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**House Foreign Affairs Committee**

*“Boko Haram: The Growing Threat to Schoolgirls, Nigeria, and  
Beyond”*

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Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to discuss Nigeria’s struggle against Boko Haram, one of the most lethal terrorist groups in Africa today.

Over a month ago, the world was shocked when Boko Haram kidnapped over 250 young women from a secondary school in Chibok. The United States swiftly joined the effort to help the Government of Nigeria safely recover the hostages.

President Obama pledged our full support, and President Goodluck Jonathan readily accepted Secretary Kerry’s offer of assistance. Today in Nigeria’s capital, Abuja, a robust multidisciplinary team from the United States government is working hand in hand with Nigerian counterparts and teams from a half dozen other countries such as the United Kingdom and France. Our military and civilian experts in intelligence, military planning, hostage negotiations, strategic communications, civilian protection, and victim support, have been given unprecedented access and cooperation to assist Nigeria’s effort to safely recover the kidnapped schoolgirls. This effort – one that is extremely difficult and, as we know from our own experience, may take

far longer than we would like – will necessarily entail not just a military approach, but also law enforcement and diplomatic approaches. This kidnapping – and addressing the threat of Boko Haram more broadly – would be daunting for any government. That is why the United States is doing all it can to help Nigeria address these challenges – today and longer term.

During our trip last week, AFRICOM Commander General David Rodriguez and I met Nigeria’s top security officials to stress the importance of resolving this crisis and redoubling the effort to defeat Boko Haram, while respecting human rights and ensuring the protection of civilians. In Paris, Under Secretary for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman continued this conversation with Nigerian President Jonathan and heads of state from neighboring countries at a summit convened by French President Hollande in Paris. The summit brought together President Jonathan with presidents of his four neighbors (Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger) as well as senior representatives of the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union. Coming one day after Boko Haram killed and kidnapped Chinese nationals in northern Cameroon, the summit made clear and urgent for all parties the growing regional dimension of this challenge.

The leaders discussed the safe return of the school girls held hostage, and shared concrete ideas on how to defeat Boko Haram such as improving cooperation on border security, countering violent extremism, and redoubling efforts to promote economic growth and create jobs in the affected region. This is consistent with the comprehensive approach Nigeria announced in March and we have repeatedly called for this broad effort to be implemented.

At the summit, the U.S., United Kingdom, and France established a coordination mechanism at various levels to ensure our development, diplomatic, and security assistance are synchronized, including with our African partners. We again called on our African partners to establish national CT strategies, to integrate them across the region, and to share

them with P3 and other partners. The United States has worked with Nigeria to impose UN Security Council sanctions on Boko Haram, which we expect to be completed this week.

Peace and security in Nigeria is one of our highest foreign policy priorities in Africa. The tragedy of this kidnapping has rightfully focused our attention on the need to return these girls to their families, and on Boko Haram's increasingly brazen assaults on youth seeking education. Ensuring that girls and boys alike have the opportunity to learn is essential to ensuring that all of Nigeria's people contribute to and benefit from its economic prosperity. As the First Lady recently observed, stories like those of the kidnapped girls – and others who have risked their lives to pursue an education – should serve as a call to action to help the millions of girls worldwide who are not in school.

The kidnappings have also exposed the long-term security challenges that confront Nigeria, one of our most important partners in Africa. The fight against Boko Haram requires more than just military action, it requires a comprehensive approach to improving the lives of people in Northeast Nigeria. Just as my portfolio at the State Department includes counterterrorism, law enforcement, democracy promotion, human rights, conflict response, criminal justice, refugees, trafficking in persons, and religious freedom, Nigeria needs to address all of these important, inter-related issues in its fight against Boko Haram. Nigeria is not only a critical regional political and economic leader, but also a partner with which we work closely together in multilateral fora, including the UN Security Council.

While the kidnapping in Chibok has cast a spotlight on Boko Haram, I want to emphasize that we have *long* been working to help the people of Nigeria and the Nigerian government address this terrorist threat. Boko Haram is a Nigerian-based group that became considerably more violent in 2009 and has metastasized into a regional threat. It is responsible for the brutal killing of thousands of people in Nigeria, resulting in over 1000 deaths and injuries in 2013 alone. Boko Haram

also operates in Cameroon's Far North Region and the Lake Chad Basin and has kidnapped high-profile Westerners and, just recently, Chinese nationals in Cameroon. While we are rightfully focused on the almost 300 girls who were kidnapped, this tragedy is not an isolated incident. Going back just a few months, in February, over 59 teenage boys were killed in an attack, and, earlier this month, Boko Haram carried out an attack on two towns, killing an estimated 300 people.

