

## **Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs**

**“*#BringBackOurGirls: Addressing the Growing Threat of Boko Haram*”**

### **Testimony of Alice Friend Principal Director for African Affairs**

Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Flake, Members of the subcommittee, thank you for calling us together to address the deeply disturbing recent abductions of over 270 school girls in northern Nigeria by the terrorist organization Boko Haram. People of good will across the globe have been horrified by this barbarous act and are rightly demanding that the Nigerian authorities take immediate measures to recover the girls and are asking what those of us in the international community can do to support Nigerian efforts.

Last Friday, the United States dispatched a multi-disciplinary, State Department-led team of experts to Abuja to provide the Government of Nigeria with the specialized advice and expertise it needs to respond to these abductions. DoD has provided four subject matter experts from USAFRICOM headquarters to augment ten DoD personnel already assigned to our embassy in Abuja as part of this interagency team. In addition, two military officers with extensive experience supporting the counter-Lord’s Resistance Army mission in Uganda also have been temporarily relocated to Abuja to provide advice and assistance. In total, sixteen DoD personnel with medical, intelligence, counter-terrorism and communications expertise have been assigned exclusively to the mission of advising the Nigerian security forces’ efforts to recover these girls safely. Their initial efforts have been to work with Nigerian security personnel to analyze Nigerian operations, identify gaps and shortfalls, and otherwise provide requested expertise and information to the Nigerian authorities, including through the use of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support. We are also working closely with other international

partners, including the UK and France, to coordinate multilateral actions and maximize our collective assistance efforts.

Our intent is to support Nigerian-led efforts to recover the girls and help catalyze greater efforts to secure the Nigerian population from the menace of Boko Haram. The Department of Defense stands ready to do what we can to help the Nigerian government, but both the immediate and the long-term solutions to the threat Boko Haram poses to the people of Nigeria must be implemented by the government of Nigeria if a sustained security is ever to be reached.

Mr. Chairman, that threat to Nigeria from Boko Haram has grown over the past five years and mutates day-by-day, extending its reach, increasing the sophistication and lethality of its attacks, and growing its military capacity. It has now proven on multiple occasions – for example, through its successful attack on a Nigerian air base in which two of the Nigerian air force’s helicopters were destroyed, as well as the coordinated, methodical and highly successful attack at Giwa barracks – that it is now capable of directly and successfully engaging Nigeria’s armed forces. Its expanded reach was also convincingly and tragically demonstrated when over 70 innocent Nigerian citizens were killed in a vehicle-borne IED attack just outside the national capital of Abuja.

These most recent attacks are especially unconscionable because they were perpetrated against innocent girls and because of the sheer scale of the attack in Chibok. Unfortunately these kidnappings are only the most recent outrages in a growing portfolio of attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram in its war against education. On June 16-17, 2013, seven students and two teachers were killed when Boko Haram members attacked the Government Secondary School in Damaturu, Yobe state. This was followed on July 6, 2013 by an attack on the secondary school in Mamudo village, in which 29 students were killed, including reports that some were burned

alive when their dormitory was deliberately set on fire. On September 28-29 2013, upwards of 40 students were slaughtered in a nighttime attack by Boko Haram on the Yobe State College of Agriculture. And in yet another nighttime attack, this time at the Buni Yadi Federal Government College on February 18 of this year, at least 59 people, including boys ranging in age from 11 to 18, were killed.

The Department has been deeply concerned for some time by how much the Government of Nigeria has struggled to keep pace with Boko Haram's growing capabilities. Recognizing this threat and the need for Nigeria to adopt a whole-of-government approach to defeating it, over the past two years the United States has made a concerted effort to assist Nigeria in its counter-Boko Haram efforts. For its part, DoD has undertaken a number of initiatives. For example, we have supported the establishment of counter-IED and civil-military operations capacity within the Nigerian army in order to make C-IED an integral part of Nigeria's security doctrine. The concept is to build Nigerian institutions so that C-IED skills are organic and can be maintained and passed along by the Nigerians themselves. We have also supported the establishment of an intelligence fusion center in an effort to promote information sharing among various national security entities and, overall, to enable more effective and responsible intelligence-driven CT operations. More recently, we have begun working with Nigeria's newly-created Ranger Battalion to impart the specialized skills and disciplines needed to mount effective CT operations.

As has been demonstrated during recent Boko Haram movements and attacks, porous borders with Nigeria's northeastern and western neighbors can also facilitate these terrorists' operations in the region. For this reason, DoD and the Department of State are working closely and actively to develop a regional response to the Boko Haram threat to enhance border security along

Nigeria's common borders with Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. The concept is to build border security capacity with, and promote better cooperation and communication among, the security forces of each country. In some cases, assistance would go to the military, in others the gendarmerie, and in still others immigration forces, to more effectively detect and respond to the movement of Boko Haram members back and forth between Nigeria and its neighbors. If we can build these basic but critical capacities, serious progress can be made toward halting Boko Haram's spread and reversing some of the gains it has made.

As committed as the U.S. is to supporting Nigeria in its fight against Boko Haram and in returning these girls safely to their families, we cannot ignore that Nigeria can be an extremely challenging partner to work with. In general Nigeria has failed to mount an effective campaign against Boko Haram. In the face of a new and more sophisticated threat than it has faced before, its security forces have been slow to adapt with new strategies, new doctrines and new tactics. Even more troubling, Nigeria's record of atrocities perpetrated by some of its security forces during operations against Boko Haram has been widely documented. As we have advised the Nigerians, consistent with U.S. law and policy, we review security force units who may receive assistance, and we do not provide assistance when we have credible information that they have committed gross violations of human rights. With this important consideration in mind, we have worked to engage where and how we are able to, imbuing our engagements and training efforts with human rights and law of armed conflict modules and emphasizing the importance of the broad counterinsurgency approach that we ourselves spent so much blood and treasure fulfilling.

No discussion of how to address the Boko Haram threat would be complete without addressing some of the political dynamics in Nigeria underlying the security environment. In spite of its vast oil wealth, Nigeria continues to face enormous development challenges. These

factors combine with pervasive federal and state government corruption and Boko Haram's brutal terrorization of the population have made northern Nigerians susceptible to anti-government narratives and afforded the group a more permissive operating environment. The long-term solution to Boko Haram does not depend exclusively on Nigeria's military or security forces, but also requires Nigeria's national political leaders to give serious and sustained attention to addressing the systemic problems of corruption, the lack of effective and equitable governance, and the country's uneven social and economic development.

Nevertheless, we will not lose our focus on the heartrending event that has brought us here today. The tragic situation of these girls and the families who hope for their safe return has captured the attention of the world. As I have highlighted already, DoD is committed to supporting Nigeria's efforts to locate these girls and to seeing them safely returned to their loved ones. This will not be an easy task. We are still seeking information on whether and how the girls may have been dispersed. Indeed, if this tragic episode is to end the way we all hope it will, the government of Nigeria must continue to match its public statements with a serious and focused response that draws on all elements of its government and making maximum use of the resources international partners are making available to it.