The Implications of the Protracted Abduction of Leah Sharibu in 21st Century Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examined the implications of Leah Sharibu still in the den and hide-out of her abductors, despite all the promise of the Buhari-led administration and security agencies to release her to join her parents, brothers and sisters. The paper also explain that it is a threat against the Christian religion, the education of the girl child, the federal government and the security agencies in the 21st century Nigeria for Leah Sharibu to still be in sanctum and evil shelter of her abductors. Leah Sharibu is still in captivity of Boko Haram because she refused to deny her Christian faith and convert to Islam, as allegedly demanded by her abductors. The study adopted the descriptive methodology. It drew upon primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include oral information and testimonies. Secondary sources include newspapers, magazines, government publications and relevant books. The researcher also made use of direct observations method. All the information so gathered were subjected to historical evaluation.

Keywords: Leah Sharibu abduction, Boko Haram, Implications to Christian faith, Education, Nigeria.

Introduction

Leah Sharibu was one of the 110 female students abducted by Boko Haram terrorists from their hostel at Government Girls Science and Technical College (GGSTC), Dapchi, in Yunusari Local Government Area of Yobe State. The unfortunate mass abduction occurred on Feb.19, 2018, under the governorship era of Mr. Ibrahim Geidam, who currently sits in the senate of the Federal Republic as a lawmaker. It is important to note that when Leah and her colleagues were abducted, the then governor rather than take action to rescue the abducted girls schools was engrossed concerned and engaged in the political game of

denial and pushing blame to the military, which he accused of removing a road block on the major road leading to the school, in his naive and idle mind, the removal of the road block aided the terrorist in the mass abduction of the school girls. Despite the passing of blames between the governor and the military to rescue the school girls their actions were passive and evasive.

On the other hand, controversial efforts was made by the Nigerian government to rescue the girls, in process, unfortunately, (5) five of the girls lost their lives in the den of their abductors, after several days of negotiations, under the table agreements, all of the girls were freed, but Boko Haram abductors held back Leah Sharibu because she was a Christian, moreover, she refused to convert to Islam. Leah was the only Christian among the 110 school girls abducted by Boko Haram terrorist on February 19, 2018. Parents of Leah Sharibu said they are proud of their daughters courage, even in the face of threat to her life. Sharibu Nathan (2018) the father of Leah also said "I am very happy and proud that I am the father... I have no fear, even if she dies because she did not denounce Christ. I am very happy of her. I don't have anything to regret about her". In a jeopardised and pressured mode, Sharibu Nathan 45, however, urged the federal government to secure Leah release, the way it did for the 105 girls returned by Boko Haram on Wednesday morning, March 20, 2018. Many Christians enjoined the parents of Leah Sharibu to call on the federal government to assist in bringing this girl back, let her, too, be released because this is a nation and everybody has his/her own religion. The released girls told Leah's parents that the insurgents insist Leah must denounce her Christian religion but she told the Boko Haram insurgents she has no knowledge of Islam, she was, then left out of the Dapchi trip returned of the school girls. On the condition that any day she accepts Islam, she will be released. This was a threat against the Christian religion and education of the girl child in Nigeria. Leah and the other school girls were abducted because the government did not provide sufficient security that would have prevented the girl's abduction. Lamid (2018) aptly point out his worries in the following statement: "How can terrorists come in a convoy, in broad day light, kidnap over 100 school girls and come back, in a broad daylight, in a convey, to return them!".

Moreover, Olanrewaju and Obogo (2018) lamented that when Buhari was in Yobe, he had over four naval planes which secured him, yet, few weeks later, these girls were kidnapped and released and their abductors even had the time to chat with villagers and preach to them., the implication of Leah Sharibu to still be in the den and captivity of her abductors. It was sad and very horrifying that the other school girls were returned and the only Christian among them was still in the den and hide out of the Boko Haram terrorists. What a threat, danger and omen Leah Sharibu's menace portent to Christianity and girl child

