



Gideon & Funmi Para-Mallam Peace Foundation

"They are blessed who work for peace, for they shall be called God's children." Matthew 5:9

The Gideon and Funmi Para-Mallam Peace Foundation (TP-MPF) is a Nigerian non-governmental Faith-Based Organization committed to nation-building through the promotion of peaceful coexistence, leadership development and social justice for all in Nigeria and Africa, regardless of culture, ethnicity, religion or class. Our mission is to promote justice and peaceful coexistence in vulnerable communities affected by violent conflict through values-based leadership development, and to facilitate inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue and collaboration on education, innovation and socio-economic development. (<https://para-mallampeacefoundation.org>)

Submission on Nigeria under the Universal Periodic Review of the 45th Session of the Human Rights Council: Abducted Christian Girls and Women

Abbreviations used:

Armed Fulani Herdsmen:	Nomadic Fulani pastoralists who are armed.
Bandits:	Criminal gangs, some from outside Nigeria, who are heavily engaged in kidnapping for ransom.
Boko Haram:	Armed Islamic group calling itself ‘Western education is forbidden’ in Hausa, also known as <i>Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati Wal-Jihadin</i> meaning ‘People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad’
GoN:	Government of Nigeria
ISWAP:	Islamic State West Africa Province
UPR:	Universal Periodic Review

A. Introduction***The context of this submission***

1. We have been closely engaged with the situation of abducted girls and women in Nigeria since 2014 when this phenomenon began. Our submission to the Human Rights Council focuses on this area.

Nigeria’s commitments under the last UPR

2. The GoN accepted many recommendations in the last UPR in the areas of A47 Good governance; B31 Equality & non-discrimination; B51 Right to an effective remedy; B52 Impunity; B53 Support to victims and witnesses; D1 Civil & political rights - general measures of implementation; D27 Prohibition of slavery, trafficking; D28 Gender-based violence; D42 Freedom of thought, conscience and religion; E1 Economic, social & cultural rights - general measures of implementation; E41 Right to health – General; F12 Discrimination against women; F13 Violence against women; F31 Children: definition; general principles; protection; F33 Children: protection against exploitation; G1 Members of minorities; S16 SDG 16 - peace, justice and strong institutions.
3. Since the last UPR, the situation in Nigeria has gone from bad to worse. Our submission is focused on the abduction of Christian girls and women, where we submit that the GoN has not honoured its international undertakings.

B. The Abduction of Christian Girls and Women

4. Forceful private abductions, conversions and subsequent marriage of under-aged Christian girls to Muslim men has become rampant in the Northern region of the country (Borno, Katsina, Yobe, Southern Kaduna, Plateau State, Benue, Bauchi etc.). This is not the same thing as the wave of kidnap-for-ransom criminality that has infected Nigeria.
5. Alongside these private deprivations of liberty are abductions of females by armed Islamist groups. Gender-based violations of rights to personal liberty and integrity have been going on since at least 2007. A leading cleric Sheikh Ja’afar Mahmoud Adam was killed for criticizing the extremist ideas of Muhammad

Yusuf, the notorious Boko Haram founder. This has spawned a pernicious targeting of Christian females. The most high-profile armed group abductions have been in Chibok (2014, 276 schoolgirls, by Boko Haram) and Dapchi (2018, 109 schoolgirls, by ISWAP). However, it is not just mass abductions. Women and girls are being abducted all the time, from all kinds of locations albeit some more than others. Males are also abducted but there is something particular happening with the females.

6. There are religious aspects to the abductions. It is not as simple as numbers. 90% of the abducted Chibok girls were Christians while 95% Dapchi girls were Muslims. The Muslim girls were released on March 2nd 2018 but the Christian girls were forced to convert to Islam before being released. One fourteen-year-old girl did not, and today remains in captivity. She is Leah Sharibu. This year, Leah marked her 5th year in Boko Haram's captivity (February 19th) and her 20th Birthday (May 14th). The facts of her situation can be described as sexual enslavement, with two children born of rape. It is a continuing violation for the GoN to fail to take all reasonable measures to secure her release.
7. From our field research and de-briefing of over a dozen victims, we know that Christian girls and women always face the pressure to renounce their faith. They are pressed over and over to convert to Islam. Those who fail to comply are punished by being placed in confinement and subjected to even harsher treatment. Some capitulate and convert to Islam under duress. They have their Christian names changed to Muslim names. Some are forced to agree to convert in exchange for 'enjoying' some small freedoms but their status as slaves never changes.

