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## Nigeria: Boko Haram Abducts Women, Recruits Children <sup>[1]</sup>

Hundreds 'Disappeared' by Security Forces; Vigilante Movement on the Rise

November 29, 2013

(Abuja, November 29, 2013) – Boko Haram has abducted scores of women and girls, used children as young as 12 in hostilities, and killed hundreds of people in recent attacks, Human Rights Watch said today. The Nigeria <sup>[2]</sup>n government, meanwhile, has failed to account for hundreds of men and boys whom security forces have rounded up and forcibly disappeared during Boko Haram's four-year insurgency.

The rise of an anti-Boko Haram group allied with Nigerian security forces, the so-called Civilian Joint Task Force, has added a worrisome new dimension to the violence. Civilian Joint Task Force members inform security forces about presumed local Boko Haram activity; the Islamist group then retaliates against both the neighborhood vigilante group and the broader community.

"For a group that claims to be religious, Boko Haram's tactics are the most profane acts we can imagine," said Daniel Bekele <sup>[3]</sup>, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "The killing and mutilation of ordinary Nigerians, the abduction and rape of women and girls, and the use of children for fighting are horrifying human rights violations."

In a nine-day November 2013 visit to Kano and Maiduguri, Human Rights Watch interviewed more than 60 victims and witnesses, as well as medical personnel, members of local rights groups, Civilian Joint Task Force commanders, and government officials.

Commanders of the Civilian Joint Task Force, working with security forces, said that they had rescued 26 abducted women and girls from a Boko Haram stronghold in Maiduguri and later in Sambisa Forest. Some of the women and girls were pregnant; others had babies. The commanders told Human Rights Watch that a number of the girls had been abducted while hawking wares on the street or working on farms in remote villages. Many girls who were rescued or had escaped were sent off by their families to distant cities like Abuja and Lagos to avoid the stigma of rape or pregnancy outside of marriage, activists said.

Several witnesses said they saw children in the ranks of Boko Haram during attacks. In Maiduguri,

Human Rights Watch researchers saw a video recording of the interrogation by security forces of a 14-year-old boy, who described the role he played in Boko Haram operations. Commanders of the Civilian Joint Task Force said they had freed numerous children during a 2013 attack on a Boko Haram base in Sambisa Forest.

Human Rights Watch also observed children who appeared to be aged 15 - 17 manning checkpoints for the Civilian Joint Task Force in Maiduguri; other witnesses described seeing children manning checkpoints elsewhere in Borno and Yobe states.

Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that Boko Haram intensified its attacks on civilians following the state of emergency imposed by the federal government in May in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states. President Goodluck Jonathan in November renewed the state of emergency in these states for another six months.

Witnesses described Boko Haram laying siege to towns, villages, and highways; looting and burning houses, shops, and vehicles; and executing and decapitating people, some of whom they accused of aiding the Civilian Joint Task Force. In July, the combined efforts of the security forces and Civilian Joint Task Force appear to have pushed Boko Haram out of Maiduguri. Since then, the group has carried out numerous attacks in the nearby towns of Damaturu, Benisheikh, and Gamboru.

Boko Haram's September 17 attack on Benisheikh, 74 kilometers west of Maiduguri, killed at least 142 people and was the most lethal incident in Borno State since 2010. A man who went to Benisheikh to look for a colleague on the morning after the attack described what he saw at a checkpoint that had been set up by Boko Haram and that was crowded with burned vehicles:

"There were bodies all over... three here, two there, four near the next – all lying face down, dead next to their vehicle. Then I saw a long line of bodies... about 30 of them. But weirdly, one of the trucks was carrying cows, which were still alive. Who are these people who kill the human beings, yet leave the cows standing?" he said.

Another witness described seeing about 20 women abducted during the September 17 Benisheikh attack. A health worker in Maiduguri told Human Rights Watch that he attended to a 15-year-old girl who had recently returned home pregnant several months after Boko Haram abducted her.

