



## For Immediate Release

\*\*\*To view multimedia: <http://watchlist.org/who-will-care-for-us/>.

\*\*\*To download photos: <http://watchlist.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/photos.zip>.

\*\*\*Link to live press conference September 4, 2014, 10:30am EST: <http://www.un.org/webcast/>.

## REPORT: CHILDREN IN NORTHEAST NIGERIA SUBJECT TO A WIDE RANGE OF VIOLATIONS BY WARRING PARTIES; GREATER ACTION NEEDED

### Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict Call for Action to Protect Children in Nigeria.

**New York, September 4, 2014**– Warring parties in northeast Nigeria have subjected boys and girls to forced recruitment, detention, attacks at school, abductions, rape, and other forms of sexual violence said [Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict](#) in a report released today. The gravity and scale of these violations warrant urgent action from the Nigerian Government, United Nations, and other child protection actors.

The 64-page report, [\*“Who Will Care for Us?” Grave Violations against Children in Northeastern Nigeria\*](#), details grave violations by some parties to the conflict since December 2012 and provides recommendations on how to better protect children. “While the abduction of over 200 girls in Chibok, Borno State, has shed some light on how children are affected by the conflict in the northeast, most abuses are still poorly documented, understood, and addressed by key actors,” said Janine Morna, Researcher at Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict.

Of particular concern is the forced recruitment of children for spying and assistance during armed attacks by Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad, commonly known as Boko Haram, and the Civilian Joint Task Force (“Civilian JTF”), a self-defense militia formed in mid-2013 in Borno State.

“Children as young as 13 are being recruited by both sides of the conflict and have nowhere to turn,” said Morna. Moreover, Nigerian security forces who encounter child soldiers in Boko Haram’s ranks often detain these children in unofficial military detention facilities known for the mistreatment of detainees, instead of protecting and rehabilitating them, in accordance with international standards. “The government of Nigeria should denounce the recruitment of children by all armed groups, take immediate steps to release child soldiers in their custody, and develop procedures to transfer child soldiers to civilian actors,” said Morna.

Watchlist also researched attacks on schools in the region which, according to their media survey, has resulted in the death, injury, or abduction of at least [414 students](#), teachers, or other civilians on school premises between January 2012 and July 2014. “Continuous attacks on schools have devastated education in the region, creating a climate of fear for students and teachers, and leading to school closures from as early as April 2013. Relevant actors must bolster school security through programs like the [Safe Schools Initiative](#),” said Morna.

Finally, Watchlist documented abductions of boys and girls by Boko Haram, including Christian girls who were forced to convert to Islam and coerced into marrying members of the group, along with other female abductees. Boko Haram abducted these girls and young women from schools and markets, and during raids on villages in areas across Borno State since at least December 2012. Some members of the group raped girls and young women in the camps. None of the girls and women who escaped, and were interviewed by Watchlist, had access to counseling and other health services.

“The humanitarian response to violations against children has been slow, fragmented, and unable to meet the fast-growing needs of those affected by the conflict,” said Morna. Few international actors currently engage in the northeast, leaving the government and local groups, with limited capacity, to support survivors. “The Nigerian Government, United Nations, and non-governmental agencies must take urgent steps to recruit experts with experience operating in a conflict situation and scale up programming to support some of Nigeria’s most vulnerable and marginalized children,” said Morna.

### **Select Accounts from the Report**

“We were sleeping in the hostel. We heard the gun shots. I woke up from sleeping ... ten boys were in the room ... I went out of the room ... I was running ... I was feeling afraid... I had gotten out of the room and I was shot at in the leg ... The person pointed a gun at me... I fell down... I was hit with two bullets on my left foot ... I pretend[ed] like I died... because if I didn’t pretend they would shoot me again ... it felt like 30 minutes ... When the people [were] not at the place I w[o]ke up. I w[o]ke up and entered the room again. The [other students] that didn’t die... I said if they are able to run, let us run.” – Watchlist interview (April 2014) with a 13-year-old boy describing an attack on his school, Federal Government College Buni Yadi, in Yobe State.

“I found myself in an Imam’s house. I don’t really remember how I got there... The men said [to us], ‘You are the real strong Christians. We want you to become Muslims. We will give you men to marry and if you refuse, we will kill you.’ The five other girls accepted. I said, ‘rather kill me.’” – Watchlist interview (March 2014) with a 16-year-old girl who was abducted with five of her peers from her school in Borno State.

“They [Boko Haram] gave us an axe to dig a hole to ease ourselves. In the night I wanted to ease myself. I was trying to ease myself and as I was in the process ... [he approached] and I started screaming. He abused me. He slipped away. He tried to penetrate, but when people came, he didn’t enter.” – Watchlist interview (April 2014) with a young woman who was 18 years old at the time of her abduction and was almost raped by suspected members of Boko Haram.

“When I returned, they [members of the Civilian JTF] suspected me of being part of Boko Haram ... Three of us were tied up. Someone came as a witness and said I was not part of Boko Haram. Then I was released. After they released me I went home. I went to the market and bought a machete and stick to be part of the [Civilian] JTF... If you refuse [to join], you are killed.”—Watchlist interview (April 2014) with a youth from Borno State who said that between the age of 17 and 18 he was forced to join the Civilian JTF.

**Watchlist’s Nigeria page will go live on September 4, 2014, at 10:30am: <http://watchlist.org/the-countries/nigeria>**

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**More information on** *“Who Will Care for Us?” Grave Violations against Children in Northeastern Nigeria*, <http://watchlist.org/the-countries/nigeria>

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**Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict**, established in 2001, is an international network of human rights and humanitarian non-government organizations striving to end violations against children in armed conflict and to guarantee their rights. As a global network, Watchlist builds partnerships among local, national and international NGOs, enhancing mutual capacities and strengths. Working together, we strategically collect and disseminate information on violations against children in conflict to influence key decision-makers to create and implement programs and policies that effectively protect children. Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a project of Tides Center, a non-profit public charity.

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