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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **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.

[31 May 2021]

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

## **REQUESTING THAT THE U.N. RECOGNISE THE ATROCITIES COMMITTED AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN NIGERIA AND TAKE ACTION TO END THE VIOLENCE**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Since 2013, 17 separate times, the ECLJ has brought to the U.N. Human Rights Council's attention the genocidal situation Christians in Nigeria have been facing – including young women and school girls like Leah Sharibu. Yet, neither Nigeria nor the U.N. have acted to mitigate the violence. Instead, the situation has only worsened. As we have repeatedly stated, Nigeria(1) is experiencing a horrific humanitarian crisis characterized by violence against women and children at the hands of terrorist group Boko Haram and groups such as the Fulani Herdsmen(2).

Now, that violence is spreading, and more and more school children are being targeted by groups seeking to obtain ransom money(3). This Council is very familiar with the devastation that is occurring in Nigeria, given the number of filings that have highlighted the urgency of this situation. It is past time for this Council to mobilise to prevent further harm to thousands of more innocent women and schoolchildren at the hands of these jihadists.

We respectfully remind this Council of the purpose of the United Nations as written in the Charter of the United Nations: “To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression . . .(4) .” It is increasingly evident that Nigeria is unable or unwilling to protect innocent women and children within its borders from these horrific acts of violence. The ECLJ calls upon the U.N. to take the immediate necessary action to stop the violence and prevent further devastation and loss of innocent life.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

While the ECLJ has been addressing this issue with the U.N. since its Universal Periodic Review on Nigeria submitted in 2013(5), Nigeria has been facing violence at the hands of Boko Haram's since 2009(6). The group has existed in Nigeria since 2002(7), but it first garnered international backlash in 2014 for attacking a school and kidnapping 276 girls, more than 100 of whom are still missing(8). The ECLJ's numerous filings have highlighted the continued atrocities committed by Boko Haram since 2014. And those atrocities do indeed continue to this day at even greater levels(9). A recent report from 2021 indicates that “Boko Haram fighters target[] women and girls with rape and other sexual violence, amounting to war crimes” during their raids in northeast Nigeria(10) .

Boko Haram's targeted attacks have internally displaced over 2.1 million Nigerians and caused over 307,000 Nigerian refugees to flee to neighboring countries of Chad, Cameroon, and Niger(11) , many of these displaced people are women and children.

### **3. VIOLATIONS**

Leah Sharibu continues to be the tragic face of the violence carried out against women and children at the hands of Boko Haram. In a February 2018 attack, similar to its 2014 attack, Boko Haram insurgents raided the Government Girls Science Technical College and abducted 110 schoolgirls, including Leah(12). The Nigerian government negotiated the release of 104 Muslim schoolgirls after a month, though five died in captivity(13). To this day, Leah remains captive because she refuses to renounce her Christian faith(14). Leah has refused to abandon her faith, yet she has been abandoned by her country, and indeed, a world that refuses to act on her behalf. On 14 May 2021, Leah turned 18, marking the

fourth year she has spent her birthday imprisoned. Moreover, during her captivity, Leah has been raped and impregnated, and given birth to two of her captors' children(15). Immediate action needs to be taken to secure Leah's rescue and safe return to her family. Furthermore, unless this situation is addressed immediately, similar oppression will continue to be a tragic reality for other vulnerable, innocent, Nigerian women and children.

Recently, Boko Haram has initiated more attacks against government-run schools. One NGO has recorded at least five abductions of schoolchildren between December 2020 and March 2021(16). According to reports, on 26 February 2021, 317 "schoolgirls were abducted from Government Girls Secondary School in Jangebe, Zamfara state. After four days in captivity, 279 of the [schoolgirls] were released(17)". While it is unclear whether the discrepancy between the report that 317 girls were captured and only 279 released is due to an error in the original report, or that some girls are still missing(18), what is clear is that without opposition, jihadists will be encouraged to target new schools because of the opportunity to make millions of dollars from ransom payments by the government(19).

These violent attacks also include looting villages, where Boko Haram militants savagely subject women and girls to rape and other sexual violence(20). Survivors and witnesses of Boko Haram's nighttime raids explain that fighters rape women and girls caught at home or who try to flee(21). One woman, after fighters physically assaulted her, saw the same men enter her neighbor's home. She recalled: "In the next house, I started hearing some women were shouting and screaming and crying. I was very afraid. After some minutes . . . I saw the men come out of the house. There were five or six of them with their guns. Then afterwards, the women were confused. Their dresses were not normal(22)". The war crimes perpetrated by these insurgents must be remedied by the Nigerian government and the international community. The women and young girls who live in these targeted communities have suffered violence, extreme pain, loss, and economic instability for too long.

