



Preventing Boko Haram Abductions of Schoolchildren in Nigeria

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What's new? In February, a faction of the jihadist Boko Haram movement, seized 113 children from Dapchi in north east Nigeria. It later released 107 of them. Five reportedly died; one remains captive. This comes four years after militants captured 276 girls from Chibok, another north-eastern town, 112 of whom are still missing.

Why did it happen? The incident shows the difficulty of protecting vast areas vulnerable to such attacks. But Nigerian authorities' missteps also played a role. Army units had recently left Dapchi and the children's school was unguarded, despite measures to protect schools laid out in a 2014 Safe Schools Initiative.

Why does it matter? The Dapchi incident casts a shadow over the government's earlier claims of victory over a resilient Boko Haram insurgency. It could further set back girls' education and thus the region's development. That said, indications of talks between the government and militants might offer hope of reducing levels of violence.

What should be done? On the eve of the Chibok tragedy's four-year anniversary, the Nigerian government should redouble efforts to protect schoolchildren. It should deploy additional forces to the north east, launch an independent probe of the Dapchi abductions, reinvigorate the Safe Schools Initiative and continue efforts to diminish bloodshed through engaging insurgents.

I. Overview

On 19 February, militants from Boko Haram's Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) faction seized 112 schoolgirls and one boy from the town of Dapchi in Yobe state, north east Nigeria. Five girls, tragically, are reported to have died; one fifteen-year-old, Leah Sharibu, remains captive. But in mid-March the militants released 107 of the children, marking a contrast to kidnappings that took place in Chibok in neighbouring Borno state in 2014. Of the 276 girls Boko Haram abducted from the school in that town, 112 are still missing.

The Dapchi girls' release, reportedly the result of talks between the Nigerian government and insurgents, offers a glimmer of hope that negotiations might help diminish levels of violence. But the five deaths and continuing ordeal of Sharibu, the

last girl held by the group, are deeply disturbing – as is the mere fact of this latest mass kidnapping. The abductions illustrate that Boko Haram remains a menace to swaths of north east Nigeria. They throw into doubt the government’s claim to have defeated the movement; instead, insurgents may be newly emboldened to keep fighting. The kidnappings cast a pall over education, particularly of girls, and thus the prospects for socio-economic development in the region.

President Muhammadu Buhari’s government should redouble efforts to recover all missing children – the one Dapchi girl, the 112 Chibok girls and the many others snatched by militants over the past four years. It should launch an independent investigation into the Dapchi abductions to identify shortfalls in the security forces’ performance and publish the findings. It also should tighten protection for schools and communities in the north east, by deploying more security personnel and reviving the policies laid out in the 2014 Safe Schools Initiative. While military operations must continue, the government should also sustain the talks it appears to have initiated with insurgents in search of a durable end to hostilities.

II. The Dapchi Attack

Since 2010, when Boko Haram launched its insurgency, fighting in northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad basin has claimed well over 20,000 lives.¹ The jihadist group, which claims to want to build an Islamic state, has repeatedly attacked educational institutions, particularly those teaching a secular curriculum. According to the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Boko Haram insurgents have killed some 2,300 teachers and destroyed some 1,400 schools throughout Nigeria’s three north-eastern states, Borno, Adamawa and Yobe since 2009.² Insurgents have kidnapped hundreds of students, among thousands of other civilians.

The abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in Borno state in 2014 was the most notorious case of such kidnapping.³ It aroused global outrage as well as widespread criticism of then President Goodluck Jonathan’s government.⁴ Fifty-seven of the girls escaped within hours of their kidnapping, 103 were released following negotiations between the government and insurgents, while four reportedly escaped.⁵ But four years later, 112 Chibok girls remain unaccounted for.

The ordeal of the Dapchi girls, students at the Government Girls’ Secondary and Technical College, and one boy who was reportedly visiting the school, began on 19 February 2018. Insurgents stormed into the dusty farming town, located 100km

¹ Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°126, *Instruments of Pain (IV): The Food Crisis in North East Nigeria*, 18 May 2017. No reliable recent figures on the numbers killed during the crisis exist.

² “Education under attack in Borno, Nigeria”, UNICEF, 5 October 2017.

³ See Helon Habila, *The Chibok Girls: Kidnappings and Islamist Militancy in Nigeria* (New York 2016).

⁴ Nnamdi Obasi and Ayo Obe, “The Chibok girls must be found – and freed”, Crisis Group Commentary, 13 April 2016.

