

THE ABDUCTION OF 218 WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN KATARKO, YOBE STATE

"Boko Haram said 'You people, you are trying to inform the Nigerian army of our presence in your town. So you too, you have joined the group of disbelievers, so your blood, your own wealth and your family, all those things belong to us.' " An eyewitness describing the abductions in Katarko.²¹⁷

On 6 January 2015, Boko Haram attacked Katarko village in Gujba LGA, Yobe state. An eyewitness, Mohammed Yakubu (not real name), a resident in his fifties, told Amnesty International that Boko Haram fighters arrived around 5:40 pm. After chasing away soldiers stationed in the town, Boko Haram fighters forced residents out of their homes by setting fire to houses and sent them to the central mosque. Mohammed Yakubu went to the mosque; he said women and children were separated out. Boko Haram gunmen then abducted 218 people – from 40 households – 134 women and girls and 84 boys, according to a list compiled by the community working with a human rights defender.²¹⁸ They were marched to the nearest town controlled by Boko Haram – Buni Yadi, Gubja LGA, Yobe state. Meanwhile, Boko Haram fighters at the mosque identified 36 men and boys aged between 15 and 45 years old, took them outside one by one and shot or slaughtered them. Their bodies were dumped in a well 50 metres from the mosque.²¹⁹

The Boko Haram gunmen told the remaining men, all over 45 years old, to repent and then left. Mohammed Yakubu was not taken because of his age. With others from the community he established how many people were killed and kidnapped.²²⁰

More than two weeks later, on 22 and 24 January 2015, Boko Haram fighters released 182 women and children.²²¹ Boko Haram fighters gave them a choice of joining the group or leaving. Some chose to stay, fearing that Boko Haram would kill them if they left. Those who were released were left in the bush and found their way back to Damaturu. No one has heard from the remaining 36 women and children, who are presumed to remain held captive by Boko Haram.

GULLAK CAMP: ABDUCTED WOMEN AND GIRLS TRAINED AS FIGHTERS

Aisha Yusuf (not real name), a 19-year-old woman who was abducted in September 2014, spent four months in a Boko Haram camp in Gullak, Madagali LGA in Adamawa state. She was abducted, when she visited a friend's wedding. Her sister, the bride and her sister were abducted as well.

She estimated that there were 500 fighters in the camp and frequently new members arrived from Sambisa and Gwoza. One week after they arrived in the camp, the bride and her sister were married off to Boko Haram fighters. They were taken away and at the time of the interview in April 2015, Aisha did not know their whereabouts.

²¹⁷ Amnesty International interview March 2015.

²¹⁸ Amnesty International has a list of those abducted on file.

²¹⁹ Amnesty International interviews, January and March 2015.

²²⁰ Amnesty International interviews, January 2015. Amnesty International interviewed two eyewitnesses and a human rights activist.

²²¹ Amnesty International interviews, March 2015.

"They used to train girls how to shoot guns. I was among the girls trained to shoot. I was also trained how to use bombs and how to attack a village. They'll dress us and demonstrate to us how to explode a bomb. This training went on for 3 weeks after we arrived. Then they started sending some of us to operations. I went on one operation to my own village."²²²

There were approximately 100 other abducted girls and women in Gullak, all abducted from surrounding villages, including Michika, Kankere, Baza, Ndutse, Kuzum, Gullak and Madagali.

In October, the commander of the camp brought approximately 200 female fighters, according to Aisha abducted women and girls like herself, to train them. "The commander said we should learn from them. Learn about killing and slaughtering. They told me how they attacked towns and villages, how they kill other people, how they slaughter infidels. They described how they attacked Gwoza and Michika. They told us they had killed a lot of people, they had abducted young boys and other girls. The commander wanted them to encourage us to fight and kill."

Aisha said the group of female fighters went on operations from Gullak camp and some were transferred to another base while others stayed in Gullak. Aisha said she went on many operations.

"From the base, we'll get into a car and then the Boko Haram will shoot anyone they see on their way. They'll kill people, we'll stay briefly before we return. The commanders will advise us to be careful. We shouldn't be afraid of the soldiers. We should confront. On the way, nothing will happen. We'll be singing and shooting in the air. We [the women and girls] were often placed in the middle or at the back. We never experienced casualties, because most times we don't even get resistance from the soldiers. During the operations, I shot guns, I didn't kill anyone, but I burnt some houses. I helped in packing people's properties into the car. The Boko Haram fighters will congratulate us and we will also celebrate. They will cook lots of food and we'll be happy."²²³

"I saw more than 50 people killed while I was there. 40 men and 10 women. Some of them refused to convert. Some refused to learn how to kill others. They were buried in a mass grave in the bush. They'll just pack the dead bodies and dump them in a big hole, but not deep enough. I didn't see the hole, but we used to get the smell from the dead bodies when they start getting rotten...My sister was killed in the camp. I was briefly taken away before they shot her. And then they brought me to see her dead body."

Aisha escaped in January 2015, in the evening. A woman who cooked for the fighters helped her.

²²² Amnesty International interview, April 2015.

²²³ Amnesty International interview, April 2015.