C. Failure to prevent

8. Mass abductions from certain locations such as schools are predictable. People of a certain gender, and a certain faith, are particularly targeted. Yet the GoN has not been pro-active in taking measures to prevent these attacks and abductions. Where is the security for schools and colleges in high risk areas? Where are the armed guards for vulnerable communities? Since the last UPR, females have continued to be targeted for abduction by Islamist groups, Bandits and armed Fulani herdsmen. We recognise the Human Rights Watch accounts in its 2014 report: 'Those Terrible Weeks In Their Camp; Boko Haram Violence Against Women And Girls In Northeast Nigeria.' In the timeframe covered by this UPR, we too have heard from residents of villages and towns ravaged by Boko Haram attacks (during which women and girls were abducted) complaining about inadequate government responses.
9. We have first-hand information that corroborates Amnesty International's 2021 report 'Nigeria: Seven years since Chibok, the government fails to protect children.' We too have heard from multiple credible sources that the Nigerian army and police received several telephone calls hours before the raid on Dapchi, but did not take effective measures to stop the abduction or rescue the girls after they were taken by ISWAP terrorists. Similarly, our information confirms that the Borno state governor and his government were alerted that Chibok Girls High School was targeted by Boko Haram but they did nothing

until it happened as feared. Those facing real or imminent danger could not rely on their government to protect them. We have also come across instances when the security forces had been overwhelmed because insufficient troops had been deployed to a given location or because they appeared to have run out of ammunition during the course of an attack.

10. The following are few examples of major abductions since 2018 which the GoN failed to prevent:
 - 344 students, Government Science Secondary School, Katsina State, 11th December 2020;
 - 27 students, Government Science School, Kagara, Niger State, Feb 17th 2021;
 - 317 students, Jangebe, Talata Mafara, Zamfara State, February 26th 2021;
 - 27 students, Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation, Afaka, Kaduna State, March 12th 2021;
 - 17 students, Greenfield University, Kaduna State, April 21st 2021;
 - 6 students, and 2 lecturers at the Nuhu Bamali Polytechnic, Zaria, Kaduna State, June 11th 2021;
 - 100 students/teachers, Federal Government College, Yauri, Kebbi State, June 17th 2021;
 - 140 students, Bethel Baptist School, Kaduna, July 5th 2021.

D. The Response of Government When Such Abductions Take Place

Passivity

11. We do not know of any abducted females who were directly freed as a result of law enforcement operations. As we explain later in our submission, the women and girls whom we have come across were not rescued by the security forces.
12. When mass abductions take place as in the classical examples of the Chibok and Dapchi girls, the response of the GoN is slow and yields no results in terms of rescue. Nigerians have not heard from their government about what it is doing about the remaining 96 Chibok school girls, nine years after their abduction. Similarly, we have not seen or heard anything to indicate any efforts to secure the release of Leah Sharibu, five years on. Former President Muhammadu Buhari and his government promised repeatedly to bring Leah home to her parents. We have not seen that anything was done up until he left office on May 29th 2023. We have not yet seen anything being done under the new leadership. Whatever the reasons, this situation is a continuing violation of Leah's fundamental rights, and the rights of her family.
13. The GoN's response to high-profile abductions has not been materially different from the more prevalent abductions from homes, farmlands, school journeys and road trips. Most of these cases are unknown to the general public but we are often in touch with distraught parents who seek comfort and help from us and from their respective faith communities. Our President The Reverend Dr. Gideon Para-Mallam, has been personally threatened by a security operative

because of his unstinting and vocal demands for action to be taken for the captives, and in particular the emblematic case of Leah.

Failure to Communicate with the Families of Victims

14. We are regularly in touch with some of the families of the victims. They tell us that they know nothing, that they are kept completely in the dark regarding their daughters and wives. For example, the Sharibu family has told us that the last contact any government official had with them was back in 2019. They at least had some contact; other families have had no contact whatsoever. The GoN does not make the effort to provide information to these families. One parent even complained that the government has never officially informed them that their daughter was kidnapped. There is not just no information, there is no psychosocial or material support for distressed relatives. These families end up imagining what their loved ones are going through, if they are alive, and that causes terrible suffering. What we have described is actually cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Lack of Reassurance to the Community

15. We in our organization have seen at first-hand how mass and individual abductions terrorize affect communities. The abductions that we are writing about are taking place in rural communities where there are traditional values about gender and certain social expectations. Abductions of girls and women, and knowing what happens to them in captivity, causes a particular type of terror for girls and women. These same communities are also facing high levels of violence in other areas, from the same militants. They are being killed off in the fields, in their homes, in their churches, on the roads, anywhere. Everyone is afraid, and justifiably so. Communities keep on being victimised, over and over again. The government's failure to protect has led to distrust of government, and caused mutual distrust between members of different religious persuasion and ethnic identities.

