

One year on: The abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls

During the evening of 14th and 15th of April 2014, nearly 300 Nigerian schoolgirls of Muslim and Christian backgrounds were abducted by force and taken from their boarding school in the town of Chibok, a small town in Borno State Nigeria by the Islamist group Boko Haram*, pretending to be soldiers. The girls aged between 16-18 years of age were in their final years of school.

A number of the girls managed to escape to tell their families and the waiting media of their plight. News reports of the girls being forced to convert to Islam or death if they refused, was further confirmed when a film showing some of the abducted schoolgirls along with their capturers making demands which included:

- **The girls were to be made slaves**
- **The girls would be married to members of Boko Haram with a reputed 'bride price' of around £7.50 each**
- **The girls would be trafficked across borders**

The group heavily criticized the fact that the girls were receiving an education stating that they should not have been in school, instead, that they should be married.

Parents of the missing girls took to social media and demanded that the Government do something for the safe return of all the girls. With momentum building, the hash tag **#BringBackOurGirls** begins to trend at #1 with Governments and personalities world-wide speaking out against Boko Haram and their actions.

In broadcast and in print, reporting of the plight and action (or inaction) taken by the Nigerian government to secure the safe release and return of the girls begins to fall lower down the list of news items until, **#BringBackOurGirls** is no longer trending and sadly, not mentioned, apart from a few committed and passionate campaigners determined to keep this issue and that of the organised and systematic violence against women and girls on the radar, meanwhile the pain and anguish suffered by all the girls and women affected, and their families continue.

The issue here is that sadly, women and girls lives are seen to have very little value. Human Rights Watch have reported that survivors of this attack stated that part of the 'success' in the amount of girls being abducted was due to the lack of resistance as there was very little security presence and the school compound housed women and young girls unable to fight back.

Women and girls experience psychological and physical abuse during periods of war and conflict. Witness accounts include rape and other types of sexual abuse, forced labour, forced marriages, forced religious conversion, having to carry ammunition including holding bullets whilst lying on the ground for guns to be re-loaded, putting the women and girls directly in the firing line, carrying

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stolen property from looted villages to being used to lure young men to their death by waiting insurgents under the guise of needing help, tells of the horrors women and young girls encounter daily during conflict and war and the little value placed on their lives.

As we approach the first year anniversary of the Chibok abductions, we urge President-elect Muhammadu Buhari, to make it a priority for his new government to do all they can to secure the safe release of over 200 missing girls and young women taken from Chibok and from other small villages in Nigeria so that a year later, we are not asking the question '**what will be done to bring home the missing Chibok schoolgirls?**'.

UCU condemns the abduction of the Nigerian school girls as well as other women and young girls abducted or forced into trafficking. As an education trade union, we value the right for women and girls to be educated, to live in societies free from fear and violence. The impact of not having access to education is huge and continues throughout life, not only in terms of access to decent jobs with a narrow or no pay gap with men but we know that educated women are less likely to die in childbirth, less likely to have children at an early age, and less likely to marry at an early age. Educated women have greater awareness of their rights and greater confidence and freedom to make decisions that affect their lives and the lives of any children that they may choose to have.

276 school girls were abducted

57 school girls escaped

219 remain in custody

11 parents have reportedly died

Source: Bring Back Our Girls Campaign www.bbogfamily.ng

An Open Letter from Malala Yousafzai to the Abducted Chibok Schoolgirls

To my brave sisters, the kidnapped schoolgirls of Chibok, On this first anniversary of your captivity, I write to you with a message of solidarity, love and hope. My name is Malala. I am a Pakistani girl your age. I am one of the millions of people around the world who keep you and your families foremost in our thoughts and prayers. We cannot imagine the full extent of the horrors you have endured. But please know this: we will never forget you. We will always stand with you.

Today and every day, we call on the Nigerian authorities and the international community to do more to bring you home. We will not rest until you have been reunited with your families. Like you, I was a target of militants who did not want girls to go to school. Gunmen shot me and two of my friends on a school bus. All three of us survived and are back in school. Now we speak out on behalf of all girls about the right to get a proper education. Our campaign will continue until you and all girls and boys around the world are able to access a free, safe and quality secondary education.

Last July, I spent my 17th birthday in Nigeria with some of your parents and five of your classmates who escaped the kidnapping. Your parents are grief-stricken. They love you, and they miss you.

My father and I wept and prayed with your parents – and they touched our hearts. The escapee schoolgirls my father and I met impressed us with their resolve to overcome their challenges and to complete their high school education. My father and I promised your parents and the girls who had escaped that we would do all we could to help them. I met Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan and urged him to work

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harder for your freedom. I also asked President Jonathan to meet your parents and the girls who escaped the kidnapping, which he did a few days later. Still, in my opinion, Nigerian leaders and the international community have not done enough to help you. They must do much more to help secure your release. I am among many people pressuring them to make sure you are freed. There are reasons for hope and optimism. Nigerian forces are re-gaining territory and protecting more schools.

Nigeria's newly-elected president, Muhammadu Buhari, has vowed to make securing your freedom a top priority and promised his government will not tolerate violence against women and girls. You will have the opportunity to receive the education you want and deserve. The Malala Fund and other organizations offered all your classmates who escaped the kidnapping full scholarships to complete their secondary education. Most of the escapee girls accepted this scholarship and are now continuing their studies at a safe boarding school and with the support they need. We hope to someday extend that same scholarship to all 219 of you, when you return home. Remember that one day your tragic ordeal will end, you will be reunited with your families and friends, and you will have the chance to finish the education you courageously sought. I look forward to the day I can hug each one of you, pray with you, and celebrate your freedom with your families. Until then, stay strong, and never lose hope.

You are my heroes. Your sister,



**Extremist have shown what
frightens them most.
A girl with a book.
Malala Yousafzi**

UCU branches and local associations are encouraged to:

1. Raise the issue of violence against women and girls within your branch / local association
2. Visit our gender equality resource web page [here](#)
3. Join the campaign Bring Back Our Girls campaign at www.bbogfamily.ng
4. Read the report published by Human Rights Watch entitled '*Those Terrible Weeks in their Camp – Boko Haram Violence against Women and Girls in Northeast Nigeria*' at www.hrw.org

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