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- No accountability for crimes against children by Boko Haram and other gunmen
- Over 600 schools closed for fear of abductions
- Authorities repeatedly failed to protect schools despite several abductions

Tens of thousands of children in Nigeria are missing out on their education because of the authorities' ongoing failure to protect schools, particularly in northern Nigeria, from attacks by insurgents and other armed groups, Amnesty International said today.

Today marks seven years since 279 schoolgirls were abducted by the armed group Boko Haram in Chibok. Although most escaped or were later released, more than 100 girls remain in captivity. Further mass kidnappings of schoolchildren in Nigeria have seen hundreds of children killed, raped, forced into "marriages" or forced to join Boko Haram. This has resulted in hundreds of schools being shut, with disastrous consequences for young people in a region already facing extreme insecurity.

"Between December 2020 and March 2021, there have been at least five reported cases of abductions in northern Nigeria. The threat of further attacks has led to the closure of about 600 schools in the region. Whatever authorities are doing to tame this tide, it is not working," said Osai Ojigho.

In 2018, Amnesty International revealed that Nigerian security forces had failed to act on warnings that Boko Haram fighters were heading towards Dapchi town in Yobe state, where they later abducted 110 schoolgirls from the Government Girls Science and Technical College.

Amnesty International has documented at least five more abductions of schoolchildren between December 2020 and March 2021. The frequency of these attacks shows just how unsafe Nigerian schools have become, while the lack of justice has only emboldened the perpetrators.

Many more abductions since Chibok

On Friday 11 December 2020, at about 9:30 pm, gunshots were heard within the premises of Government Science Secondary School in Kankara, Kastina state, northwest Nigeria.

Witnesses told Amnesty International that hundreds of gunmen broke into seven dormitories, rounding up 300 students and marching them to an unknown destination. The students were held in captivity for six nights until their release on 17 December 2020.

The night-time attack prompted state governments in Kano, Kaduna, Zamfara, Jigawa and Katsina to order schools to close, contributing to the huge number of children that are out of school in Nigeria. The UN currently puts the figure at 10.5 million.

Just a month later, on 17 February 2021, 27 students from the Government Science Secondary School in Kagara, Niger state, were abducted by gunmen from their dormitory in the early hours of the morning. The students were released on 27 February.

In another raid on 26 February 2021, hundreds of schoolgirls were abducted from Government Girls Secondary School in Jangebe, Zamfara state. After four days in captivity, 279 of the students were released on 2 March.

In March 2021, two different schools were attacked in Kaduna state, northwest Nigeria, including the Federal College of Forestry Mechanization where 30 students were seized on 11 March.

Attacks against schoolchildren, teachers and school buildings show a callous disregard for the right to life and the right to education by both the bandits and insurgents on one hand, and the Nigerian authorities who have failed to end these horrifying attacks, on the other.

“The Nigerian authorities risk a lost generation, due to their failure to provide safe schools for children in a region already devastated by Boko Haram atrocities,” said Osai Ojigho.

Lack of justice

No one has been arrested or prosecuted for the abductions of schoolchildren from Chibok and other locations. The lack of justice and accountability has led to an escalation of attacks on schools, forced school closures and left parents in despair. Authorities must provide adequate security to schools to ensure that children and teachers are safe.

The parents and guardians of some of the victims told Amnesty International that their children would not return to school because they did not believe the government could guarantee their protection.

“The schools are not safe. The government is not trustworthy, and we do not believe them when they say that they would protect our children,” one parent said.

“Some of our children are about to write exams but they cannot continue because the schools are closed, yet the government is doing nothing to ensure that our children return to school,” said another.

Risk of a lost generation

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) estimates that about 10.5 million children between the age of 5 and 14 are out of school in Nigeria.

Following the shutdown of schools across northern Nigeria, there has been a rise in reported cases of child marriages and early pregnancies of school-age girls.

One 16-year-old schoolgirl told Amnesty: “Since many of my friends were kidnapped in school, my parents decided to give me out in marriage for my own safety.”

“It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that no child is left behind. Education is a human right and the government must ensure that all children have access to basic education in an environment free from violence and threats of attacks,” said Osai Ojigho.

Amnesty International is also calling on the government to reaffirm its commitment towards ensuring the safe return of children still in captivity, including the remaining over 100 Chibok girls, Leah Sharibu; the only Dapchi schoolgirl still in Boko Haram captivity – and other victims.

Background

In April 2014, 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped in government secondary school Chibok, a town in Borno State Nigeria. Some of the girls escaped captivity on their own, while others were later released following intense campaigning efforts by civil society organizations and negotiations by the government.

However, more than 100 girls remain in captivity, along with children abducted in subsequent attacks.

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ecoi.net summary:



Lack of state protection for schools despite repeated instances of abductions; more than 600 schools remain closed for fear of further cases; no accountability for perpetrators in abductions of schoolchildren

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