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Written statement* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[03 June 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

REQUESTING THAT THE U.N. WORK TO ENSURE THE IMMEDIATE AND SAFE RELEASE OF LEAH SHARIBU

1. Introduction

Terrorist group Boko Haram poses a grave threat to the safety and wellbeing of children in Nigeria. One young girl in particular, Leah Sharibu, stands as the face of the atrocities that are targeted towards and being carried out against children and Christians. She was abducted over a year ago by Boko Haram and continues to remain a hostage today because she refuses to renounce her Christian faith. Sadly, she spent her sixteenth birthday, a special birthday for most girls as the captive of Boko Haram. This cannot be tolerated any longer.

It is estimated that since May of 2011 Boko Haram has killed more than 37,500 people, displaced 2.4 million, and created 228,000 refugees¹. Boko Haram has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, and utilises its tactics of mass killings and kidnappings to instil fear. Boko Haram targets Christians and anyone else whom it sees as a threat to the establishment of an Islamic State.

Boko Haram's atrocities have no limit. Horrific examples of its cruelty include: executing 59 boys in their sleep and burning down their school², utilizing mob violence to target Christians, and using fake preachers to massacre innocent worshipers³.

These and countless other acts of terror and senseless sectarian violence provide an example of the gruesome and dehumanising atrocities targeting Christians and others who are vulnerable.

2. Background

Nigerian children are particularly vulnerable, as evidenced by the fact that over 50,000 children have been orphaned by jihadist violence in Northern Nigeria. In addition, children are often preyed upon and weaponized as "suicide bombers".

Reports estimate that since 2013 Boko Haram has abducted approximately 1,000 children, killed over 2,000 teachers and destroyed more than 1,400 schools in northeast Nigeria. These attacks and kidnappings have been carried out when children are at school and should feel safe.

In February of 2018 Boko Haram insurgents raided the Government Girls Science Technical College in Dapchi, Yobe State and abducted 110 schoolgirls⁴. Approximately four weeks later, Boko Haram released 104 of the schoolgirls while five of the girls died while being held captive,

¹ *Boko Haram in Nigeria*, Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker?marker=19#!/conflict/boko-haram-in-nigeria>, (last visited 16 Nov. 2018).

² *Nigerian Boarding School Attack by Boko Haram Gunmen Leaves 59 Pupils Dead, Officials Say*, ABC NEWS (25 Feb. 2014, 9:49 PM), <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-26/scores-dead-in-boko-haram-nigerian-school-attack/5284250>.

³ Jessica Chasmar, *Boko Haram 'Fake Preachers' Slaughter 45 Worshipers*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES (5 June 2014), <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/jun/5/boko-haram-islamists-pose-preachers-slaughter-45-w/>.

⁴ Stephanie Busari & Bukola Adebayo, *More Than 100 Girls Missing After Raid on Nigerian School*, CNN (26 Feb. 2018), <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/25/africa/nigeria-boko-haram-father/index.html>.

the only girl to remain captive is Leah Sharibu⁵. Leah Sharibu remains a captive for one reason, her refusal to denounce her Christian faith.

Leah's father stated "I thought she might have been killed since we were told by those released that Boko Haram kept her because she is a Christian. I can only imagine the way they would have treated her⁶".

In audio recording released by Boko Haram, Leah Sharibu stated:

I am Leah Sharibu, the girl that was abducted from Government Girls Science Technical College, Dapchi. I am calling on government and people of goodwill to get me out of this problem.

I am begging you to treat me with compassion, I am calling on the government, particularly, the president to pity me and get me out of this situation⁷.

Leah has now spent more than 400 days as a hostage of Boko Haram. It is extremely critical that efforts be immediately undertaken to ensure that she is immediately set free.

3. Request

It is imperative that the U.N. take swift action and work with the government of Nigeria to ensure that Leah is brought home safely and to put an end to the atrocities being carried out in Nigeria by Boko Haram. No child should have to live under the fear of being abducted, enslaved, or killed.

⁵ Stephanie Busari & Bukola Adebayo, *Most of Kidnapped Schoolgirls Freed, Nigeria Says*, CNN (21 Mar. 2018), <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/21/africa/nigeria-kidnapped-girls-boko-haram-intl/index.html>.

⁶ Bukola Adebayo, *Lone Dapchi Schoolgirl in Boko Haram Captivity Begs for Her Freedom*, CNN (28 Aug. 2018, 7:36 AM), <https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/28/africa/nigeria-lone-dapchi-schoolgirl-speaks-from-captivity/index.html>.

⁷ *Id.*