



American ideals. Universal values.

May 8, 2014

The Honorable Charles Hagel  
Secretary of Defense  
U.S. Department of Defense  
100 Defense Pentagon, Room 3E880  
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Hagel:

Human Rights First welcomes the announcement that the United States will send a team of military, intelligence, and law enforcement advisors to Nigeria to assist in the search for the girls kidnapped by Boko Haram, an increasingly dangerous terrorist group. American participation in the effort comports with the national interest in human rights and regional security.

We are concerned, however, that U.S. counterterrorism assistance to Nigeria is not addressing the underlying problems that made this horrific crime possible. In fighting Boko Haram, the Nigerian military has deployed teams of civilian vigilantes who themselves commit abuses. The military has been accused of raping, torturing, and killing civilians. When Nigerian civil society groups took to the streets to demand government action to rescue the missing girls, the security services arrested some of their leaders. While the military has upgraded weapons and training to deal with terrorism, the police remain badly underfunded, riddled with incompetence and corruption. This further alienates the citizenry whose cooperation the police need in order to weaken Boko Haram. Nigeria is routinely ranked one of the world's most corrupt countries: judges can be bought and elected officials are believed to cut deals with Boko Haram. The International Crisis Group reports that nearly one-third of Nigerian police are deployed as security guards to senior officials. Much of the northern region where Boko Haram grew strong lacks reliable power and water; in some provinces, the education for which the kidnapped girls risked their lives is not free, and children work as house servants to pay for it.

In this context, we urge you to be frank with your counterparts in Nigeria about how their security forces have contributed to this crisis. The Department of Defense should partner with State and USAID to support anti-corruption, rule of law, and police reforms. It should also, through the Leahy Law and other avenues, ensure that the United States is not supporting individuals within the Nigerian security services who are complicit in the victimization of the kidnapped girls or other civilians.

Respectfully,

Elisa Massimino  
President and CEO

CC: Ambassador Susan Rice, National Security Advisor to the President

The Honorable John Kerry, Secretary of State

The Honorable Sarah Sewall, Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy,  
and Human Rights

The Honorable Tomasz Malinowski, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy,  
Human Rights and Labor

Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of African  
Affairs

The Honorable Derek Chollet, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International  
Security Affairs

Ambassador Tina S. Kaidanow, Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator for  
Counterterrorism