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## **NIGERIA | Ongoing Concerns for Missing School Girls**

There are ongoing concerns for the safety of 129 female students kidnapped from their school in Chibok in Borno State on April 14 by members of the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram, amid disputes over a statement issued by the Nigerian military on April 16 claiming to have freed most of them.

On the evening of April 14, Boko Haram gunmen invaded the predominantly Christian town of Chibok in the Gwoza Local Government Area (LGA), setting fire to homes and public buildings and looting food items, before kidnapping 129 students from Government Girls Secondary School (GGSS), who were taking the West African Examination Council (WAEC) examination.

In a statement issued April 16, the Nigerian Defence Headquarters had stated most of the victims were freed “in the ongoing Search & Rescue operations”, that “the Principal of the school confirmed that only eight of the students are still missing”, and one Boko Haram member involved in the abductions had been captured. Earlier, 14 of the girls had managed to escape their captors when the vehicle transporting them ran into difficulties.

However, the principal of GGSS Chibok, Asabe Kwambura, informed local media the school was “still waiting and praying for the safe return of the students. All I know is that we have only fourteen of them, and the security people, especially the vigilante and the well-meaning volunteers of Gwoza, are still out searching for them.”

Borno state governor Kashim Shettima offered a reward of around \$302,000 for information leading to the girls’ release.

Meanwhile, attacks in the area have continued. On April 16, Boko Haram gunmen ambushed two buses carrying traders near Wala Village in Gwoza LGA, killing 18 of them, reportedly after identifying them as Gwoza residents and injuring several others. On the same day, other Boko Haram gunmen attacked Sabon Kasuwa Village in Hawul LGA, where they murdered the District Head in his bedroom before killing his guard and fleeing the scene

Last week Idrissa Timta, the Emir of Gwoza, appealed for effective protection, informing local media that Gwoza residents are being forced to flee and trade in food and goods is being disrupted, “We want action from government so that lives can be saved; if nothing is done, we have no other option than to desert our homelands and flee into the neighboring Cameroon towns where we may perhaps get protection.”

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, “We join with all people of goodwill throughout Nigeria in praying for the wellbeing and safe return of the abducted girls. We also condemn the continuing targeting of Gwoza residents and echo the

calls of the Emir for effective action to increase security in Gwoza LGA so that normal life can resume and people are not forced to abandon their homes and livelihoods.”