

EU must demand safe return of Nigerian schoolgirls

Written by Mariela Baeva on 27 March 2015



Borno state, known as the 'home of the Berbers', in northeastern Nigeria, is said to be the probable location where around 200 schoolgirls from Chibok are being kept, out of the 276 who were kidnapped by Boko Haram in April last year.

Some have managed to escape and have been reunited with their families. Reports indicate, however, that some of the captives have been sold as slaves in Chad and Cameroon, and others forced into marriage, or used as suicide bombers.

Late at night on Monday 14 April 2014, residents of Chibok were warned by people in adjacent villages that a truck convoy was heading to Chibok. The suspected perpetrators were Boko Haram militants.

They made their way to the government secondary school for girls, which was being guarded by security soldiers. Gunfire ensued and they stormed into the premises, where the girls were sleeping. They had exams the following day. Most of them were between 16 and 18 years old.

Over 270 students were kidnapped and loaded onto the trucks. That same night, some of the girls managed to escape by jumping off the trucks, barefoot, crying and praying to return home safely.

They revealed it took them two weeks before they could stand back on their feet. A search-and-rescue operation was launched.

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Nine days after the atrocity, the first call for #BringBackOurGirls was tweeted. A few days later, a 'one million women march' of protest flooded the streets of Nigeria, spilling over onto the streets of the world.

Since then, there have been more and more calls worldwide for global leaders to take a stand and participate in #BringBackOurGirls.

During last year's European elections, a European parliament press adviser and I asked the five major candidates vying for the commission presidency to hold up a #BringBackOurGirls sign during their lively debate about the future of Europe. We submitted this request as a plea from the campaign's activists around the world.

The safe schools initiative was launched by Nigerian businesses, in partnership with government, civil society and other stakeholders, in an effort to implement - on an equal footing - measures tailored to Nigeria's most vulnerable children.

This April marks one year since the atrocity committed by Boko Haram. Several of the missing girls' parents have passed away. The United Nations (UN) special envoy for global education says the international community is keeping up the pressure.

A vigil will be held on April 14 at the UN in New York if the girls are still captive by then.

Join us - in your communities - in our endeavour to send a strong message of support to the Nigerian girls of Chibok and for the right to education for every young person.

We must keep speaking out. I will continue to demand that EU leaders and MEPs join us in asking Nigeria to provide the safe return of these girls, and to support the initiative for safe schools.

The international community urges the UN security council to grant schools worldwide a protected status, so that attacks on them or their use for military purposes are treated as an international crime. Add your voice to that call.

About the author

Mariela Baeva is a former ALDE MEP and a #BringBackOurGirls international campaign activist

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