⁵ The 103 Chibok girls that were let go were released in two batches (21 in October 2016 and 82 in May 2017) after negotiations with the government brokered by the Swiss government. See “Swiss facilitate release of 21 Chibok girls”, SWI, 13 October 2016; and “Swiss gov’t opens up on why it helped in negotiating Chibok girls’ release”, *This Day*, 10 May 2017.

from the Yobe state capital, Damaturu, riding in Toyota Hilux pickups and a Tata truck.⁶ As they invaded the school grounds and began shooting, many of the 906 students, along with several teachers, managed to scale the fence along the school's perimeter and flee. But the insurgents rounded up 113 children, loaded them into the vehicles and headed off into the bush.

The captives were aged eleven to nineteen, most of them at the younger end, and many still in their first year at the school. Thankfully, ISWAP returned 107 of them to Dapchi on 21 March. The government claims the release was the result of negotiations and a ceasefire that allowed the militants' safe passage to deliver the girls and return to their bases.⁷ Some of the freed girls said five of their classmates had died of trauma and exhaustion during the long journey to the insurgents' camp.⁸ All but one of the kidnapped girls were Muslims. The last girl in captivity is the only Christian, reportedly still held because she refused to renounce her faith and adopt Islam.⁹

III. Security Lapses

For the Nigerian government and security forces, securing towns and communities across the vast north-eastern region affected by the Boko Haram insurgency or within militants' striking range is clearly an enormous challenge. But a number of errors by Nigerian authorities appear to have enabled the Dapchi girls' abduction.

First, Dapchi town was unguarded: the army had withdrawn its troops on 10 January. It has since claimed that the troops were redeployed to Kanama (close to the border with Niger) to counter persistent insurgent attacks in that area, suggesting troop numbers in Yobe state are insufficient to secure every town that needs protection at the same time.¹⁰ Indeed, many residents of the north east have long worried that the army is stretched too thin in that area.¹¹

The army also asserted, after the abduction, that troops had been withdrawn from Dapchi because the town was considered safe, suggesting intelligence failures. It claims that police subsequently assumed responsibility for the town's security.¹² Yet the Yobe state police commissioner denies any such handover – or even consultation with the military about the withdrawal – took place, suggesting communication gaps among the branches of the Nigerian security forces.¹³

Second, security forces appear to have been slow to respond to Dapchi's distress calls before and during the raid. An Amnesty International report noted that the “army and police received multiple calls up to four hours before the raid” but failed

⁶ Crisis Group telephone interviews, local journalist and civil society activist, 22 and 23 February 2018.

⁷ Statement at press conference by Information Minister Lai Mohammed, Lagos, 25 March 2018.

⁸ “Dapchi: How our schoolmates died in custody – Freed girls”, *New Telegraph*, 22 March 2018.

⁹ “Christian association demands release of lone Dapchi girl in Boko Haram captivity”, *Sahara Reporters*, 23 March 2018.

¹⁰ Statement by Colonel Onyema Nwachukwu, deputy director, public relations, Abuja, 26 February 2018.

¹¹ Crisis Group interviews, Maiduguri, Borno state, December 2017 and March 2018.

¹² “Police in control of Dapchi security, says army”, *The Nation*, 26 February 2018.

¹³ “Military, police in blame game over Dapchi girls' abduction”, *This Day*, 27 February 2018.

to take preventive action.¹⁴ Troops were stationed in Damaturu and in Geidam (a town about 60km, or an hour's drive, away). Yet Dapchi residents say the captives were carted away more than an hour before any soldiers arrived and, further, that the army did not immediately pursue the abductors. The army denies the charges on all counts.¹⁵ Whatever the case, the kidnappers were able to travel, in a convoy of several vehicles, across an arid expanse with sparse vegetation, apparently close to 200km from their bases around Lake Chad, seize more than a hundred Dapchi girls and return unhindered. These facts in themselves are an indictment of the government's security provisions.