Security forces acting with enhanced powers, particularly during the state of emergency, established frequent screening routines for male youths in Maiduguri, detaining several hundred young men, according to residents. Witnesses described how soldiers pounded on doors in neighborhoods perceived as Boko Haram strongholds beginning at 5 a.m., ordered the young men out, demanded that they stand before a car with its headlights on, and then declared the men

either free or under arrest. Scores of those arrested have disappeared, and their family members, despite great efforts, have been unable to locate them.

A woman in Gwange, a Maiduguri neighborhood, described how security forces arrested her seven sons, between the ages of 12 and 30, who had gathered in front of their home with 15 others for evening prayers in May. Another woman told Human Rights Watch that eight soldiers ordered her 10-year-old son to lie down, beat him with batons and tied him up, piled him face down with 22 others in an open-back vehicle, and then drove them away.

Two former detainees and three other witnesses provided detailed statements about the horrific conditions in the security forces' notorious Giwa military barracks in Maiduguri. They said that hundreds of detainees died as a result of dehydration, illness, and beatings, while many others were executed.

Boko Haram should halt all attacks and release immediately all children and women in its custody, Human Rights Watch said. The Nigerian government should thoroughly and impartially investigate the fate of the disappeared, as well as credible allegations of arbitrary detention, use of torture, and deaths in custody by security forces.

The Nigerian government has a responsibility under international human rights law to take all reasonable steps to protect its residents from violence, but should not use excessive force, mistreat and torture detainees, or conduct arbitrary arrests in quelling the Boko Haram threat.

The Nigerian authorities should prosecute, based on fair trial standards, all those who committed crimes during the conflict, including members of the government security forces and pro-government vigilante groups. The Civilian Joint Task Force, Human Rights Watch said, should end recruitment and use of children in counterinsurgency and intelligence activities.

The federal attorney general's office, drawing on information from the military, police, and State Security Service, should compile, maintain, and make available a list of detention facilities and detainees. The authorities should give detainees access to lawyers and family members. Detainees should either be publicly and promptly charged with a recognized crime in a civilian court or released.

The government, in coordination with the National Human Rights Commission, should establish a commission of inquiry on "disappearances" in northeast Nigeria; train Civilian Joint Task Force members in human rights norms and standards; and work with child protection agencies to facilitate the rehabilitation of former child soldiers and the return to their families. It should also help provide psychological and medical services to girls and women who have been abducted and raped.

“Many Nigerian families have suffered, even lost loved ones, at the hands of both Boko Haram and the security forces,” Bekele said. “Boko Haram must desist from waging war on ordinary Nigerians, while the government should take urgent steps to hold to account soldiers who have tortured, disappeared, and killed, regardless of rank.”

## **Fighting Between Boko Haram and Nigerian Security Forces**

Since fighting with security forces in the summer of July 2009, Nigeria’s homegrown Islamist insurgent movement, Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad, popularly known as Boko Haram, has carried out frequent attacks on police, soldiers, politicians, and other symbols of authority, as well as on civilian property such as schools. The group is waging a war against the government to establish an Islamic legal code.

Human Rights Watch for several years has documented Boko Haram attacks and abuses by government security forces against civilians and suspected Boko Haram members. In a 2012 report, “[Spiraling Violence](#) <sup>[4]</sup>”, Human Rights Watch analyzed the pattern and scope of the violence that has engulfed communities in northeast and central Nigeria.

In June 2013, young men in Maiduguri organized into a group known as the Civilian Joint Task Force, or Yan Gora, to monitor and protect their town and neighboring villages from violence. Members interviewed by Human Rights Watch said the youth had grown tired of being targeted by both Boko Haram and the security forces. The group maintains checkpoints; searches pedestrians, vehicles, and residences; and provides intelligence to the security services.

The Civilian Joint Task Force relies on members’ knowledge of the community to identify Boko Haram members for the security forces. The Borno State governor has recruited 1,800 youths, paying them the equivalent of US\$100 per month to work with the Civilian Joint Task Force, who are trained by security forces. Recruitment and training of Civilian Joint Task Force members is ongoing.

