

**Testimony of Ambassador Robert P. Jackson,
Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs,
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Subcommittee on African Affairs
“#BringBackOurGirls: Addressing the Growing Threat of Boko Haram
May 15, 2014**

Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Flake, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to update you about U.S. efforts to address the chilling threat that Boko Haram represents to Nigeria, one of our most important partners in sub-Saharan Africa.

It has now been one month since Boko Haram kidnapped more than two hundred girls from the town of Chibok in northeastern Nigeria. At the time of the kidnapping, these brave girls had returned to their high school in order to complete examinations that would allow them to attend university. By seeking knowledge and opportunity, they represented a challenge to Boko Haram in the heart of its area of operations. As the world now knows, Boko Haram opposes democracy and formal education. It has attempted to crush the kind of faith in the promise of education and prosperity that families in Chibok showed.

Boko Haram, the terrorist organization that kidnapped these girls, has shown it has no regard for human life. It has been killing innocent people in Nigeria for some time, and the attack at Chibok is part of that long, terrible trend. This year alone, Boko Haram has murdered more than 1000 innocent people in vicious attacks on schools, churches, and mosques. Since 2013, it has targeted and systematically kidnapped women - including these girls – seeking to deny them the education and opportunity they deserve. The abductions in Chibok fit into this larger pattern of violence. Throughout northeastern Nigeria, innocent civilians are terrified by gunmen who come in the night to kill young men and teachers and steal away young women.

Boko Haram has also retained its ability to target Abuja, as we saw with two recent bombings at the Nyanya bus depot outside the capital. And we’re concerned by the expansion of the group’s operations beyond Nigeria, including in Cameroon where it has also conducted kidnappings. The group is not just a Nigerian problem; it is a regional security problem.

We join the world, the people of Nigeria, and the parents of these children in expressing our outrage at Boko Haram’s shocking acts and its perverse ideology.

Young people, in Nigeria and across the globe, deserve the chance to pursue their dreams without suffering the predations of violent extremists. What happened in Nigeria resonates around the world, and pleas to free the kidnapped schoolgirls have come from First Lady Michelle Obama, from Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai, UN Special Envoy for Global Education Gordon Brown, and other champions of women's right to an education.

This tragic kidnapping demands that we redouble our efforts to defeat a Foreign Terrorist Organization that has troubled Nigeria for more than a decade. World leaders, including President Obama, have pledged their full support to the government and people of Nigeria as they seek the safe return of these brave girls. We acted swiftly to carry out the President's pledge. By Monday, May 12, the U.S. Government had deployed an 18-member interagency team to provide military and law enforcement assistance, as well as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support. We have provided commercial imagery and are flying manned and unmanned ISR aircraft over Nigeria to support the search. We are working closely with international partners on the ground, including the UK and France, and we are pressing for additional multilateral action, including UN Security Council sanctions on Boko Haram. As the President has directed, we will do everything possible to support the Nigerians in their efforts to find and free these girls. But we won't stop there. We can and must continue to work closely with Nigeria to prevent Boko Haram from harming any more innocent people.

Given Nigeria's importance, Boko Haram cannot be allowed to continue its array of bloody tactics: murdering police officers, snatching children, destroying churches, burning schools, attacking mosques, driving people from their homes, and challenging the government's authority.

Mr. Chairman, A peaceful and stable Nigeria is crucially important to the future of Africa, and we cannot stay on the sidelines if it stumbles. Nigeria has the continent's largest population and biggest economy. We look to Nigeria as a partner in our quest to help Africans lead lives free of violence and filled with possibility. As an engine of growth, a fountainhead of art and industry, and a political giant, Nigeria is vital to the success of President Obama's 2012 Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa. As we implement that strategy, we are focusing on building a democratic, prosperous, and secure Nigeria.

Since Boko Haram came to the world's attention with a massive uprising in 2009, we have been working to help Nigeria counter this threat. We provide Nigeria with security cooperation, which goes toward professionalizing the Nigerian

military, investigating bomb sites, improving border security, and carrying out responsible counterterrorism operations. As we hear reports of Boko Haram cells in neighboring countries, we have increasingly placed our response to Boko Haram in a regional context. Through our Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, and our bilateral relationships with Nigeria's neighbors, we are encouraging greater information sharing and border security efforts.