Third, the Dapchi school itself was inadequately protected. Again, to guard all of the numerous schools across the conflict zone simultaneously is undoubtedly difficult. But the challenge is not new – and the government was supposed to have found a solution years ago. Following Boko Haram's killing of 59 schoolboys in Buni Yadi, Yobe state, in February 2014 and the Chibok abductions two months later, the Nigerian government, in partnership with the UN's special envoy for global education, Gordon Brown, the Global Business Coalition for Education, business leaders and international donors, launched a Safe Schools Initiative in May 2014.¹⁶

This initiative comprised a range of policies for various levels of government, as well as communities and school authorities, that aimed to ensure students' safety. These measures included the transfer of students in the highest-risk areas to schools (especially federal government-run secondary schools, better known as Federal Unity Colleges) in safer parts of the country; steps to better protect schools with fences and security guards; and contingency plans to enable security forces and other relevant parties to respond quickly to threats. The UN Development Programme supported the project, and by October 2015, had raised more than \$30 million from donors.¹⁷

This initiative has recorded some progress, particularly under its students transfer program, which has moved over 2,000 students from the north east to schools in safer zones of the country. However, in most of the approximately 5,360 public primary and secondary schools in the three north-eastern states, there has been scant improvement to security infrastructure, safety guidelines or arrangements for early warning and rapid response. The Dapchi school had perimeter fencing but no security guards, offering scant protection to over 900 girls (some just ten years old) who, according to the provisions of the Safe Schools Initiative, should already have been transferred to a safer location. As Professor Jibrin Ibrahim, senior fellow at Abuja's Centre for Democracy and Development, lamented: "Four years after the massacre

¹⁴ "Nigeria: Security forces failed to act on warnings about Boko Haram attack hours before abduction of schoolgirls", Amnesty International, 20 March 2018.

¹⁵ "Military faults Amnesty report on Dapchi abduction", *Daily Trust*, 21 March 2018.

¹⁶ On the Buni Yadi attack, see Crisis Group Commentary, "Nigeria: Boko Haram's Deadly School Attack", 27 February 2014. For background on the Safe Schools Initiative, see "Safe Schools Initiative: Protecting the right to learn in Nigeria", Global Business Coalition for Education, in collaboration with A World at School, May 2014.

¹⁷ The main donors were the U.S., UK, Norway, Germany, the African Development Bank and Qatar (through the Qatar Foundation). "Safe Schools Initiative: Protecting the right to learn in Nigeria", Global Business Coalition for Education, in collaboration with A World at School, May 2014 (updated version, October 2015), pp. 1; see also "U.S., Qatar donate U.S.\$4 million to Safe Schools Initiative", *This Day*, 20 February 2015.

of 59 male students at Buni Yadi and as we approach the fourth year in captivity of the remaining 112 Chibok schoolgirls, it is shocking that we have not learned lessons on how to make our schools safe”.¹⁸

The government exacerbated errors in failing to prevent the Dapchi attack with additional missteps immediately afterward. Its information management was particularly poor. Initially it remained silent for 48 hours. Then the Yobe state government and local security officials denied that any student had been abducted and, according to journalists in Dapchi, attempted to deter distraught parents from speaking out.¹⁹ Government and army spokesmen issued conflicting numbers as to how many girls were missing. On 21 February, the Yobe state government proclaimed that Nigerian troops had rescued the girls, then retracted the announcement less than 24 hours later. The incoherent responses may well have hindered search-and-rescue efforts.²⁰ They also suggest that the first instinct of some officials is to obfuscate.²¹

President Muhammadu Buhari himself, in his first reaction to the incident on 23 February, admitted the mass abduction was a “national disaster”.²² He dispatched two federal government missions to Dapchi; ordered security chiefs to take personal charge of the search and dedicate more resources to it, including surveillance aircraft; engaged foreign officials to broker negotiations with the abductors; and visited the beleaguered school on 14 March, three weeks after the girls were taken.²³ Overall, his response was an improvement upon that of his predecessor to the 2014 Chibok kidnappings. Whether his actions contributed to ISWAP’s decision to free the girls is unclear. What is clear is that they did not undo the damage done to his government’s credibility by its initial blunders.

IV. Implications

The Dapchi incident and its aftermath could have lasting implications for the government, for the Boko Haram faction responsible for the kidnappings and for towns across the Nigerian north east.

More than two years ago, President Buhari had declared the insurgents “technically defeated”; more recently he claimed they had been degraded to no more than “desperate criminal gangs” and their operations reduced to “the last kicks of a dying

¹⁸ Jibrin Ibrahim, “Dapchi and the agony of refusing to learn lessons”, *Premium Times*, 2 March 2018.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Nigerian journalists who spoke with parents of abducted girls, Dapchi, Yobe state, 20-25 February 2018.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, retired army officer and security consultant, Abuja, 5 March 2018.