## **Boko Haram’s Execution and Decapitation of Civilians in Benisheikh**

The September 17, 2013 attack on Benisheikh was Boko Haram’s most deadly attack on civilians in Borno State since 2009. At least 150 members of Boko Haram took over and for several hours held a stretch of the highway near the town, 75 kilometers west of Maiduguri, the Borno State capital.

During the siege, they killed at least 142 people, according to officials from the Borno State Environmental Protection Agency, which cleared away and buried the bodies. The heavily travelled road connects Maiduguri with Kano, the commercial hub to the west.

Human Rights Watch interviewed seven witnesses with knowledge of the attack, including three detained by Boko Haram during the episode and four others who went to the scene shortly after Boko Haram members fled.

The witnesses described how heavily armed men from Boko Haram set up checkpoints that forced at least 30 vehicles to stop – private cars, commercial taxis and minibuses, motorcycles, and trucks carrying goods and livestock. The armed men ordered the passengers out of the vehicles and demanded their cash, telephones, and identity cards. Boko Haram separated the women and children from the men, who were ordered to lie down on the road, then executed scores of the men and several boys. During and after the attack, Boko Haram stole merchandise from the vehicles as well as from stores inside Benisheikh.

Witnesses who arrived shortly after Boko Haram fled described seeing several lines of bodies on the road, many with their feet and hands bound. Others were in the grass not far from the road. Most had one or a few bullets to the head and neck; others had deep machete wounds. According to a morgue attendant who picked up the bodies, at least six had been decapitated.

Witnesses said that based on comments from Boko Haram, many of the victims were targeted merely on the basis of where they lived: those from Maiduguri, Damaturu, and other towns in Borno and Yobe states were singled out for execution because of their perceived support for the Civilian Joint Task Force. Many of those from Kano and elsewhere were spared. A driver from Kano said:

At the entrance to the town, I was stopped by a group of 35 men in military uniform and turbans covering their faces. They were heavily armed with AK[47]'s; many had machine guns. They looked in my car and seeing I had mostly women, motioned for me to move on until I was stopped by another big group of more than 100, at the truck stop [where we usually pray and eat]. I was one of at least 30 vehicles. They ordered us out, yelling at the men to lie down on the road, and for the women to move to one side. They asked the men where we were from....

The driver never again saw his passengers, who were from Maiduguri:

While lying there, I saw them kill 10 men... they walked behind a small house with them, then I heard them in Hausa saying, "Uh huh... you've left us, you are Civilian JTF [Joint Task Force], you have chosen your side," meaning the government. Then a shot... and another and another. Later, after BH [Boko Haram] fled, I saw the 10 bodies where they'd been slaughtered.

Another driver identified the bodies of two of his friends – one in a cluster with nine other bodies,

another with four other dead. A third driver, who also searched for his colleague, found his body, but “his head was to one side... completely severed... I couldn’t sleep for days.”

A man who went to Benisheikh on the morning after the attack described what he saw as he searched for the body of his colleague who had failed to return home from Kano:

I saw four big trucks and about 15 cars or minibuses – most of them burned, some still smoldering, and next to them were the bodies... three here, two there, four near the next – all lying face down, dead next to their vehicle. Then I saw a long line of bodies... about 30 of them. Each had his legs and hands bound, and a cloth over their eyes... it was here I found my friend. He, like the rest, had been killed with a bullet to the back of the head.

### **Boko Haram Abduction and Rape of Women and Girls**

A driver detained in September at a checkpoint manned by Boko Haram near the town of Benisheikh told Human Rights Watch that he saw Islamist group members force more than 20 women at gunpoint to get off public transport vehicles and climb onto two other vehicles that sped away with Boko Haram:

At their checkpoint they ordered us out, yelling at the men to lie down on the road, and for the women to move to one side. I remained on the ground for over 45 minutes... I saw them kill many men, but the women, they took them away... I saw two of the vehicles they’d stopped drive up close to us... one 16-seater, the other of about 10 seats. A few of the BH [Boko Haram] went over to where the women were gathered, pointing at which ones they wanted. They didn’t take those with children – mostly, they took young women in their 20s... they picked the fine [pretty] ones. They ordered them inside, at times pointing their guns, saying, “Go, go.” A few other women were ordered to get into one of their Hiluxes [vehicles]... The women were crying and saying, “Oh my God, oh my God,” as they entered the cars. None of the men dared say a word... Then they [Boko Haram] drove away with [the women]...

