

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman  
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing on  
“Boko Haram: The Growing Threat to Schoolgirls, Nigeria, and Beyond”  
May 21, 2014**

**(As Prepared for Delivery)**

This hearing will come to order. Today – *as we meet* - nearly 300 school girls remain Boko Haram kidnap victims. It has been *five weeks* since they were abducted. And every passing minute makes their successful rescue less likely. We meet today to ensure that the United States is doing *everything* it can to assist in their rescue. Just yesterday, the House passed a resolution pressing for more aggressive action from the Administration.

Many around the world are just now hearing of “Boko Haram.” Sadly, for communities in northern Nigeria, they know the death and destruction this group brings all too well.

This morning, Committee members had the chance to meet with Deborah Peter. Deborah, a young woman of just 15 years of age, is from Chibok, Nigeria – the same town where the recent abduction took place.

Ms. Peter, seated in the front row, is one of only three Boko Haram survivors in the United States. She courageously shared with us her traumatic experience at the hands of Boko Haram in 2011. Her father and brother were executed in front of her eyes for not renouncing their Christian faith. We thank Deborah for being with us today, travelling from rural Virginia to share her traumatic story in the hope that the world will act.

We are faced with two challenges in northern Nigeria: in the near-term, seeing these school girls rescued; and in the long-term, rendering Boko Haram unable to threaten the region. This is a group that has killed more than 600 students and teachers and destroyed some 500 schools. Boko Haram means ‘Western education is a sin,’ and Boko Haram’s mission is to carry their war to those who educate or empower women.

Over time, Boko Haram has developed a vast arsenal of weapons, received training from al-Qaeda affiliated groups, and built-up its resources. This means greater terror for Nigerians, and greater challenges for Nigerian security forces. Unfortunately, these forces suffer unprofessional elements with poor morale.

That's led some to say we shouldn't get involved. But it tells me otherwise: that U.S. involvement is critical. U.S. forces are well positioned to "advise and assist" Nigerian forces in the search for these girls. In this role, U.S. forces – expertly trained to deal with hostage situations and in jungle environments – could help Nigerians with intelligence, planning and logistics. And if some U.S. laws would hinder such assistance, the Administration should use its waiver authority under these extraordinary circumstances.

Why do we care? We care about Deborah, her friends and family, and a girl's right to an education. We care about human rights and religious liberty and the future of Africa's largest country.

And we have direct security interests. Commanders at the Pentagon have stated that Boko Haram is a "threat to Western interests" and one of the highest counterterrorism priorities in Africa.

Pressure from this Committee was critical in getting the State Department to designate Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. Indeed, the Administration made that announcement in this room. As many have noted, it shouldn't have taken so long.

We want to hear from the State Department and the Pentagon witnesses on the strategy we now have in place.

Boko Haram, with heavy weapons and grenade attacks, is waging a brutal war against schoolgirls carrying backpacks, books, and pencils. We can't sit on the sidelines.

I'll now turn to the ranking member for his opening comments.