

ISIS Allegedly Kills Kidnapped Christian Girl Who Refused to Deny Christ

Disturbing reports over the weekend claimed kidnapped Christian Nigeria schoolgirl Leah Sharibu has been killed in captivity. But those fighting for her release—including Save the Persecuted Christians (STPC), which advocates on behalf of hundreds of millions of persecuted Christians worldwide, the Leah Foundation and the International Committee on Nigeria (ICON)—say the reports are unconfirmed and continue to pray for her safety.

According to the news outlet Global Voices, a social aid worker with Action Against Hunger named Grace was captured July 18. Through a video, she begs for her release and references the deaths of Leah and another captive, Alice.

“Save the Persecuted Christians joins the Leah Foundation and ICON in calling for a measured response to an unconfirmed report which implies that Leah Sharibu has been killed,” said Dede Laugesen, executive director of Save the Persecuted Christians. “This report is not verified and may be a diversion tactic. We call upon the government of Nigeria to secure safety for its most vulnerable citizens and to pursue freedom for Leah and thousands of other innocent people taken captive by terrorists in their country. Please keep praying. Leah and her family need our continued prayer and support.”

In June, STPC and ICON hosted several members of a Nigerian delegation in Washington, D.C., to give voice to Nigerian victims to describe the horrors they have suffered. Among them was Leah’s mother, Rebecca Sharibu, and Rebecca Sharibu’s translator, Dr. Glorinda Puldu, who also serves as the president of the Leah Foundation. The Leah Foundation was

created by the Sharibu family to advocate for Leah's release and to assist Nigerian children attend school. UNICEF reports 8 million children refuse to go to school for fear of being kidnapped or harmed.

Leah was kidnapped Feb. 19, 2018, along with 109 other girls. Five girls died during the first month. In March 2018, the Nigerian federal government interceded and all the girls remaining in captivity were released—except Leah, who refused to deny Christ and convert to Islam. Last August, Boko Haram released a video of Leah as she pled for her release. A few months later, after threatening to execute her, Boko Haram instead announced plans to keep Leah as a “slave for life” for refusing to renounce Christianity.

The following joint statement was also released late last week by ICON and The Leah Foundation:

Suspicious Video Claims Leah Sharibu Is Dead

There is a renewed debate that Leah Sharibu has been murdered by Boko Haram terrorists. The recent video of a kidnapped woman wearing a blue hijab and calling herself “Grace” made claims that can neither be confirmed or rejected.

The International Committee on Nigeria (ICON) has questioned the authenticity of the video; the staging of the recording is atypical, and the absence of signature markings of Boko Haram or Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) on the video is also uncharacteristic.

“True, the video and story were reported by Cable News and Views, which broke the October story,” stated Mr. Kyle Abts, ICON Director and Sharibu family friend, “but it is still unverified.”

He is concerned because “the Nigerian federal government remains silent.”

The only remarks from the government were tweets from the presidential spokesman Garba Shehu. He did not give supportive information and merely asserted that “the government is making contacts in the hope that the captors will see reason not to visit hardship or harm on these innocent individuals.”

At present, it appears that this is another unconfirmed report that requires the Nigerian government to clear the air. ICON and the Sharibu family continue their pursuit of putting pressure on the government to get Leah released.

In observing the video, there are seven reasons to doubt the authenticity of the video, Abts added:

- “First, we do not have an authoritative message from Boko Haram or ISWAP.
- “Second, the staging is doubtful. No bodyguards are seen. Backdrop is UN relief material cloth.
- “Third, Grace first addresses Christian Association of Nigerian instead of the federal government of Nigeria or the USA.
- “Fourth: The video does not contain the watermark or image of any terrorist organization, and it lacks a familiar terrorist soundtrack.
- “Fifth, there is not the voice of a terrorist making demands.
- “Sixth, Grace said she was recently captured by “Calipha” on July 18 and in less than a week. she already seems to know about Leah Sharibu; unclear if this is Islamic State West Africa Province or the original Boko Haram.
- “Seventh: To kill a high-value hostage seems unusual for a terrorist group that previously stated they would not kill Leah or Alice but hold them as slaves for life.”

The International Committee on Nigeria (ICON) and the Leah Foundation are the official representatives working on behalf

of the Sharibu family. Dr. Gloria Puldu is president of the Leah Foundation, and Mr. Kyle Abts is director of ICON.

The mission of Save the Persecuted Christians is to save lives and save souls by disseminating actionable information about the magnitude of the persecution taking place globally and by mobilizing concerned Americans for the purpose of disincentivizing further attacks on those who follow Jesus.

According to Aid to the Church in Need, which released its biannual report on Religious Freedom in the World in November, over 300 million Christians experience persecution. According to Open Doors USA World Watch List, 245 million Christians are victims of high to extreme levels of persecution (i.e., torture, rape, sex-slavery, expulsion, murder and genocide), an increase of 14 percent over 2018. Open Doors also estimates 1 in 9 of the world's Christians experience persecution and that every month: 345 Christians are killed, often in public and without regard to gender or age; 219 Christians are abducted and imprisoned indefinitely without trial; and 106 churches are demolished.

Because most of these crimes are not covered in the media, Save the Persecuted Christians has developed a dedicated news aggregator—to capture current instances of persecution and to provide readers with an easy way to share these heartbreaking stories with others.

With so much of the world's Christian population being attacked, imprisoned and/or exiled for their beliefs, such as Nigerian Christian girls like Leah, the need has never been greater for the sort of grassroots campaign STPC's SaveUs Movement is working to foster. Its efforts are modeled after a miraculously successful one that helped free another population suffering from heavy persecution—Soviet Jews—by penalizing those in the Kremlin responsible for such repression. Through this movement, Save the Persecuted Christians endeavors to provide American policymakers with the

popular support they need to effect real change worldwide and alleviate systemically the suffering being experienced by so many of those following Christ.