education in Nigeria's 21st century. Leah Sharibu's experience is very terrorising to bully Christian school girls not to go to school in Northern Nigeria. On the other hand, still barking in the political bliss ecstasy and jubilation of the All Progressive Congress (APC) members of the release and returned of the 105 school girls to their parents by the Boko Haram Sect. President Buhari (2018) led administration promised and assured the parents of Leah Sharibu and the Dapchi community that she will not be abandoned. Buhari (2018) in a statement by one of his media aides, Garba Shehu (2018) said his administration was committed to the freedom of the only Dapchi school girl still in captivity. The statement read: "The Buhari administration will not relent in efforts to bring Leah Sharibu safely back home to her parents as it has done for the other girls after she was held back by the terrorists over her decision as reported, not to convert from Christianity to Islam". It was very disturbing that Leah Sharibu was not released by the terrorist despite government negotiation with the Boko Haram terrorists. By law, president Buhari is fully conscious of his duty under the constitution to protect all Nigerians, irrespective of faith, ethnic background or geo-political location and will not shrink in this responsibility.

Furthermore, the Buhari administration is equally mindful of the fact that true followers of Islam all over the world respect the injunction that there is no compulsion in religion. To this effect, no one or group can coerce, force or impose its religion on another. In this disturbing situation of child abuse, the hearts of members of Bring Back our girls and the international community goes out to Leah isolated parents who must watch other Muslims rejoice while their Christian daughter is still away. Together, all the humanitarian and Christian groups says collectively no to man inhumanity to fellow man, "The lone Dapchi girl, Leah, will not be abandoned". For Leah Sharibu to still be in the den of her abductors is a national challenge to the Buhari led administration. This has not match Buhari's words of releasing Leah to join her parents with action. It is not a demonstration of high level political and military will and dedicated leadership as a former top military brass. If president Buhari was brave enough in intelligence gathering perhaps Leah Sharibu would have quickly regained her freedom.

It is unfortunate that the Buhari –led administration failed to deliver Leah Shaibu, the only Christian girl in the abduction saga of the Dapchi school girls released to their parents going by the government insensitive and crude response to the release of the Dapchi school girls, which was bias as Leah Shaibu is still in the den of the Boko Haram terrorists. According to Chud Uchegbu Nwamou (2021) as it stands now, Leah has lived the last four years of her life as a captive. No one is certain about her living condition. No one knows her state of health, mental and physical. The little girl has lived for more than 1,450 days in the enclave of people she neither likes nor loves. She has lost her time in School. She has

lost her school mates, many of whom may have forgotten her four years plus away from the warmth of her family and friends. And by the last count, she should be 18years by January 1, 2021 having been taken hostage when she was just 14. Leah Sharibu conviction, faith, firmness and principle to stay in the captivity of Boko Haram terrorists because she refused to deny her Christian faith and convert to Islam, as allegedly demanded by her abductors. portrays her as a living heroine that is ready to pass through the agony, excruciation, persecution and witness for our Lord Jesus Christ even in the face of death. Leah faith in Christianity is marvellous, sensational and beyond belief in modern day Christian religious practice in the recent history of Nigeria. For sure, Leah Sharibu's name has entered into mass book or prayer book in all Christian belief centres of worship in the world, to reflect on the travails of Christians in contemporary Nigeria. The sad story is that, despite promises to rescue Leah by both federal and state governments, Leah has been severally disappointed by those her parent exercised their franchise to vote into power on her behalf. By excercing their franchise legitimately, Leah's parents submitted their will to the state, believing that the state would, in return, protect them from such crimes as kidnapping, But the Buhari-led administration hasn't. The Nigerian state has failed many Christians that hitherto believed in it. It is for this reason that Danjuma, the former Army Chief of staff and David Mark, the former president of the senate, recently warned that citizens would eventually have no option than to take up arms in self-defence. (Nwamuo, 2021). What baffles and puzzles Leah parents, Christians and many other non-governmental organisations is that there were insinuations and stories that Leah was pregnant and even put to bed, but no one knows her exact location for possible rescue. This indicates that the little girl is now a mother of children. Concern born again Christians and many other people often asked "but who is the father of her kids".