²¹ John Campbell, former U.S. ambassador to Nigeria (2004-2007), offered this assessment: “there have been inaccurate and misleading public statements by the government and certain officials even denied that kidnappings had even taken place, at least initially”. John Campbell, “Dapchi girls still missing, Boko Haram still active”, Council on Foreign Relations, 27 February 2018, www.cfr.org/blog/dapchi-girls-still-missing-boko-haram-still-active.

²² “Dapchi girls: Abduction of schoolgirls in Yobe is a national disaster – Buhari”, *New Telegraph*, 23 February 2018.

²³ See “Parents, students weep as Buhari visits Dapchi”, *The Nation*, 14 March 2018; and “Finally Buhari visits Yobe, says he’ll not rest till Chibok, Dapchi schoolgirls are released”, *Vanguard*, 14 March 2018.

horse”.²⁴ No doubt, the Nigerian army has made gains since 2015. It has ousted insurgents from most of the territory they once held, reopened roads and curbed Boko Haram attacks. Militants now operate mostly in remote border regions or from neighbouring countries around Lake Chad. The government also claims that bringing the abducted Dapchi girls home quickly was an achievement.

Yet the incident calls into question the government’s claims of victory over what remains a resilient insurgency. The questions are all the sharper given that Dapchi was one of a string of recent attacks, including the 1 March strike on a military base in Rann, Borno state, in which three aid workers, six soldiers and four policemen were killed, leading to the temporary suspension of relief work in an area hosting some 55,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs).²⁵ Information Minister Lai Mohammed disclosed that the government negotiated a one-week “no confrontation” agreement – in essence, a kind of ceasefire – with the abductors effective 19 March, which allowed them safe passage for the girls’ return.²⁶ This agreement contradicts its characterisation of the insurgents as routed, incapable of holding territory or challenging the government’s control. The public is likely to be more sceptical of government narratives on the conflict, particularly claims of success, in the future.

The failure to thwart the abductions reflects badly on the military and other security agencies, too. Many Nigerians consider it a source of shame that a ragtag insurgent group, with limited ground logistics and no air power, could again outwit the military, particularly in a region where units are supposedly on high alert.

The Dapchi abductions could have repercussions for Nigerian politics. In the north east, a heightened sense of insecurity could hamper preparations by the electoral authority, the Independent National Electoral Commission, for the February 2019 general elections. President Buhari won the 2015 election partly on his promise to end the Boko Haram insurgency and improve security nationwide. Many Nigerians see the Dapchi incident, coupled with the fact that over 100 Chibok girls are still missing and escalating herder-farmer killings in several states, as demonstrating an inability to deliver on that promise.²⁷ Buhari’s opponents – for now the only real challenge appears likely to come from the People’s Democratic Party that lost to his All Progressives Congress last time around – are likely to emphasise this failure during the campaign (the president recently announced he would seek a second term).²⁸

Exactly what the incident means for Boko Haram’s ISWAP faction itself is uncertain. The abductions are likely to have boosted the fighters’ morale, which some

²⁴ “Boko Haram technically defeated – Buhari”, *The Nation*, 24 December 2015; “Dapchi abduction, Rann attack won’t happen again, says Buhari”, *The Nation*, 7 March 2018; “B/Haram bombings last kicks of dying horse – Buhari”, *Daily Trust*, 27 November 2017.

²⁵ On 2 April, the UN deputy humanitarian coordinator in Nigeria, Yassine Gaba, reported that since the beginning of the year, there have been over 22 attacks by non-state armed groups in north east Nigeria, killing at least 120 civilians and wounding over 210 seriously. “UN deputy humanitarian coordinator in Nigeria strongly condemns the continued targeting of civilians in north-east Nigeria”, press release, Maiduguri, 2 April 2018.

²⁶ Statement at press conference by Information Minister Lai Mohammed, Lagos, 25 March 2018. See also “FG declared one-week ceasefire to secure Dapchi girls’ freedom – Lai Mohammed”, *The Punch*, 25 March 2018.

²⁷ Crisis Group Africa Report N°252, *Herders Against Farmers: Nigeria’s Expanding Deadly Conflict*, 19 September 2017.

²⁸ “Buhari declares to run for second term”, *The Punch*, 8 April 2018.

reports suggest has been flagging in some units.²⁹ The high-profile operation may help ISWAP attract new recruits and sustain its armed campaign.

