

**Testimony by United States Agency for International Development  
Assistant Administrator for Africa Earl Gast  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
Subcommittee on Africa  
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**“#BringBackOurGirls: Addressing the Growing Threat of Boko Haram”**

USAID partners around the world to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies, while advancing our security and prosperity. Our work in Northern Nigeria highlights the nexus between security, stability and poverty reduction. We are committed to working with Nigeria to build a peaceful society that promotes inclusive economic growth and lifts its citizens out of poverty.

One month ago, Boko Haram militants kidnapped more than 250 young girls from their school in an attack so shocking it mobilized the world behind returning these girls to their families. But this latest brutality was not an isolated incident. For years, Boko Haram has terrorized the people of Northern Nigeria through bombings, kidnapping, and sexual violence.

For decades, development in the Northern part of the country has markedly lagged behind the relative progress made in the South as is evident through comparison of development indicators in Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones. In the three Northern zones, per capita incomes are significantly lower than the national average. Literacy in the South-West zone is around 80 percent for girls, while in the North-East it is only 15 percent. Health statistics paint a similar picture of disparity. Immunization coverage in the North-East is only about 8 percent, while in the South-South it is closer to 36 percent.

In recent years, Boko Haram has attempted to exploit Northern Nigeria’s low level of infrastructure, public services, and security. Boko Haram attacks have affected all aspects of life, from economic growth to access to basic services, and resulted in the North’s growing isolation. Commercial activity in Kano, once a national economic hub, is estimated to have decreased by 50 percent in recent years, due in large part to the stream of businesses that have left Northern states like Borno and Kaduna for the stability of the South.

The conflict has caused decreases in agricultural production, price spikes, and serious concerns about food security both in the North and neighboring states, particularly import-dependent Niger. In Nigeria, nearly 4.2 million people are at risk of food insecurity, and continued unrest will likely have long-term impacts on nutrition, agriculture, and trade.

Access to health care has dramatically declined in the hardest hit conflict areas; in Borno state, doctors are fleeing and clinics are closing, forcing the population into neighboring Cameroon for

basic health services. Boko Haram has also been targeting cell phone towers so people in the region have less access to communications.

As violence began to escalate, the Government of Nigeria declared a state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states in May 2013. In early 2014, attacks carried out by Boko Haram militants killed more than 1,500 people. According to the UN, violence had displaced more than a quarter million people to neighboring states by March 2014 – 70 percent of them women and children. An additional 61,000 people, including returning migrants, have also fled to neighboring Niger, Cameroon, and Chad, where they are living in host communities

In communities hosting internally displaced persons, the presence of additional families is straining local resources, including already-stretched water systems and basic commodities. Increasing numbers of female-headed households is forcing widows to become the sole providers for their families. Such households and widows are exposed to additional violence within host communities. In the absence of their husbands, widows also lack access to financial resources, exacerbated by inheritance laws, and systems that limit women's ownership of property.

### **Situational Assessment**

Due to insecurity, presence of aid workers in the most affected areas is very limited and we do not yet have a comprehensive picture of the overall humanitarian situation. To determine the extent of the crisis, the UN along with key international nongovernmental organizations are currently conducting a multi-agency, multi-sector needs assessment. Last week, a team of humanitarian professionals from the UN and NGO's traveled to the areas in states of emergency (Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa) as well as three bordering states (Bauchi, Gombe, and Taraba) that have received the most internally displaced people.

This team is currently interviewing state and local officials and meeting with internally displaced persons and other community members to establish the number of displaced people, where they live, and their level of access to food, income, health care, education, water, sanitation, and hygiene. The team will also evaluate food security, nutrition, and protection services, identify humanitarian actors still on the ground, and develop the most effective approaches to deliver relief and identify opportunities to strengthen the capacity of state governments and local partners to monitor displacement, report, assess, and coordinate delivery of relief.