As Nwamuo (2021) aptly pointed out, "How come we know when Leah put to bed and how her babies are faring but do not know where she is being held? Other development around Leah are public knowledge, yet, her location is unknown ... Leah is in captivity against her Christian faith and against her conscience. She has been systematically damaged and ravaged by vampires who have neither regard nor feeling and would, someday, be reintegrated into society by the government as repentants. I imagine the pain her mother feels remembering that her precious little daughter is in the hands of beasts who know neither innocence nor conscience. It is important to point out where the Nigerian state and its security agencies failed as a nation and as a people, Nigeria, the giant of African have failed Leah, they also failed her parents, family members and the Christian faith in Nigeria, as well as the girl child education in Northern Nigeria. As a Nigerian we have every reason to hide our faces in shame. The Buhari-led administration acted inactive and evasive to rescue and guarantee the safety of a little Christian girl, who is helpless

before the Boko Haram terrorists. Like many other girl children abducted in Nigeria, Leah looked up to the Nigerian state and its military to guarantee her safety and freedom. Unfortunately, Nigeria cannot guarantee the safety of Leah Sharibu, because the Buhari led administration lacks the political and military will to confront the Boko Haram terrorists that is killing Christians as infidels and black-mailing Western education in Northern Nigeria as evil.

It is unfortunate to note that since the federal government and it security agencies acted inactive and evasive to rescue Leah Sharibu from the Boko Haram terrorists; attacks on schools and kidnapping of students are taking a huge toll in the North as no less than 5,330,631 students in states in that part of Nigeria have had their education disrupted. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2021), this has further compounded the out of school situation on the country as parents withdraw their children from school to evade attacks and kidnapping. It is also sad to explain that with Leah Sharibu still in captivity, media reports (2021) say the Girls Science and Technical School, Dapchi, has been shut and students there sent to schools in urban centres in Yobe. And since then other mass abductions has taken place by kidnappers. In December 2020, 300 students were taken away from a school in Kankara, Katsina state while in February, 2021, 27 students and staff members of a school in Kangara, Nigeria state were kidnapped by gunmen believed to be bandits.

The next incident of mass abduction happened in Jangebe, Zamfara state, 317 school girls were victims in that attack and it took several days of negotiation with the abductors before they were freed. Furthermore, on Friday, March 11, 2021, more than 200 students were abducted at the Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation, Kaduna by gunmen believed to be bandits. At press, time only 180 of the victims had been freed. Same day, troops reportedly foiled another attack by gunmen on Turkish International Secondary School also in Kaduna (Funmi Ajumobi, 2021). It is worrisome that since the federal government and the security agents in Nigeria has failed to rescue Leah Sharibu and other school children in captivity; many school children have been abducted in four states in the North: Katsina, Nigeria, Zamfara and Kaduna. The effect and implications of the serial mass kidnappings, UNICEF said, is that schools were closed in the geo-political zones where they happened. Worse hit are schools in the North East where Boko Haram insurgency is raging and the North West where banditry and kidnapping have become almost a daily occurrence. In the affected states of mass abductions schools in rural areas are merged with those in the urban centres to curb insurgents and bandits attacks on schools. (Funmi Ajumobi, 2021). Schools in remote areas were prone to insurgents and bandits attacks and students abduction. Education is the right of every child. Despite the post COVID-19

lockdown on schools that affected schooling. The recent attacks brought another disruption in schooling and loss of learning time. Because Leah Sharibu and other school children who are still in the captivity of their abductors, Northern Nigeria is currently going through learning crisis. UNICEF is very concerned about the struggles in getting Nigerian children access to rights to quality learning. UNICEF is appalled, disgusted, frightened, and terrified by attacks on schools in Nigeria, which on a gross violation of children's rights and the rights to education. The Leah Sharibu and other school children in captivity affects their mental health and well being and can have long lasting impacts on their lives.