E. The Consequence of the GoN's Failure to Prevent and Protect: Experiences of Captivity

16. Some of the Christian women and girls we have dealt with have shared their experiences, and we relate three accounts here. It is necessary to do this because it is the human consequence of the GoN's failure to prevent their abduction and protect them by taking all reasonable steps to rescue them from captivity and support those who are out. **For security reasons, only pseudonyms are used and the stories presented in a way that cannot identify them.**
17. One victim Laraba Salihu (5 months captivity) was held in a makeshift room where she could not lie down except to kneel or stand for refusing to convert to Islam. She was accused of being a prostitute because she looked healthy, beautiful, attractive, and unmarried. When the harsh camp conditions caused her to be sick and lost weight, she was accused of having HIV and AIDS. Eventually, she was transferred to another camp where the conditions were

worse. She went for days without bathing and food. There was a time she went for seven days without food except water and bush wild fruits.

18. A second victim, Monica Yakubu (15 months captivity) spend her first week of captivity having nothing to eat, and no water for washing or bathing. She was only permitted one cup of water per day. The terrorists would preach Islam to her and others every day, insisting they convert to Islam. Monica's resistance led to being asked if she was married. When she answered she wasn't, she was taken and placed in prison. She and the other female captives were subjected to great physical and mental cruelty, including sexual and verbal abuse. They were called infidels. She and some of the captives were made to undergo HIV and AIDS test to ensure that they were safe for sex as slaves.
19. The third victim, Halima Mainasara (20 months captivity), was worn down with cajoling to convert to Islam. She was tricked that if she converted to Islam, she would live a normal life in the camp. On converting, they took her to the warfront where she was locked up in a secluded place, all alone. After some days, a commander propositioned her to have sex with him. She refused and was sent back into confinement. Alone, she cried night after night. The pestering for sex continued and she gave in. Later, she and another abductee attempted an escape but were caught after 6 hours and taken back, trussed up and beaten. They were later taken to the group's 'prison' from where they were called out and flogged, first 30 strokes and later 15 strokes. A rival Boko Haram group attacked their camp, but Halima remained in captivity, abused and brutalized until her final escape.
20. The stories of the others are similar but each with its own account of depravity. All of those we have spoken to continue to suffer from severe after-effects of their abuse.

F. Dereliction of responsibility: the treatment of girls and women who are released or who escape captivity

Those who were released through negotiation

21. We know from the victims that they have not received meaningful support from the GoN. One group's release, which was negotiated, was turned into a public relations exercise: the traumatised girls were triumphantly hosted by the President at an event which was filmed by television crews and broadcast not just around Nigeria but around the world. Then they were abandoned, left on their own.

Those who escaped on their own

22. Some of the captives found ways to escape from their captors and were found by the Nigerian Army and the Lake Chad Multinational Forces. From our debriefings we discovered that none of these escaped victims got any form of government support. Organisations such as ours and churches have stepped in to help them. We acknowledge two former state Governors who have helped

out on an ad hoc basis: Dr. Samuel Ortom of Benue and Barr Simon Bako Lalong of Plateau States.

G. No accountability, no effective remedy for human rights violations

23. Thousands of Nigerian Christian women and girls have been abducted and treated inhumanely by their captors, yet we have not come across a single instance of anyone held to account by the authorities. As for the authorities and their dereliction of duties, there is no chance of holding the various entities of the GoN or individuals within them to account within Nigeria. The 2021 Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions further to her visit to Nigeria confirms the desperate state of law and order in the country.

H. Recommendations

24. Nigeria should invite the CEDAW Committee, the CRC Committee, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, the UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children to visit jointly and carry out an in-depth investigation, and commit to implementing their recommendations.

25. Nigeria should act on the findings of the 2021 Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and seek international assistance in reforming its law and order, justice and security sectors. Investigative and prosecution strategies should be revised so that anyone, including religious and political leaders, who commits, aids or abets abduction and abuse of girls and women faces prosecution and punishment. The Child Rights Act of 2003 should be applied rigorously to prohibit the forceful marriage and conversion of underaged girls allowed in the Sharia law.

26. Nigeria should recognize and incorporate into domestic law the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law (General Assembly resolution 60/147), along with providing urgent training and mainstreaming into all relevant organs of state. In this respect, we recommend:

- (i) the adoption of a law that obliges victims to be given all the necessary medical, material and financial support to regain their human sense of dignity and self-worth, including through the creation of a specialized agency to care for and support them.
- (ii) Provision of full scholarships to enable victims of abductions to continue their education, employed or develop new skills for their economic empowerment.

27. The promotion for the Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) should be made a priority policy for everyone, at federal and state level, especially in Northern Nigeria. There is particular need to address the challenge of religious discrimination, hate speech and violence, and to counter poisonous ideologies

about religion and gender through targeted educational and de-radicalization programmes.