A woman who works with a local nongovernmental organization told Human Rights Watch that she interviewed a young woman who was saved from abduction during the Benisheikh attack after a former neighbor, now a member of Boko Haram, recognized her. A bus owner said Boko Haram released one of his captured passengers after seeing her walk with a limp.

In Maiduguri, residents told Human Rights Watch that, on several occasions, members of Boko Haram forcefully abducted several teenage girls. One man who had documented several of these cases said, “After storming into the homes and throwing sums of money at their parents, with a

declaration that it was the dowry for their teenage daughter, they would take the girls away.” Some of the girls returned months later, showing signs of pregnancy or babies born during their captivity. One witness said his neighbor was shot dead for rejecting the “dowry” thrown at her by insurgents, who took away the neighbor’s daughter.

A Civilian Joint Task Force commander who had participated in a raid that freed some abducted women and girls said:

When we made Maiduguri “too hot” for Boko Haram, they ran away without their wives. Now they are picking up women anywhere and using them to satisfy themselves. Some of the girls we found hiding when we invaded Boko Haram camps around Sambisa [Forest] told us they were dragged into vehicles when hawking on the street. When we return them home, their families are too ashamed to keep them because nobody will marry a girl who has been raped or has a child for these bad people.

### **Recruitment and Use of Children by Boko Haram and the Civilian Joint Task Force**

Several witnesses described the presence of children, a few as young as 12, in the ranks of Boko Haram. Witnesses to the Benisheikh attack observed some children carrying AK47 rifles. Human Rights Watch viewed a video of the interrogation by the military of an alleged child combatant who described the duties children perform for Boko Haram: intelligence gathering, tracking the movements of the security forces, transporting guns, burning down schools and churches, and providing information before attacks.

Other witnesses described seeing several children aged 15 - 17 manning checkpoints for the Civilian Joint Task Force, working with security forces within several towns in Borno State. Civilian Joint Task Force members admitted to having used numerous children in operations. However, one leader noted recently that “the military had advised us not to allow any children to enter into the Civilian JTF [Joint Task Force] as part of our ongoing recruitment drive.”

Nigeria is party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, which bans the recruitment and use in hostilities of children under 18 by armed groups distinct from the armed forces of a country. Under Nigeria’s 2003 Child Act, the government is required to ensure that no child is directly involved in any military operations or hostilities.

### **Mass Arrests, Detention, and Disappearances by Security Forces in Maiduguri**

Former detainees, family members of detainees, human rights advocates, and militia leaders described the detention in Maiduguri of hundreds of men in mass arrests by security forces; the

numbers of detentions were particularly high in May and June 2013.

Scores, perhaps hundreds, of these men and boys remain unaccounted for. Witnesses and former detainees credibly assert that detainees died in custody from the appalling detention conditions or were executed by the security services within the 21 Armored Brigade, popularly known as Giwa Barracks. Both the detentions and deaths in custody appear to have slowed since July.

Human Rights Watch documented five major mass arrests, in markets, mosques, and other locations where young men are known to congregate. Witnesses said the security forces appeared to detain the men arbitrarily.

Human Rights Watch spoke with 16 family members of men and boys detained by the security services during sweeps of their neighborhoods in Maiduguri, including Gwange, Gamboru ward, Terminus, and Baga fish market. Many of the relatives saw the mass arrests. Family members and witnesses described how, often after Boko Haram attacks, members of the security forces indiscriminately rounded up and arrested boys and young men in the vicinity who were presumed to be aligned with the group.

Several people in the vicinity of Baga fish market in Maiduguri described how, in May 2013, security forces shot and killed 13 young men and arrested more than 200 others during a major operation. One witness said:

I was attending to customers at my stall on Democracy Day (May 29) when at about 9 a.m. soldiers surrounded the market and locked the gates... They ordered everyone to come out into an open space in the market, then separated the young men from the old... The commander of the soldiers... stood in front of the young men with someone whose head was covered... He would count then point...