The issue of Leah Sharibu still in captivity and other out of school children has been a great source of worry, agony, and plague. The implication is that it result to low learning out comes due to poor quality of learning in schools. Because of lack of encouragement and threat of Boko Haram some school children have dropped out from school. Hence, some may never enrol in school that is why more girls are out of school especially in Northern Nigeria. World Bank (2021) in a report, said that one in every five of the world's out of school children is in Nigeria especially, girls are more likely to be out of school than boys' in Northern Nigeria. It is also important to note that in places, such as, the rural communities, children from the poor background are negatively affected in their education. Moreover, the current series of attacks and abductions of school children is likely to make parents afraid of their children in school in Northern Nigeria. Girls abduction and forced marriage is a huge challenge to girl-child education in Nigeria (Funmi Ajumobi, 2021). As Leah Sharibu and other girls who are in the captivity of their abductors, apart from the loss of learning period, the attacks affects the psychosocial well being and mental health of the children. It is also affects the confidence of parents on the safety of their children while in school. Education is a right of every Nigerian child and schools are expected to provide safety and security to ensure that every child can access his or her right to education. Boko Haram attacks do not give parents reassurance of safety of their children while learning. Parents are likely to be afraid to send their children to school (Funmi Ajumobi, 2021).

Leah Sharibu still in the den of Boko Haram and other recent mass kidnappings would definitely leave school children traumatized, scared and parent may lose confidence in schools being able to provide adequate safety for their children. This is affecting boarding schools more than day schools. Today in the North, some of the affected schools do not have any hope of resumption. Nigeria is already suffering from learning crisis and the recent mass abductions of school children will worsen the situation if the government failed to act wisely and timely. Unfortunately also, the Buhari led administration, whose

basic constitutional function is the security and welfare of the people, has progressively shown lack of capacity to guarantee the security and safety of anyone, not even its governors, who are Chief security of their states but the lack power to control the police commissioner of their respective states. As it stands now, the fate of Leah still in the den of her abductors will continue to haunt and torture all those who publicly promised to secure her in 2018 but have failed to do so and moved on with their offices like nothing happened. The cry of her face will continue disrupt their sleep, having disappointed her and behaved like she no longer matters. But she does! Leah matters because she is a national symbol that represents the travail of the Nigerian child. As far as Leah and other Nigerian Children are concerned, tomorrow will never come. This is because those who had promised to protect their tomorrow have rather raped it and in the process alienated them from it. To be honest, the tomorrow of Leah Sharibu and the Nigerian child is blurred, beclouded, confused, ill defined, uncleared and vagued. It is so because those who had been given today to protect and manage for their future care not about what that future holds for the Nigerian child (Nwamuo, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is depressing, discouraging and downhearted that a little girl like Leah in the early age of 14 becomes the mother of two under duress, captivity, incarceration, confinement and threat of a terrorist. Unfortunately, this is the reality a born again Christian like Leah Sharibu lives with. It is the reality the church and her parents manage to sleep with. It is the reality of a nation and its leaders that does not care entertains. There is bias as Leah Sharibu is still in the den of her abductors, had it been she was a Muslim she would not have been in the den of her abductors, she would have been freed with the rest of 215 school girls released by the Boko Haram terrorists. The story that she was offered conversion to Islam as bait for freedom explains her predicament. On the other side of the story, for the public to still know many things about her, but not knowing the location of her hideout. It means that the government and the security agencies no longer bothers, worries and upsets itself about her. The Christian world is saddened, aggrieved, and disheartened as Leah Sharibu is still in the captivity of the Boko Haram terrorists. It is a blow, shame, slap and disappointment to the Christian faith Leah Sharibu count on rely, on and depend on as her hope, source and total supply. We hope Leah Sharibu will be released to her parents one day by grace of God in Jesus Name – Amen. With Leah Sharibu still in the den of Boko Haram terrorist, this has eroded the credibility of the Buhari-led administration. The federal and the state government are toothless bull dogs before kidnappers in Nigeria. This is because the government and the security agencies can bark but they cannot bite. The government should set up and make sure that any incident of kidnapping is recorded, their perpetrators arrested and prosecuted very quickly. The

government must be able to demonstrate that no one can attempt a kidnapping in Nigeria and not be caught. The location and hide out of terrorists keeping Leah Sharibu should be uncovered urgently. The technology to do so exists, the police can be trained. The government and the security agencies must put their acts together, if need be, conduct continuous aerial surveillance to help the police on the ground. If kidnappers are not checked, they will soon begin to dictate to government as they do in places like Mexico and Colombia. Already they control the lives of many Nigerians who now live in fear. The government should fight this vice with all seriousness.

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