On the other hand, the girls' return may have bolstered ISWAP's credibility with the government and with third parties facilitating negotiations. The government insists that it neither paid ransoms nor released Boko Haram prisoners in exchange for the schoolgirls; no report or evidence indicates otherwise.³⁰ Information Minister Mohammed says the militant faction freed the girls largely because its leaders felt a "moral burden", as their actions risked undermining ongoing negotiations about a ceasefire. The militants who returned the girls to Dapchi claimed to have done so as a gesture of goodwill and did not mention any talks with the government. Indeed, one ISWAP leader has claimed the group acted on instructions from the leader of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) to whom it pledges allegiance (though that movement is currently under enormous pressure in the Middle East and has lost the vast majority of the territory it recently controlled).³¹

That said, official and other sources in Abuja and Maiduguri confirm that some form of engagement between militants and the government exists, even if its impact on the release of the girls is hard to verify.³² The Dapchi events might encourage the ISWAP faction to proceed more confidently in those talks. Coming after its 10 February release of three members of the oil exploration team it abducted in Borno state in 2017, returning the Dapchi girls could help the group project an image distinct from the indiscriminately murderous reputation of the other Boko Haram faction, led by Abubakar Shekau (from which it split in June 2016). It could enable the movement to cultivate better relations with communities around Lake Chad. Under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Barnawi – widely thought to be the son of Boko Haram founder Mohammed Yusuf – ISWAP has tended to avoid the brutal attacks on civilians regularly perpetrated by the Shekau faction. It has largely concentrated its firepower on state security forces.³³

Across north east Nigeria, the Dapchi abductions, following the Chibok kidnappings and many other attacks on schools over the years, could further disrupt school programs and impair educational opportunities. Already, in response to Dapchi and the 1 March attack on the army base in Rann, the Borno state government ordered indefinite closure of boarding schools in 25 of its 27 local government areas (administrative districts) until it can provide adequate security.

Girls' education in particular is imperilled. Insurgents have attacked boys' schools, but their repeated attacks on girls' schools and warnings against girls' education could discourage girls from enrolling or staying in school. The militants who returned the Dapchi girls left a chilling message ("Do not send your daughters back to school;

²⁹ Crisis Group interviews, persons displaced from communities around Lake Chad, Maiduguri, March 2018.

³⁰ The government reportedly paid secret ransoms and released detained insurgents in exchange for some of the Chibok schoolgirls. "Freedom for the world's most famous hostages came at a heavy price", *Wall Street Journal*, 24 December 2017.

³¹ "Boko Haram gives reasons for release of Dapchi girls, denies ceasefire talks with FG", Sahara Reporters, 9 April 2018.

³² Crisis Group interviews, Abuja and Maiduguri, February-March 2018.

³³ Crisis Group interviews, military and humanitarian aid workers, Maiduguri and Abuja, December 2017 and January 2018, March 2018.

otherwise, we will come back for them”).³⁴ The gender gap in school attendance in the north east is already wide; between 2010 and 2015, 75 girls finished their secondary education for every 100 boys. Lower female enrolment and retention rates will widen the gender gap; higher female dropout rates risk increasing child marriage and early pregnancy, limiting many girls’ options.³⁵

After the Dapchi abductions, Buhari ordered the reinforcement of school security. But Defence Headquarters spokesperson Brigadier General John Agim said the military lacks sufficient troops to guard all of the schools in the north east, largely because it is deployed in what should be police and other internal security operations in almost all of the country’s 36 states.³⁶ The federal police are undermanned as well, partly because over 150,000 of an official total of 371,000 personnel are assigned as bodyguards for senior officials, politicians and other VIPs in Abuja and state capitals across the country.³⁷

Police chiefs have recently deployed about 2,000 additional men to schools in the three north-eastern states. But these men can only cover some 300 of over 5,000 public primary and secondary schools. The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, another federal body with a mandate to fight crime and maintain public order, has sent 500 personnel to schools in Borno state, but these are limited to only seven of the state’s 27 local government areas (administrative districts) and apparently insufficiently armed to repel a significant Boko Haram attack.

On 1 March, the government established a twelve-man committee to investigate the Dapchi abductions. It is the latest in a succession of committees established to report on various aspects of the Boko Haram insurgency. The findings of the previous inquiries have been classified, however, and their recommendations have rarely been followed.³⁸ The present committee, set up by the national security adviser, is comprised largely of representatives of military, intelligence and other agencies with a culture of secrecy. Its report risks being classified as well, inaccessible to other actors who could help prevent a recurrence.

