

## **Ugandan networks join global call for the release of the girls abducted by Nigerian rebels**

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The Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice and its partners, the Women's Advocacy Network of Uganda (WAN) and the Greater North Women's Voices for Peace Network (Uganda), express our concern and solidarity with the girls and young women abducted in Chibok, north-eastern Nigeria, by the rebel group, Boko Haram.

On 14 April, 234 girls were abducted during the night from their boarding school by members of the Boko Haram militia. The rebel group, which began an insurgency in northern Nigeria in 2009, has stated that it believes girls should not receive an education and should be married.

'In 1994, I was 12 years old when I was abducted by the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) from my village in Amuru District in northern Uganda. I was the same age as some of the girls who have been abducted by the rebels in Nigeria. The LRA attacked our village at dusk when I had just returned home from school. Every day with the LRA was terrifying. We were treated harshly, repeatedly raped, punished and beaten by them', said Evelyn Amony, Chairperson of WAN.

'We must all do everything we can to support the return of the Nigerian girls. I don't want anyone else to suffer like I did. WAN calls for the safe and speedy release of those who have been abducted by Boko Haram', Ms Amony said.

WAN is a network of young women formerly abducted by the LRA. WAN works to support their reintegration into communities and also advocates for access to reparations, medical and psycho-social support, as well as opportunities to resume their education and receive vocational training.

Gladys Canagura, Director of Kitgum Women Peace Initiative (KIWEPI), an organisation that works with young women abducted by the LRA, said that her organisation 'condemns these abductions and all human rights violations perpetrated against women and girls all over the world'.

KIWEPI is a member of the Greater North Women's Voices for Peace Network which is a movement of grassroots women's rights and gender justice organisations, networks and individuals in the LRA-affected districts of north and north-east Uganda and the Blue Nile.

'Many girls and young women were abducted by the LRA over the 25 years of their activities in northern Uganda. Everyone suffered. Many girls were taken from their schools, their homes, their villages and enslaved by the LRA for many years. Hundreds are still believed to be with them in the bush. We have been advocating for their safe return for a long time, and we now also call for the return of the Chibok girls', said Jane Akwero, Uganda Programme Officer for the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice.

'We hope the Nigerian authorities will hold accountable those who are responsible for these crimes. The government must quickly provide more security in the areas where the rebels are operating in order

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to prevent further abductions of this kind. Unfortunately, Boko Haram has already taken eight more girls even after the international outcry following the Chibok abduction', said Jane Akwero.

'From our experience in Uganda, when the government is slow to protect the community and doesn't secure areas threatened by rebels, such groups become emboldened and the attacks become more numerous and brutal. The Nigerian Government needs to act now to prevent further attacks and to pursue the rebels for the release of the abducted girls', Akwero said.

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