by Boko Haram gunmen. One of the witnesses, for example, told Amnesty International: "I saw them bringing people, most times men, from other communities and slaughtering them in front of us. This happened nine or 10 times when I was in their custody."²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Amnesty International interview, February 2015.

²¹⁶ Amnesty International interview, February 2015.