#### 4. REQUEST

Clearly, horrific acts of violence at the hands of Boko Haram and other opportunistic militant groups pose extreme danger to the lives of Nigerian women and schoolchildren. Collectively, the U.N.'s lack of action and Nigeria's "problematic level of apathy" have resulted in extreme injustice for Nigerian citizens(23). The U.N. Charter calls on the U.N. to remove threats to peace, not merely to feign a response. As past statements by the ECLJ predicted, because neither the international community nor Nigeria have taken meaningful action, an extraordinarily increasing number of women and children are facing the same atrocities that have been occurring since 2014(24).

To mitigate greater future harm, we respectfully urge this Council to work closely with the government of Nigeria to immediately secure the release of Leah Sharibu, prosecute those who are responsible, protect those vulnerable to future attacks, and provide aid and assistance to the victims. Until real action is taken against Boko Haram, those who live under the daily fear of being abducted, raped, enslaved, or killed will continue to be deprived of their fundamental human rights.

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1. Home to over 219 million people, Nigeria is split between a predominately Muslim north and a predominately Christian south. Approximately 53 percent of the population practices Islam, and 46 percent practices Christianity.

2. U.S. COMM'N ON INT'L RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, ANNUAL REPORT 2021: NIGERIA 30 (2021).

3. Nigeria, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/nigeria/>.

4. U.N. Charter art. 1, ¶ 1 (emphasis added).

5. European Centre for Law and Justice, UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW: 2013, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN NIGERIA (2013), <https://7676076fde29cb34e26d-759f611b127203e9f2a0021aa1b7da05.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/eclj/nigeria-upr-2013.pdf>.
6. Who are Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamist Group?. BBC (24 Nov. 2016), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13809501>.
7. Boko Haram: Nigerian Islamic Group, ENCYC. BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Boko-Haram> (last updated 26 Feb. 2020).
8. Nigeria Chibok Abductions: What we Know, BBC (8 May 2017), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-322999431>; Stephanie Busari, Several Remaining Missing Chibok Schoolgirls Escape from Boko Haram, CNN (updated 29 Jan. 2021, 12:07 PM), <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/29/africa/nigeria-chibok-girls-escape-intl/index.html>.
9. U.S. COMM'N ON INT'L RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, ANNUAL REPORT 2021: NIGERIA 30 (2021).
10. Nigeria: Boko Haram Brutality Against Women and Girls Needs Urgent Response – New Research, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (24 Mar. 2021), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/03/nigeria-boko-haram-brutality-against-women-and-girls-needs-urgent-response-new-research/>.
11. Nigeria Emergency, UNHCR: THE UN REFUGEE AGENCY, <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html> (last visited 19 May 2021).
12. Leah Sharibu Turned 17 in Boko Haram Captivity, INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN (18 May 2020), <https://www.persecution.org/2020/05/18/leah-sharibu-turned-17-boko-haram-captivity/>.
13. Id.
14. Id.
15. Leah Sharibu Gives Birth to Her Second Child While in Captivity, INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN (24 Mar. 2021), <https://www.persecution.org/2021/03/24/leah-sharibu-gives-birth-second-child-captivity/>.
16. Nigeria: Seven Years since Chibok, the Government Fails to Protect Children, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (14 Apr. 2021), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/04/nigeria-seven-years-since-chibok-the-government-fails-to-protect-children/>.
17. Id.
18. Lekan Oyekanimi & Sam Olukoya, Nigerian Governor Says 279 Kidnapped Schoolgirls Are Freed, WJHG.COM (2 Mar. 2021, 7:13 AM), <https://www.wjhg.com/2021/03/02/nigerian-governor-says-279-kidnapped-schoolgirls-are-freed/>.
19. Philip Obaji Jr., Boko Haram Won't Stop Targeting Schools in Nigeria, FOREIGN POLICY (23 Mar. 2021, 4:06 PM), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/23/boko-haram-nigeria-kidnappings-school-children/>.
20. Nigeria: Boko Haram Brutality Against Women and Girls Needs Urgent Response – New Research, *supra* note 10
21. Id.
22. Id.
23. U.S. COMM'N ON INT'L RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, ANNUAL REPORT 2021: NIGERIA 30 (2021).
24. Nigeria: Seven Years since Chibok, the Government Fails to Protect Children, *supra* note 16.