At the same time, we have been urging Nigeria to reform its approach to Boko Haram. From our own difficult experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, we know that turning the tide of an insurgency requires more than force. The state must demonstrate to its citizens that it can protect them and offer them opportunity. When soldiers destroy towns, kill civilians, and detain innocent people with impunity, mistrust takes root. When governments neglect the economic development of remote areas, confidence can falter. We share these lessons with our partners in Nigeria, urging them to ensure that security services respect human rights; officials end a culture of impunity; people see the benefits of government; and diverse voices are heard and represented in the capital. We have seen some signs of reform – we were encouraged in March of this year to see National Security Advisor Sambo Dasuki announce his “soft approach” to countering violent extremism, though Nigeria needs to follow through on implementing this strategy. We have also worked through our Counterterrorism and Conflict and Stabilization Operations Bureaus to promote narratives of non-violence in Nigeria, and we are working broadly to protect civilians, prevent atrocities, and ensure respect for human rights.

At the same time, we are providing law enforcement assistance, including by training Nigerian law enforcement officials on basic forensics, hostage negotiations, leadership, and task force development.

To counter the spread of violent extremist ideology, we support programs and initiatives – including job training and education -- that create economic alternatives for those vulnerable to being recruited by terrorist organizations.

All of this is part of a coordinated effort to help strengthen Nigeria's ability to respond responsibly and effectively to these challenges in a way that ensures civilians are protected and human rights are respected.

We have also joined the international effort to isolate Boko Haram. In June 2012, the State Department designated Boko Haram's top commanders as Specially Designated Global Terrorists under section 1(b) of Executive Order 13224. In June 2013, the State Department added Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram's official leader, to our Rewards for Justice Program and offered up to \$7 million for information leading to his location. In November 2013, the State Department designated Boko Haram and Ansaru as Foreign Terrorist Organizations, under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended, and as Specially Designated Global Terrorists under section 1(b) of Executive Order 13224. Last week, our Ambassador met President Jonathan on the margins of the World Economic Forum, and they agreed on the importance of quick action on the UN designation of Boko Haram as a terrorist group. The United Nations Security Council has renewed calls for regional cooperation to address Boko Haram. This week, Nigeria brought this question to the UN Security Council. And as I mentioned, we continue to work with Nigeria and others to press for UN Security Council sanctions on Boko Haram.

The importance of regional and multilateral coordination is clear at a time like this, as Nigeria and its partners seek to prevent Boko Haram from smuggling young women across the border or using neighboring countries as safe havens. I must note, however, that our ability to encourage regional collaboration is made more difficult, at this time, as our highly qualified nominees to be the U.S. Ambassadors to Niger and Cameroon continue to await confirmation by the full Senate.

As we strike a balance between helping empower Nigeria and counseling its government on reform, we engage regularly with Nigeria at all levels of our government. President Obama and Nigerian President Jonathan discussed security issues during their bilateral meeting on the margins of the UN General Assembly last September. Most recently, our Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, Dr. Sarah Sewall, and U.S. Africa Command Commander General David Rodriguez spent May 12 and 13 in Nigeria. They met senior Nigerian security officials to discuss how to intensify efforts against Boko Haram, reform human rights practices, and pursue a comprehensive approach to Boko Haram. Under Secretary Sewall and General Rodriguez devoted considerable attention to the crisis surrounding the kidnapped women. Under Secretary Sewall called the principal of the young women's school in Chibok to express U.S. outrage and deep concern about the deplorable kidnapping.

All of these policy tools – our security cooperation, our legal and sanctions actions, and our diplomatic engagement – constitute the framework within which we are

working to help Nigeria safely bring back the women kidnapped by Boko Haram. Resolving this crisis is now one of the highest priorities of the U.S. Government. As I mentioned when I began, we deployed an interagency team to advise Nigerian authorities on how to recover safely and assist these young women. Led by a senior diplomat from our Africa Bureau, the team is liaising with counterparts across Nigeria's government to offer specialized expertise on military and law enforcement best practices, hostage negotiation, intelligence gathering, strategic communications, and how to mitigate the risks of future kidnappings. At the same time, USAID has mobilized resources to provide humanitarian assistance to those affected by Boko Haram violence, including through the provision of psychosocial and medical support and treatment. We are cooperating thoroughly with the UK, France, and a host of other countries who are also dedicating significant interagency manpower, resources, and time to this effort. Our field team remains in close, coordinated contact with State Department headquarters here in Washington.

Nevertheless, Nigeria's conflict with Boko Haram will not end when these young women are bought home. Consequently, throughout this crisis, our assistance is framed by our broader and long-term policy goal of helping the Nigerians implement a comprehensive response to defeating Boko Haram that protects civilians, respects human rights, and addresses the underlying causes of the conflict. We are sharing practices and strategies with the government of Nigeria that will bolster its future efforts to defeat this deadly movement.

Nigeria's importance and the violent attacks committed by Boko Haram are both growing. We cannot ignore either trend. We welcome your interest in these urgent matters, and we look forward to continuing to work with you as we strive to bring these young women home and address the broader threat posed by Boko Haram. I would be pleased to respond to your questions.