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Global Revulsion Grets Massacre of 16 Students in Borno, Yobe

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- *Campaign launched to ensure every child goes to school safe*
- *50 schools razed by Boko Haram as Borno govt beefs up security*

Michael Olugbode

Following the massacre of 16 students in Yobe and Borno States this week, former UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, has led the global community in condemning in the strongest possible terms the killing of the students and their teachers in both states.

Seven students and two teachers were killed on Sunday in Government Secondary School, Damaturu, the Yobe State capital, by suspected members of the Boko Haram sect.

The next day, five more students sitting for the National Examination Council (NECO) exam at Ansarudeen Primary/Secondary School, a private school in the Jajeri ward of Maiduguri metropolis, were killed; while gunmen suspected to be members of the sect again stormed a private secondary school in the

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Customs area of Maiduguri on Wednesday, killing four teachers and two students.

In a statement signed by Brown, who is also the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Global Education, he said: "In response to these tragedies, and events a day earlier in Pakistan where 14 girls were murdered on their school bus, a new global petition - led by Malala the young Pakistani girl shot for wanting an education - has been launched calling on governments to ensure that every child can go to school in safety."

He said the petition - which demands that the UN implement its Millennium Development Goal promises of universal education by December 2015 - can be signed on aworldatschool.org.

Also joining in the condemnation, the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, expressed shock and dismay at the terrorist killings, wondering how in a school examination hall last Sunday seven students and two teachers were killed by gunmen and how this five-hour shootout at the secondary school in Damaturu was then followed by a grim sequel when on Monday nine students were murdered in a school hall in Maiduguri.

The Nigerian killings have parallels with the Saturday massacre at a girl's college in Pakistan, Brown said.

"There on Saturday, a bus taking 40 students from their college studies was blown up by a female suicide bomber, killing 14 girls. In just three days, 30 young people have lost their lives simply because they wanted an education.

"And there is a pattern that is now visible in these outrages. The five students who were killed on Monday at the primary/secondary school, in the Jajeri ward of Maiduguri metropolis, were gunned down in the examination hall as they started their annual exams.

"Once terrorists had stormed the school, the sect members opened fire on the hall just moments after the examination started, forcing students and invigilators to take to their heels.

"This episode resembles earlier attacks in Pakistan where only a few weeks ago at an all girls' school, pupils were gunned down and bombs thrown into the playground at a Saturday morning open-air prize giving ceremony."

He observed Nigeria has more than 10 million girls and boys who are not at school, adding that the figure is the highest in the world.

"The poorest most rural communities are the worst hit of all. If you want to help their cause, join Malala in signing the petition on aworldatschool.org. As Malala said when supporting the new petition, every child has a right to go to school," Brown said.

Also, in response to the targeting of schools in the state, the Borno State Government yesterday promised to provide security in all schools in the state to stem the rising spate of killings of teachers and students and to ward off the ceaseless burning of schools by the deadly Boko Haram sect.

The state also expressed concern that in the last one year, the terrorist group has razed over 50 primary and junior secondary schools in the state and caused government to spend several millions of naira in reconstruction.

Speaking at a press conference Thursday, the Borno State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) Chairman, Professor Tijjani Abba Ali, said the state government was made to rebuild two schools shortly after they were built from the initial ashes.

Ali said initially 10 schools were burnt for which the state received assistance of N120 million from the Ministry of Education to rebuild but the schools were razed again shortly after they were rebuilt.

Ali added that after the incident, more schools were razed, putting the total number of primary and junior secondary schools that have been razed by the fundamentalists at over 50.

The SUBEB chairman, who said the destroyed senior secondary schools were excluded from the list, revealed that six teachers and five students had been killed by the insurgents in primary schools in the state in the last few days.

He also disclosed that from 2008 to 2011, the state government had settled all the outstanding counterpart funding with Universal Basic Education (UBE) in order to access about N3.4 billion which was expended in the reconstruction, and procurement of furniture for schools under the SUBEB scheme across the 27 local government areas of the state.

According to him, under the self-help projects of UBE, 85 and 107 schools benefited from the scheme in 2010 and 2011 respectively, stressing that schools were selected across the three senatorial districts of the state.

On teachers' welfare, he said the government had promoted 13,163 teachers across the state and had set up a committee with a view to settling the gratuities of all teachers who died in service and those who have retired.

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