³⁴ “Dapchi school girls: What Boko Haram told parents after releasing their daughters”, *Daily Post*, 22 March 2018.

³⁵ “Preventing conflict, transforming justice, securing the peace: A global study of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325”, UN Women, 2015.

³⁶ “We don’t have manpower to deploy troops in all schools – military”, Channels Television, 23 March 2018. For Nigerian military involvement in internal security operations, see “How Nigerian military operations are named”, *Daily Trust*, 28 October 2017.

³⁷ The federally controlled Nigeria police force officially has 371,800 officers on its pay roll but according to reports, as of February 2018, a physical count of its staff reported 291,685. See “N14bn in 2017, N72bn in five years – FG’s loss to ‘ghost police officers’”, International Centre for Investigative Reporting, Abuja, 3 April 2018.

³⁸ These include the 2011 Presidential Committee on Security Challenges in the North East, the 2013 Presidential Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North, the 2013 Presidential Taskforce on Negotiations with Boko Haram, the 2014 Presidential Fact-finding Committee on Abduction of Chibok Girls and the 2017 Presidential Investigative Panel to Review Compliance of the Armed Forces with Human Rights Obligations and Rules of Engagement. A member of one of these committees publicly complained that if their recommendations had been implemented, the insurgency could have been defused long ago. Crisis Group interview, member of the 2011 Presidential Committee on Security Challenges in the North East, Abuja, 12 January 2018.

V. Priorities Ahead

While no safeguards can completely protect against attacks on schools and the abduction of students, a number of steps would help minimise risks in the north east. These include:

Improve military deployments and other security arrangements: The army, police and other security agencies need to deploy more personnel in the north east. While all agencies are overstretched, the government could allocate personnel more efficiently. In particular, the army should review its engagements countrywide, pull out personnel and resources from what are in essence police operations, and concentrate its forces in the north east. The police should recall many of the 150,000 police officials guarding politicians and, in some cases, private individuals, and re-assign them to the north east, too.

Security agencies should redeploy forces to the smaller towns that are often more vulnerable to insurgent attacks than state capitals. Where possible, they should include female operatives in security units deployed to schools, to promote diverse teams able to build trust with communities and assist victims of crime, including those who may have suffered from sexual and gender-based violence. State education authorities should review security arrangements and procedures at all schools in the region, especially at girls' boarding schools.

Probe the abductions, publish findings and follow recommendations: The government should investigate the security lapses that enabled the abductions, security agencies' subsequent blame game, and the information mismanagement by federal and state officials. The committee convened by the national security adviser is unlikely to be up to the task. President Buhari should constitute an independent, non-partisan committee, not subordinate to any top security official, to investigate and publish findings. The government should pledge to implement this committee's recommendations. The committee should include women and others with specific knowledge and understanding of gender-sensitive aspects of the Boko Haram insurgency.³⁹ The government also should publish the findings of the 2014 Ibrahim Sabo committee, which investigated the Chibok girls' abduction.

Recommit to the Safe Schools Initiative: The federal government should probe the inadequate implementation of the initiative over the past three years. The federal finance ministry, along with relevant state-level agencies, should identify the 500 schools that reportedly received funding under the initiative and account for the funds provided. All levels of government should help advance the scheme, notably by transferring students – particularly girls – in high-risk environments to safer schools until the security situation improves. State and local education authorities should ensure that schools introduce other measures envisaged in the initiative, including safety guidelines, incident response plans and early-warning procedures linking school administrators, community residents and local security agencies.

³⁹ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°242, *Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency*, 5 December 2016.

Sustain efforts toward recovering the Chibok girls and other abducted persons: The government's pledges to protect communities in the north east will remain unconvincing until the Chibok girls' and other abducted persons' cases are resolved. At his May 2015 inauguration, Buhari declared: "We cannot claim to have defeated Boko Haram without rescuing the Chibok girls and all other innocent persons held hostage by insurgents".⁴⁰ While his government has secured the release of 103 of the girls, 112 remain captive. The release of the Dapchi girls raises hope that further progress on the Chibok girls' case is possible. The government should intensify its engagement with insurgents to ensure those girls still missing are returned or accounted for.

