

NIGERIA FLASH-NOTE**Implications of the Chibok Nightmare**

Nigeria's recent emergence as the Continent's largest economy, prompted a wave of official triumphalism that the World Economic Forum on Africa, due to convene in Abuja this week, seemed poised to validate. Instead, the gross incompetence with which the government has responded to the latest outrages by the Islamist terror group known as Boko Haram has demonstrated to the world that the giant of Africa stands upon feet of clay.

- 1) Exactly three weeks have elapsed since more than 250 female pupils were abducted from their Chibok boarding school on April 14th, the same day that a massive bomb blast on the outskirts of the Federal capital killed 78 and maimed more than 150. A second bomb, detonated in the same Nyanya neighborhood on May 1st, reinforced the message that [the Islamists are able to strike at will well beyond their acknowledged stronghold in the north-eastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa.](#)
- 2) The authorities have reacted to this dire emergency with [a degree of passivity bordering on the supine.](#) Not only have they failed to identify¹, much less apprehend, any of the culprits or their confederates; there is little evidence of them having actually exerted any effort whatsoever to this end. Instead, what they have produced is a series of bogus accounts designed to foster the illusion of purposeful action, each of which they have been forced to retract subsequently^{2, 3}.
- 3) But, far more disturbing than these clumsy attempts at spin-control has been the scandalous campaign by [senior officials and their proxies suggesting that the reported abductions are nothing more than a hoax.](#) On April 30th, Mrs. Kema Chikwe, the national women's leader of the ruling PDP enquired rhetorically, *"How did it happen? Who saw it happen? Who did not see it happen? Who is behind this?"* before demanding that the principal of the Chibok boarding-school be required to produce the names and photographs of the girls reportedly abducted.⁴
- 4) The crass insensitivity of this insinuation provoked such a backlash from outraged Nigerians that the official felt compelled to issue a clarification the next day, alleging that she had been quoted out of context⁵. But undeterred, [the notoriously turbulent First Lady⁶ then proceeded to convene a May 4th 'fact-finding' meeting⁷ in Abuja](#) to which she invited Hajiya Nana Shettima, wife of the Governor of Borno state, who was asked to arrange for the Chibok principal and a selection of the affected parents to attend.

¹ As it happens, Abubakar Shekau the Boko Haram leader, has since claimed responsibility for both April 14th outrages via video-taped statements delivered to the AFP news agency on April 20th and May 5th, respectively. Most ominously, he has threatened to either sell the abducted pupils as slaves or force them into arranged 'marriages'.

² On April 14th, Maj-Gen. Chris Olukolade, the Director of Defence Information (DDI), announced that all but eight of the girls had been rescued and that one of the hostage-takers had been captured alive. The account was promptly challenged by the school principal and three days later the same official withdrew his earlier statement with fatuous argument that, *"The number of those still missing is not the issue now as the life of every Nigerian is very precious."* – quoted by [SaharaReporters](#) in "Military Retracts Earlier Statement about Rescue of Girls Abducted from Secondary School in Chibok", Apr. 17, 2014.

³ On April 29th an unnamed military source assured *ThisDay* newspaper that *"All this while, the military has known and has tracked the locations where they are and has even concluded plans to invade the place, but later shelved it to avoid collateral damage."* A mere five days later, amid insistent rumors that the hostages had been transported across the notoriously porous border into south-western Chad or north-western Cameroon, President Jonathan himself admitted on national television that his government had no information on their whereabouts.

⁴ As reported by [SaharaReporters](#) in "PDP Chieftain Expresses Doubt Chibok School Girls Were Kidnapped," on Apr 30, 2014.

⁵ As reported by [PM News](#) in "Chibok School Girls: I was quoted out of context – Kema Chikwe," on May 1, 2014.

⁶ Reacting to the chaos that had erupted in Mrs. Jonathan's home state of Rivers in July 2013 as a result of her frequent partisan interventions, Wole Soyinka observed as follows: *'It is perhaps pertinent to remind ourselves that Oil is not the only marvel to emerge from the Delta swamps. However, unlike crude oil, which can be refined, you can extract a hippopotamus from the swamps, but you cannot take the swamp out of the hippopotamus.'* - reported by [SaharaReporters](#) on Jul. 13, 2013.

5) However it was evident from the tone of the invitation that “Dame” Patience’s real mission was to cast aspersions on the veracity of the reported abductions. Accordingly, Mrs. Shettima tasked the Borno State Commissioner for Women’s Affairs to represent her while the parents of the abductees chose to be represented by two ladies⁸ from Chibok town, one of whom had helped organize the *Bring Back Our Girls* demonstration held in Abuja May Day.

6) Outraged, the First Lady then unleashed a veritable tirade, initially directed at the local Governor’s wife⁹, but ultimately covering the entire female population of Borno, viz.:

”Borno women are playing games. Nigerian women should not go out for demonstration. Don’t use school children for demonstration again. Borno women are not ready for cooperation.”^{10 11}

7) Worse was to follow. Without any constitutional authority, Mrs. Jonathan reportedly ordered police to arrest the two women representing the Chibok parents – on the imaginative charge of ‘impersonating the parent of an abducted child (*sic*)’. While Ms. Ndirpaya was released as soon as she had been booked¹², Ms. Nyadar the ‘protest’ leader remains in detention. According to an eye-witness account filed by AP, she was bundled into a vehicle from the Presidential fleet before being driven off to an unknown destination¹³.

8) With the WEF due to convene in a little over 24 hours, the Federal government’s number one priority is clearly to reassure the 1,000 delegates registered to attend¹⁴. So, although there has been no official reaction to the horrific threat that now hangs over the abducted pupils, the authorities have announced that all government offices will remain closed for the duration of the forum, to minimize traffic on the roads and so enhance security.

9) But, by adopting this course of action they have implicitly, if unintentionally, validated Shekau’s brazen jibe - directed at President Goodluck Jonathan specifically – that, “*We are in your city but you don’t know where we are.*”¹⁵ From the perspective of ordinary Nigerians nothing could be less reassuring.

⁷ i.e. To seek ‘clarification’ on the conflicting reports as to the exact number of missing girls.

⁸ Respectively, Ms. Saratu Angus Ndirpaya and Ms. Naomi Mutah Nyadar, the ‘protest’ leader.

⁹ Viz.: ‘*I asked her to come with the principal and parents: she did not turn up ... To our greatest surprise, she sent a commissioner*’, as reported by *The Punch* in “*Patience Jonathan Weeps at Chibok Abduction Meeting*” on May 4, 2014.

¹⁰ As quoted by *Daily Trust* in “*Abducted girls - First Lady bars women from protesting*” on May 4, 2014.

¹¹ A clip of her decidedly emotional performance is available [here](#).

¹² She has since disclosed that the First Lady actually accused her and her colleague of being members of Boko Haram; report by AP, in “*Protester- 1st Lady orders arrests*” on May 5, 2014.

¹³ As reported by AP, *ibid*.

¹⁴ In the words of the Co-ordinating Minister for the Economy: ‘*The Government has taken the strongest measures to ensure a safe forum. We ask participants not to let terror win.*’ – Reported by Reuters in “*Federal Govt. says World Economic Forum will not be cowed by bombings*” on May 2, 2014.

¹⁵ From transcript of videotaped broadcast quoted by *Premium Times*, in “*Boko Haram claims responsibility for Abuja bombing*”, on Apr. 19, 2014.

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