

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL JOINT PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Nigeria: Unlawful killings by the Joint Military Task Force in Maiduguri must stop

Amnesty International and prominent human rights organizations in Nigeria have today condemned the human rights violations being perpetrated by the Nigerian security forces in Borno state in response to abuses by Boko Haram. The security forces have unlawfully killed dozens of people, and many have been brutally assaulted and unlawfully detained.

The organisations also condemn the recent bombings carried out by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. More than 140 people have died in these attacks since January, including members of the security forces.

It is reported that in response to the bombing at Kaleri Ngomari Custain area in Maiduguri on 9 July 2011 by Boko Haram, the Nigerian security forces cordoned off the area, went from house to house and used brutal and unlawful tactics against the population.

At least 25 people are believed to have been shot dead by the Joint Military Task Force (JTF). Many more men and boys have been reported missing. According to eyewitnesses, the JTF burnt down several houses, forcing their occupants to flee. The JTF also beat many people, including women and children. At least 45 people were reportedly wounded by these actions.

The organizations are calling on the Nigerian government to immediately stop the JTF from carrying out further human rights violations and unlawful killings. The government must investigate the killings and bring to justice anyone found responsible for these heinous crimes. Allegations of rape of women by members of the Joint Task Force should also be investigated and perpetrators brought to justice. National security must not be pursued at the expense of respect for human rights, including the right to life, privacy, dignity of human persons, housing and freedom of movement.

According to reports, members of the JTF have threatened to shoot residents if they fail to report future planned attacks. Thousands of people living in Maiduguri have already left the city; and many more continue to do so, resulting in displacement of families from their homes, thereby destabilizing them and subjecting them to further emotional and psychological trauma.

Amnesty International and human rights organizations in Nigeria oppose all unlawful killings, whether committed by armed forces under the control of the government or by armed groups.

Attacks by armed groups, do not absolve the Nigerian government of the responsibility to conduct security operations in a manner that complies with national and international law and in a way which does not violate the human rights of its people. The arbitrary and unlawful killings carried out by the security forces in recent days are abhorrent and must cease immediately.

Nigeria must not promote security at the expense of human rights. Governments have a duty to prevent and punish human rights abuses but they must do so while fully respecting human rights and within legitimate boundaries, established legal frameworks and in line with the rule of law. It is

a moral and legal imperative to observe fundamental human rights; it is also far more likely to be effective in the long term. The deplorable actions of the JTF, the unlawful killings and detentions, fuel resentment against the security forces, undermine confidence in the criminal justice system and the government..

Amnesty International and human rights organizations in Nigeria call on President Goodluck Jonathan to immediately stop the security forces from carrying out further human rights violations and set up mechanisms to investigate these killings and publicly declare that anyone found culpable for the killings during operations in Northern Nigeria will be brought to justice. In addition, the President must make public the commission of inquiry report into the Boko Haram crisis of 2009.

Background

In July 2009, a week of clashes between members of Boko Haram and security forces in Borno, Kano, Katsina and Yobe states, left more than 800 people, including 24 police officers, dead. A committee was set up in August 2009 to "investigate the circumstances leading to the [2009] crisis including the alleged killing of the leader of Boko Haram and the slaughter or killing of over 17 Police officers." Neither the findings nor the recommendations were ever made public.

On 13 July 2011 six police officers suspected of the extrajudicial execution of Muhammad Yusuf appeared in court. It is expected that they will be arraigned on 19 July.

In June 2011, the Federal Government set up a Special Military Task Force in Maiduguri, which consists of the army, navy, airforce, Department of State Security and the Nigeria Police. In recent months, Amnesty International has received numerous reports that security forces in Borno state have resorted to unlawful killings, dragnet arrests, arbitrary and unlawful detentions, extortion, and intimidation. Investigations do not seem to be intelligence led; the JTF simply cordon off areas and do house to house searches, arresting and at times shooting young men. Since Saturday's bombing, the intensity of these practises has increased.

Since July 2010, attacks by people believed to be members of the religious sect Boko Haram have increased. More than 250 people have been killed in such attacks, many of which have targeted police officers and government officials. Several religious leaders have been killed and churches have also been targeted. Since June 2011, Boko Haram has also attacked bars and beer gardens, killing scores of residents.

Signed

Access to Justice

Amnesty International

Bauchi Human Rights Network

Borno Coalition for Democracy and Progress

Centre for Environment Human Rights and Development (CEHRD)

Civil Liberties Organisation Borno state (CLO)

Civil Rights Congress of Nigeria

Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC)

Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR)

Human Rights Law Service (HURILAWS)

Human Rights Research and Advocacy Centre

Human Rights Social Development Environmental Foundation (HURSDEF)

International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law

Legal Aid Council of Nigeria, Borno state

Legal Defence and Assistance Programme (LEDAP)

Network of National Human Rights Institutions in West Africa

Nigeria Bar Association Human Rights Committee, Maiduguri branch

Nigerian Humanist Movement

Ogoni Solidarity Forum

Patriots' Forum

Social Development Integrated Centre (Social Action)

Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP)

Social Justice and Advocacy Initiative (SJAI)