Sustain military operations while pursuing talks about a cessation of hostilities: The only long-term way of protecting schools and towns across the north east is by ending the insurgency. The Nigerian government's 25 March admission that it is attempting to negotiate a ceasefire with the Barnawi faction of Boko Haram marks a welcome shift from its insistence upon crushing the insurgents militarily.

Many challenges lie ahead on any path to a negotiated settlement. Insurgent factions are not uniformly disposed to talks. Nor is it clear that the ISWAP leaders with whom the government engages represent the entire faction.⁴¹ Whether leaders of even that faction can abandon their rigid views of the government, education and place of religion in public life remains unclear, as is the role they envisage for themselves after fighting is over. Victims of Boko Haram atrocities may reject any compromise with insurgents. The government cannot and ought not abandon its counter-insurgency campaign. But given the remote prospects of militarily defeating the insurgency, it should actively explore all additional options, including dialogue, that might help diminish levels of violence and end hostilities, even if only with one insurgent faction.

Maintain international support: Abuja still needs help, not only in recovering the remaining Dapchi girl, the 112 Chibok schoolgirls, and an unknown number of others still held in insurgents' enclaves or bases, but also in its wider efforts against Boko Haram. In addition to much-needed humanitarian aid, international partners should continue assisting the government, especially by sharing intelligence and building security forces' capacity for civilian protection. They also should encourage the Nigerian government to pursue all options for ending the conflict, including dialogue. They should promote the improved delivery of public services and help foster the economic opportunity in the north east that will be essential to any lasting peace.

VI. Conclusion

The Dapchi incident made clear that the Boko Haram insurgency, despite internal splits, remains dangerous. The quick release of most of the Dapchi girls is, of course, a huge relief. That it may have happened as a result of talks between the government and insurgents likewise offers some hope regarding prospects that dialogue can lead

⁴⁰ "Inaugural speech by His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari following his swearing-in as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 29 May 2015", Aso Rock Villa, Abuja.

⁴¹ Crisis Group interviews, senior security officials and diplomats, Abuja and Maiduguri, 25 to 28 March 2018.

to a ceasefire or even help end the conflict. But the abductions also underscore the challenges the Buhari government still faces. The ability of the ISWAP Boko Haram faction to strike almost 200km from its bases around Lake Chad, kidnap the girls and return without challenge illustrates its own potency but even more so security forces' inability to protect civilians in vast areas of the north east.

Four years after militants kidnapped 276 girls from the Chibok schools, the Boko Haram insurgency is far from over. The government and its international partners need to redouble efforts to protect communities in areas affected or at risk, through the deployment of additional security forces and continued counter-insurgency operations but also, if feasible, through dialogue.

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Appendix A: Map of Nigeria's Three North-eastern States



Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

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Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in ten other locations: Bishkek, Bogota, Dakar, Kabul, Islamabad, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Sanaa, Tblisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), European Commission, Directorate General for Neighbourhood Enlargement Negotiations, Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, French Development Agency, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, German Federal Foreign Office, Global Affairs Canada, Irish Aid, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

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April 2018

Appendix C: Reports and Briefings on Africa since 2015

Special Reports

Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.

Central Africa

Elections in Burundi: Moment of Truth, Africa Report N°224, 17 April 2015 (also available in French).

Congo: Is Democratic Change Possible?, Africa Report N°225, 5 May 2015.

Burundi: Peace Sacrificed?, Africa Briefing N°111, 29 May 2015 (also available in French).

Cameroon: The Threat of Religious Radicalism, Africa Report N°229, 3 September 2015 (also available in French).

Central African Republic: The Roots of Violence, Africa Report N°230, 21 September 2015 (also available in French).

Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility, Africa Report N°233, 30 March 2016 (also available in French).

Burundi: anatomie du troisième mandat, Africa Report N°235, 20 May 2016 (only available in French).

Katanga: Tensions in DRC's Mineral Heartland, Africa Report N°239, 3 August 2016.

The African Union and the Burundi Crisis: Ambition versus Reality, Africa Briefing N°122, 28 September 2016 (also available in French).

Boulevard of Broken Dreams: The "Street" and Politics in DR Congo, Africa Briefing N°123, 13 October 2016.

Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram, Africa Report N°241, 16 November 2016 (also available in French).

Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures, Africa Report N°246, 8 March 2017 (also available in French).

Burundi: The Army in Crisis, Africa Report N°247, 5 April 2017 (also available in French).

Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads, Africa Report N°250, 2 August 2017 (also available in French).