As we pursue an integrated approach to helping Nigeria meet its challenges, we want Nigeria to prevail in its efforts, which we believe can only be accomplished through a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to defeating Boko Haram. We know from experience the difficulty in confronting an enemy that knows no borders and kills civilians indiscriminately. The most urgent need we see today is for Nigerian forces to conduct intelligence-driven operations that avoid civilian casualties, in order to help enhance trust and cooperation with northern populations and expose the relatively small numbers of Boko Haram fighters. More broadly, Nigeria's approach in the Northeast should emphasize and inspire respect for human rights, rule of law and accountability, and development and responsive governance. We are seeing small measures of slow progress, including the Nigerian government's announcement two months ago of a multi-faceted "soft" approach to Boko Haram. We are eager to see and to help Nigeria now implement this plan and have offered assistance to that end, including sharing our own lessons learned in how to effectively carry out counterterrorism operations while ensuring the protection of civilians.

Today, I would like to highlight some of the kinds of security assistance that we have been providing to help Nigeria address Boko Haram. A fuller description of our counterterrorism assistance to Nigeria can be found in the Fact Sheet about Boko Haram and U.S. Counterterrorism Assistance to Nigeria released by the State Department on May 14. In Fiscal Years 2012 and 2013, the Department of State planned approximately \$35.8 million in security assistance programs that benefit Nigeria, subject to Congressional notification and approval.

Our security assistance reflects our efforts to ensure Nigeria takes a comprehensive approach to countering Boko Haram. We are working with vetted police and civilian security components to build Nigerian law enforcement capacities to investigate terrorism cases, effectively deal with explosive devices, and secure Nigeria's borders. We do this because the most effective counterterrorism policies and practices are those that respect human rights and are underpinned by the rule of law. For example, our West African Regional Security Initiative provided nearly \$3.7 million in assistance to the Nigerian Economic and Financial Crimes Commission in Fiscal Year 2013 to help Nigeria counter corruption, money laundering, and terrorist financing, and help reform the police and promote the rule of law. We are also focused on enabling various Nigerian security services, including the police, various intelligence agencies, and the ministry of defense, with fusing multiple information streams to develop a better understanding of Boko Haram. My DOD colleague will speak to this more fully, but our military assistance supports the professionalization of vetted military units and improves their ability to plan and implement appropriate steps to counter Boko Haram and ensure civilian security. We have a robust dialogue with our Nigerian counterparts on all of these efforts, including through the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission's Regional Security Working Group.

While these efforts will make a difference, we continue to have concerns that human rights violations by government forces – particularly those forces that have operated in the Northeast – are undermining the government's attempts to defeat Boko Haram. Given these concerns, we continue to press the Government of Nigeria to demonstrate that it is working to protect civilians where Boko Haram is not—this means ending impunity for human rights violations by security forces. For example, alongside the Nigerian people and their own human rights commission, as well as Amnesty International and others, we have asked the Government to investigate massacres allegedly committed by government security forces that occurred in the village of Baga in April 2013 and at the Giwa Barracks detention facility after

Boko Haram staged a prison break there in March of this year. Only with facts uncovered and perpetrators brought to justice can the Nigerian government demonstrate that it is working to preserve life and fairly administer justice.

Let me be clear that there is no equivalence between the actions of the Nigerian military and those of Boko Haram, a terrorist group which has made clear that it is seeking to murder civilians in large numbers and terrorize the civilian population as a matter of policy. Yet, we also know the power of popular grievance narratives against governments, and it is incumbent on Nigeria's government to demonstrate through specific steps the will to ensure its forces protect the human rights of all of its people and end impunity for those that use violence indiscriminately. Civilians in the Northeast must be assured that security services are there to protect them from Boko Haram's violence. The confidence and cooperation of civilians is critical to deny Boko Haram a safe haven and gather the intelligence necessary to, among other pressing goals, safely recover the girls kidnapped at Chibok. Moreover, when military and security forces are found to commit human rights violations and the government does not act to hold the perpetrators of these incidents responsible for their actions, we are then limited as a matter of U.S. law and policy to work with units involved in these incidents. We are eager to help the Nigerian government address these concerns, which impede our ability to help in preventing punishing, and rectifying Boko Haram's atrocities.

Let me say a few words about how the provisions of law concerning security assistance and human rights known as the "Leahy laws" affect our work to assist the Nigerian government combat Boko Haram. Let me be clear: We value and strongly support the tenets and purpose behind the Leahy laws, and we have worked within U.S. law and policy to assist the Nigerians in their fight against Boko Haram. There is no question that the behavior of certain Nigerian military actors have made it impossible for the United States to work directly with them. To better understand the possibilities of promoting change, I will

ensure that we are working to the greatest extent possible to build Nigeria's capacity as a rights-respecting security partner and to encourage the reform of its military to more effectively address the Boko Haram threat.

