

Nigerian Government Reports 16-Year-Old Christian Captive Leah Sharibu Is Alive

Several Nigerian and global media outlets reported Saturday that kidnapped Christian Nigeria schoolgirl Leah Sharibu is indeed alive.

In late July, questionable reports circulated that the 16-year-old had been killed in captivity. Save the Persecuted Christians (STPC), which advocates on behalf of hundreds of millions of persecuted Christians worldwide, says Nigerian contacts report the Nigerian federal government dismisses "speculation that Leah Sharibu, the Dapchi schoolgirl still held by Boko Haram, is dead" and continues to "negotiate her release from the captivity of the terrorist group."

"Leah needs to come home," said Dede Laugesen, executive director of Save the Persecuted Christians. "We are delighted the Nigerian federal government has confirmed Leah lives!"

The senior special assistant on media and publicity to Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, Garba Shehu, gave an update on Leah Sharibu in a statement he issued on Saturday in Abuja. "Instead of giving up," he stated, "the government is carrying forward processes that should hopefully yield her release by her captors."

"STPC and our coalition of NGO and faith leaders insist they keep their word and move quickly to secure her release," said Laugesen. "The Nigerian government is eager to placate Vice President Mike Pence, USAID Admin. Mark Green and others in the U.S. administration pressing for her release after Rebecca Sharibu's visit to Washington, D.C. in June where, with our coalition's assistance, she made many tearful pleas for help for her daughter. This cannot be another photo op backed up by

empty promises.”

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. The Nigerian federal government assured Rebecca Sharibu they were negotiating for her release, but nothing has come of it. In October, after threatening to execute her, Boko Haram instead announced plans to keep Leah and another captive, as “slaves for life” for refusing to renounce Christianity. Last month, a kidnapped ministry worker named “Grace” claimed Leah had been killed. At that time, STPC, the International Committee on Nigeria (ICON) and the Leah Foundation called for a measured response to the rumors.

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’s biannual report on Religious Freedom in the World, 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 (torture, rape, sex-slavery, expulsion, murder and genocide), an increase of 14% 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.

Save the Persecuted Christians tells of the specific terror tactics targeting Christian women and their children, through

a new exhibit titled "Warfare on Women." The exhibit is a series of 15 vertical banners that feature images, facts and quotes from recent news stories about women who have been harmed, including a banner that spotlights Leah Sharibu.

The lives of millions of Christian women and girls, most harmed by the worldwide rise in religious-based violence, have been fractured by violence. Daily they are kidnapped, forcibly converted and married, sold, beaten, raped, enslaved or slaughtered. Forced to watch their children die, untold numbers are left to live with horrific memories and debilitating wounds.

"Women and children bear the brunt of heavy persecution afflicting an estimated 300 million Christians worldwide," the opening banner in the exhibit reads. "Women are targeted increasingly for violence that punishes their faith, destroys their dignity, robs their identity and strikes fear in their communities. In a growing number of countries, Christian women face many forms of discrimination and violence, including: restrictions on freedom of dress and movement, employment and legal discrimination, violent assault, widowhood, forced abortions or death of children, false accusations, sexual harassment, forced conversion and marriage, kidnapping, rape, human trafficking and murder. If they survive and return, brutalized women and girls often face shame and exclusion from their families and communities. This must end."

"Warfare on Women" is available for churches, public venues and special events. To learn more about hosting the traveling exhibit, contact Save the Persecuted Christians or visit the website, where panels are available to view online.

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. Stories are categorized and resource reports are easily accessible.

With so much of the world's Christian population being attacked, imprisoned and/or exiled for their beliefs, such as Nigerian Christian schoolgirls 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.