

Boko Haram Attacks Preventing Kidnapped Nigerian Schoolgirls' Family Members From Translating the Bible

What started as a home-grown movement for Sharia law in northern Nigeria is now a full-scale insurgency. Boko Haram attacks have terrorized this part of the country for years.

In April, the insurgents kidnapped over 200 schoolgirls (#bringbackourgirls), which earned them both ignominy and notice. It's been more than six weeks since the kidnapping, and seemingly little progress has been made in bringing the girls back home.

Wycliffe Associates President and CEO Bruce Smith says this group of girls is not just a headline to them. "Unfortunately, to us they're not 'unknown faces.' They're family members of some of the people that are directly involved in Bible translation in that part of Nigeria."

Boko Haram wants to implement Sharia law throughout the north, and in their quest to accomplish this, nearly three and a half million Nigerians have been displaced inside the country last year. According to Nigeria's National Commission for Refugees (NCFR), the sudden spike in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) comes from a combination of Boko Haram attacks, counter insurgency operations, and ongoing inter-communal violence.

The group's use of suicide attacks, bombings and raids have spread to most northern states and south toward Abuja, and its targets have become almost exclusively civilians. It has looted villages, killed and kidnapped residents, used forced conscription, and abducted women and girls.

Since April, the insurgents have stepped up the frequency and brazenness of its attacks on villages in the region. For translation partners, this is a continuing and immediate threat to their families. As a result, "They have essentially all abandoned their homes, and they're sleeping out in the woods and in surrounding areas because they're afraid of being attacked directly." Smith adds, "We still have staff that are living and working in Nigeria. Bible translation is a high priority need there. They have more than 300 languages that have been identified that have not one verse of Scripture and need to be started."

This means the translation projects have NOT stopped. In fact, it's quite the opposite, says Smith. "The desperation of the situation actually increases their motivation for getting God's Word translated because they realize that the political and religious solutions are not working. They need some truth that's going to change hearts, change perspectives, in order to make any difference for the long haul."

Translators use a BTAK (Bible Translation Acceleration Kit) which includes a small, portable netbook computer satellite communication terminal solar panel battery and power supply.

Smith says the impact of Boko Haram on Nigeria takes a personal note for him. "I went there a few years ago to train the translation team in the use of some of this technology that helps them be more mobile."

Their dedication is heartening. Many members of the translation team survive as subsistence farmers. Before the uprising, they were already teetering on the brink of poverty. For them, the Boko Haram insurgency is devastating, explains Smith. "For this kind of an impact to occur in their area just puts them closer to death's door. Even if they're not the victims of direct violence from the antagonists, they're being starved out because they're not able to take care of their own

economic welfare.”

The work ahead is staggering. Even if the movement was stopped in its tracks today, there is devastating emotional, psychological, and spiritual trauma. “This has fundamentally changed their community and changed their family relationships. Just pray for God to intervene and to bring the Holy Spirit, the comfort, and the counsel that they need from His Word and from other Christians in their community.”

The message of God’s love turns despair to hope, anger to joy, and violence to peace. What will you do to make a difference? Here are three ways you can help:

- 1) Will you pray for all the Bible translators in harm’s way?
- 2) Will you give generously to help Wycliffe Associates expedite Bible translation safely and effectively using the latest technology: Bible Translation Acceleration Kits?
- 3) Will you volunteer your time and skills to help Wycliffe Associates provide the tools and support needed on the field?

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