USAID humanitarian experts have been involved in the assessment process since the beginning, working to help define indicators and processes. USAID humanitarian experts are currently in Nigeria and will continue to support the work of the UN and other agencies. USAID will use the results of this mission to shape the provision of humanitarian assistance in partnership with implementing organizations to meet urgent humanitarian needs among affected families. Assistance may include providing food, shelter, and household items for displaced populations;

safe water in communities whose resources have been overstretched because of an influx of new families; support to emergency treatment of acute malnutrition; or community-based psycho-social support and programs targeted at the prevention and treatment of sexual and gender-based violence. USAID is also exploring opportunities for collaboration with key Nigerian agencies, the Nigerian National Emergency Management Agency, local emergency response actors as well as supporting efforts to increase food security data collection and analysis to inform potential response options.

Once completed, the UN and USAID assessments will give us a better understating of the situation and how best to respond, taking into account the operational realities of programming in Northern Nigeria.

### **An Attack on Education**

Exacerbating the humanitarian crisis, Boko Haram's assaults on youth seeking education has become ever more brazen over the past two years. A good education is a global public good, and a necessary ingredient for economic development and poverty reduction. Education enables people to live healthier and more productive lives, allowing them to fulfil their own potential, as well as to strengthen and contribute to open, inclusive and economically vibrant societies.

Boko Haram's attacks on schools had consisted of destroying empty school buildings at night, but more recently has shifted to targeting Muslim and non-Muslim students and staff with guns, knives, and explosives. The group has killed or wounded hundreds of students and teachers since June 2013. The mass abduction of female students in Chibok marked a frightening shift: While in prior attacks, Boko Haram generally instructed female students to flee, they are now publically calling on girls to abandon Western education or be taken as slaves.

Boko Haram is also seeking to perpetuate child marriage as an acceptable practice and is using it to sow fear, intimidation, and coercion.

These attacks undermine Northern Nigeria's already precarious educational system by destroying schools, forcing others to close, and keeping thousands of students and teachers out of the classroom. School attendance in the region, already well below the national rate, most likely will continue to suffer.

### **USAID Assistance**

USAID has active programs in nearly all of Nigeria's Northern states, with a particular focus on Bauchi and Sokoto. Through our education programs in the North, we have increased access to basic education services for over 15,000 orphans and vulnerable children, strengthened the capacity of 24 education-related non-governmental organizations to responsibly manage their

finances, and influenced Nigeria's Educational Research and Development Council to include reading as a part of the education curriculum.

Through our economic growth programs, USAID has built the capacity of export firms, helped medium-sized, small, and micro enterprises gain access to loans, and supported the development of a new customs and excise management act to reform and modernize the Nigerian customs service. At the same time, the Feed the Future program has helped Nigerian farmers more than double their yields in maize, rice, and sorghum, and leveraged millions of dollars in credit for thousands of beneficiaries and for numerous private sector partnerships.

USAID has also helped the Sokoto and Bauchi State Houses of Assembly pass public procurement and fiscal responsibility laws, trained over 900 government officials in public procurement and financial management practices, and assisted with the passing of the federal freedom of information act and its adoption at the state levels.

USAID's conflict mitigation program—active in six states in the North, including Borno, the state most affected state by Boko Haram's violence—has funded numerous community training programs on conflict mitigation, reconstituted and trained Conflict Management and Mitigation Regional Councils, and carried out phone-in interfaith dialogues on radio and television programs.

Regionally, the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, which USAID implements alongside the Departments of State and Defense, includes a regional Peace for Development program in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad—areas that are vulnerable as they may become fertile ground for the expansion of violent extremist groups. This initiative applies a holistic, community-led approach that has reached nearly 3.8 million people from at-risk groups through youth-led community mobilization activities, radio programming, and training in management skills, budgeting, leadership, vocational trades, and conflict resolution. In other areas of the Sahel, USAID supports a vocational education program in Mauritania and has expanded our program to counter violent extremism to key areas of Northern Mali. Given the immense size of the Sahel, interventions are limited to communities with the highest risk factors, which have been identified through assessments conducted by the project. A number of those target communities are in areas of Niger and Chad that border Nigeria. These programs have led to a noticeable rise in community action. This week, a local youth organization in Bamako, Mali, is sponsoring a mass demonstration and public outreach around the issue of the kidnapping of the Nigerian schoolgirls.

Today our thoughts are with the schoolgirls, their families; and the millions of Nigerians forced to live under the threat of Boko Haram's violence every day.