Whoever he pointed at would have their shirt immediately torn off by other soldiers and the pieces used to tie their hands at their back. Sometimes he would touch people on their chest and if their hearts were pounding or they moved, their shirt would also be torn off and used to tie them. Some people became nervous, afraid, and tried to move away from the soldiers. They were instantly shot dead... Thirteen dead bodies were taken away by the soldiers when they finished screening us at around 9 p.m. at night...

They piled the young men whose hands they had tied on top of each other in the trucks that brought fish to the market... More than 200 people were arrested from this market that day. We heard later that those at the bottom of the piles were already dead when the trucks arrived at JTF [Joint Task Force] Sector 1. Those that remained alive were taken to Giwa Barracks later that night and we never saw them in the market again.



A man who was detained at Giwa Barracks for six months with 16 other men and boys from his neighborhood, ranging in age from 17 - 60, said he was the only one from the group to survive. Hundreds of his cellmates died at Giwa, the man said:

After reaching Giwa, many of us were chained to the columns – four of us on each one – where I remained for 20 hours while they beat us; an old man chained alongside me died right there, his head hanging limp. I watched as six of my neighbors died while being beaten with sticks and iron rods by soldiers the very first day we got to Giwa Barracks – two of them were brothers. They fell down and never got up again.

Of those in my group, the other 10 died from starvation and illness in the cell, where we were detained with over 1,000 other men... They died one by one like so many others, of illness, of sickness like dysentery or cholera, of hunger... sometimes up to 25 would be taken out of the cell dead. In one day I saw others being dragged off for interrogation, but they never returned.

On several occasions I heard the officers saying, “Just finish him,” and then a shot would ring out. Once I saw the major take out a Beretta [firearm] and shoot a detainee... only they will know what to say to Allah on the Day of Judgment.

Several witnesses described an underground bunker where men thought to be active members of Boko Haram were detained and where the conditions were even worse. Two witnesses described seeing corpses on several occasions brought up from the cellar and loaded onto an ambulance.

The former detainees and witnesses described gross overcrowding, with hundreds of men jammed into a cell: “We were packed so tightly; if you dared stand up, there was no way you’d find the room to sit down again,” one former detainee recalled. The detainees at times urinated, defecated, and vomited on themselves. One detainee said he bathed only twice in six months.

Witnesses attributed the majority of deaths in detention to dehydration and illness, primarily dysentery. They said the pace of deaths increased in the hot months and rainy season. One detainee claimed to have seen up to 20 or 25 dead being taken out per day. An 18-year-old former detainee who was arrested in his home with a friend, also 18 years old, said:

I was handcuffed to my friend for 10 months and had only one free hand to quickly use the toilet and get our meal, which is served directly unto our palms within the five minutes we were opened up in the mornings and evenings [to use the bathroom and get meals]. My friend became gravely ill and weak so our cuff was removed, but he received no treatment or medication except painkillers once in a while. When we were eventually released after two years through the intervention of a benefactor, my friend could no longer hear, speak, or walk... He is still gravely ill now.

A group of 70 women and children from the Terminus area of Maiduguri in early November protested the detention without charge of their family members at Giwa Barracks. One of the group's leaders told Human Rights Watch that the detainees, aged 15 - 30, had not been permitted to see their family members, who had tried desperately to locate and visit their detained loved ones.

Witnesses at a hospital in Maiduguri described seeing soldiers bring corpses to the hospital on nearly a daily basis, both from Boko Haram attacks and Giwa Barracks. The largest numbers were in May and June, when the military ambulance would sometimes make up to seven trips from Giwa Barracks to the morgue, witnesses said. The corpses that arrived at the morgue were visibly emaciated; some with hands tied behind their backs, or had scars around the wrists, suggesting they had been handcuffed for extended periods of time. Some of the corpses had "necks hanging at strange angles" or gunshot wounds that suggested the cause of death, witnesses said.

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