In addition, pervasive corruption undermines the government's fight against Boko Haram. The Nigerian government has one of sub-Saharan Africa's largest security budgets, with \$5.8 billion dedicated to security in its proposed 2014 budget. Yet corruption prevents supplies as basic as bullets and transport vehicles from reaching the front lines of the struggle against Boko Haram. Morale is low and desertions are common among soldiers in Nigeria's 7<sup>th</sup> Army Division. For example, on May 14, 7<sup>th</sup> Division soldiers reportedly fired at their commander's car, complaining that he had failed to ensure they received the necessary equipment. As this incident shows, Nigeria will need to seriously tackle corruption if it is to succeed in stamping out Boko Haram.

These challenges are even more acute in the lead up to February 2015, when Nigeria will hold its fifth presidential election since its return to democracy in 1999. The last election, held in 2011, showed improvements in election administration, but was followed by riots that claimed over 800 lives, mostly in northern states. Insecurity and political tensions have fueled fears that 2015 may see even greater violence.

We are of course concerned about the northeast, where Boko Haram operates, and where it will be critical for the government to ensure security so that Nigerians in the Northeast are able to vote, including in three states of emergency. We are also working to help address instability in Nigeria's Middle Belt, where complex conflicts over land have pitted communities against one another, and the Niger Delta, where tensions over the allocation of oil revenues remain high and a long-running insurgency is yet to be fully settled. As Nigerians prepare to vote against this backdrop of corruption, tension, and uncertainty, we must look at more than the kidnapping at Chibok to

understand and help Nigeria address the full range of challenges to its future.

We are therefore working in other ways to help Nigeria keep civilians safe and strengthen democracy. For example, we are reviewing ways to establish a community-based early warning response to combat GBV in Nigeria, and particularly in the north. We are striving to promote interreligious tolerance in the Middle Belt, and we have an initiative championing narratives of non-violence in the Niger Delta led by local Nigerian community, business, cultural, and economic leaders, and aimed at giving local populations' a voice to promote peace through media. As the 2015 elections approach, our diplomatic engagements are supporting USAID's elections assistance package, which will help the Independent National Electoral Commission, or INEC, to register voters, conduct elections, and run a nationwide voter education campaign to ensure that all citizens understand their rights and know how to exercise them. During my trip to Nigeria, I met INEC Chairman Professor Attahiru Jega to discuss preparations for the elections, the status of northeastern states' ability to participate in elections, and convey our interest in the credibility and peacefulness of the vote. We continue to call on all political parties and candidates to publicly renounce violence and commit to ensuring a free, fair, and peaceful election.

Before I close, I would like to address two aspects of the State Department's approach toward Nigeria and Boko Haram. The first concerns the timing of the designation of Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. While I was not at the State Department at that time, the Department pursued the designation after careful deliberation and consultation with the Nigerian government and after a series of steps that included our June 2012 designation of Boko Haram's top commanders as Specially Designated Global Terrorists and our June 2013 decision to add Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram's official leader to our Rewards for Justice Program. We made the FTO designation after implementing and assessing these earlier steps, and shortly after Nigeria and the United Kingdom made their own designations. In short, our

approach to the FTO designation reflected our evolving assessment of Boko Haram's threat potential, the utility of additional sanctions available pursuant to FTO designation, and our close coordination with our partners. Significantly, while Nigeria has been reluctant to seek international attention to the Boko Haram crisis, it has moved forward this month, in part at our urging, to request that the United Nations Security Council designate Boko Haram under its al Qaeda sanctions regime.

The second issue concerns whether Boko Haram, and particularly the kidnapping at Chibok, is part of a worldwide trend of persecutions against Christians. We are committed to protecting the rights of people of all religions, including Christians, to practice their beliefs freely and peacefully. Certainly Boko Haram has targeted Christians, and Nigerian officials believe that 85% of the girls kidnapped at Chibok are Christians and have been forced to convert to Islam after their kidnapping. We want to highlight, however, that Boko Haram is a problem that affects Nigerians of every religion. Indeed, the majority of Boko Haram's estimated 4,000 total victims to date have been Muslim. Even as we work to help the Government of Nigeria protect Christians, we are also helping it protect its population as a whole. In the aftermath of the kidnappings, we have encouraged Muslim and Christian faith leaders alike to speak out, in Nigeria and around the world, to urge respect for religious diversity and interfaith cooperation. I can assure you that we treat issues of religious freedom, like other issues of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, with utmost seriousness.

The State Department, like the American people, hope to see the girls reunited with their families soon. But we are also preparing for a long, tough fight to defeat Boko Haram and to help the Nigerian people – including Nigeria's girls and boys alike – realize the full political and economic potential of their great country.