Avoiding the Worst in Central African Republic, Africa Report N°253, 28 September 2017 (also available in French).

Time to Reset African Union-European Union Relations, Africa Report N°255, 17 October 2017 (also available in French).

Cameroon: A Worsening Anglophone Crisis Calls for Strong Measures, Africa Briefing N°130, 19 October 2017 (also available in French).

Cameroon's Far North: Reconstruction amid Ongoing Conflict, Africa Briefing N°133, 25 October 2017 (also available in French).

Time for Concerted Action in DR Congo, Africa Report N°257, 4 December 2017 (also available in French).

Seven Priorities for the African Union in 2018, Africa Briefing N°135, 17 January 2018 (also available in French).

Electoral Poker in DR Congo, Africa Report N°259, 4 April 2018 (also available in French).

Horn of Africa

Sudan and South Sudan's Merging Conflicts, Africa Report N°223, 29 January 2015.

Sudan: The Prospects for "National Dialogue", Africa Briefing N°108, 11 March 2015.

The Chaos in Darfur, Africa Briefing N°110, 22 April 2015.

South Sudan: Keeping Faith with the IGAD Peace Process, Africa Report N°228, 27 July 2015.

Somaliland: The Strains of Success, Africa Briefing N°113, 5 October 2015.

Kenya's Somali North East: Devolution and Security, Africa Briefing N°114, 17 November 2015.

Ethiopia: Governing the Faithful, Africa Briefing N°117, 22 February 2016.

Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival, Africa Briefing N°119, 21 March 2016.

South Sudan's South: Conflict in the Equatorias, Africa Report N°236, 25 May 2016.

Kenya's Coast: Devolution Disappointed, Africa Briefing N°121, 13 July 2016.

South Sudan: Rearranging the Chessboard, Africa Report N°243, 20 December 2016.

Instruments of Pain (II): Conflict and Famine in South Sudan, Africa Briefing N°124, 26 April 2017.

Instruments of Pain (III): Conflict and Famine in Somalia, Africa Briefing N°125, 9 May 2017.

Instruments of Pain (IV): The Food Crisis in North East Nigeria, Africa Briefing N°126, 18 May 2017.

Kenya's Rift Valley: Old Wounds, Devolution's New Anxieties, Africa Report N°248, 30 May 2017.

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After Kenya's Leaders Reconcile, a Tough Path Ahead, Africa Briefing N°136, 13 March 2018.

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Zimbabwe: Stranded in Stasis, Africa Briefing N°118, 29 February 2016.

Zimbabwe's "Military-assisted Transition" and Prospects for Recovery, Africa Briefing N°134, 20 December 2017.

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Burkina Faso: Nine Months to Complete the Transition, Africa Report N°222, 28 January 2015.

Security Sector Reform in Guinea-Bissau: An Opportunity Not to Be Missed, Africa Briefing N°109, 19 March 2015 (only available in French).

Mali: An Imposed Peace?, Africa Report N°226, 22 May 2015 (only available in French).

Burkina Faso: Meeting the October Target, Africa Briefing N°112, 24 June 2015 (only available in French).

The Central Sahel: A Perfect Sandstorm, Africa Report N°227, 25 June 2015 (also available in French).

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Mali: Peace from Below?, Africa Briefing N°115, 14 December 2015 (only available in French).

Burkina Faso: Transition, Act II, Africa Briefing N°116, 7 January 2016 (only available in French).

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Boko Haram on the Back Foot?, Africa Briefing N°120, 4 May 2016 (also available in French).

Nigeria: The Challenge of Military Reform, Africa Report N°237, 6 June 2016.

Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?, Africa Report N°238, 6 July 2016 (also available in French).

Burkina Faso: Preserving the Religious Balance, Africa Report N°240, 6 September 2016 (also available in French).

Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency, Africa Report N°242, 5 December 2016 (also available in French).

Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram, Africa Report N°244, 23 February 2017.

Niger and Boko Haram: Beyond Counter-insurgency, Africa Report N°245, 27 February 2017 (also available in French).

The Politics of Islam in Mali: Separating Myth from Reality, Africa Report N°249, 18 July 2017 (only available in French).

Double-edged Sword: Vigilantes in African Counter-insurgencies, Africa Report N°251, 7 September 2017 (also available in French).

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Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force, Africa Report N°258, 12 December 2017 (also available in French).



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Crisis Group also operates out of over 25 locations in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America.

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