



Education Must Continue
Initiative (EMCI)

Written statement of Escaped Chibok Schoolgirl “Sa’a”
On the U.S. Role in Helping Nigeria Confront Boko Haram
and Other Threats in Northern Nigeria

Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights
and International Organizations
Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives

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I am one of the 276 Schoolgirls who was kidnapped from the Government Secondary School in Chibok by the terror group Boko Haram. Sa’a is not my real name. It is a name that I use for my protection.

Before attending the Chibok Secondary school, I also survived an earlier Boko Haram attack at my former high school. After I escaped from that school invasion, my parents decided to move me to the Chibok Secondary School because they thought that it would be a safer place nearer home for me to continue my education.

However, on the 14th of April 2014, the Boko Haram came to my school at Chibok when we were all sleeping at night. They were shooting guns and yelling. They were yelling, “Allahu Akbar.” Everyone woke up, and came out of their rooms. We were wearing our pajamas when they came in. They asked us, “Where are the boys?” The boys are day students. The boys usually came to school in the morning but went home after school. They also asked us where the food was kept. They pointed out two girls to show them where the food store was and took it in a truck. Then they made us move from where we were staying to the class area. Next, they started burning everything – our clothes, our books, our classrooms – everything in our school.

They marched us out of the school for miles to where their trucks were. Then they asked us to enter the trucks and said that if we did not, they were going to shoot all of us. We were all scared, so we entered the trucks. They started driving us through the forest. When we were all riding in the trucks through the forest, I just had this feeling I should try to escape because I don't know where I'm going and neither do my parents. I said to one of my friends that “I'm going to jump out of the truck. I would rather die so my parents will see my body and bury it than to go with the Boko Haram.”

So my friend said, "OK." She would jump out with me. I jumped out first, and she jumped after me. We hid in the forest while the cars passed. We were in the forest that night without knowing what to do. It was very dark. We didn't know where we were. My friend injured both of her legs from jumping. She couldn't walk. We just sat under a tree until morning. She cried. She said that I should go home and let her die in the forest. I said, "No. If we are going to die, we are going to die together. I won't leave you here."

I decided to go and look for help in forest. I was going around not far from where we slept, and I found a Fulani man – a shepherd. I asked him for help, but he said, "No, I can't help you." So I tried to convince him. Then he did help us. He put my friend on his bicycle and took us to Chibok, and that's how we got home.

Before I got home in the morning, my parents heard what happened in my school and one of my brothers and his friend went back to Chibok to find out what happened. When I got home, my mom, my dad, and my family, everyone was crying. Our neighbors came to the house. They were all happy and crying because I'm home, but they were asking about the other girls. There was a man who came to my home. He was asking about his daughters. I told him we managed to escape, but I didn't know if his daughters would manage to escape the way we did. I didn't know what happened next after we jumped out of the truck.

After we escaped, Mr. Emmanuel Ogebe with the Justice for Jos Project together with Congressman Chris Smith came to Nigeria to find out what happened. They first met my friend who escaped with me, and she told them her story of how we escaped. Mr. Emmanuel later found a school for her to study in safety in the US. She told them if they are giving her a scholarship to come and study, she'd like me to come too because I was the one that helped her escape.

My friend told me about the opportunity, but I told her that "I'm not coming to school because I am so scared because of what happened." That was the second attack that both of us had been through before we relocated to Chibok. When Boko Haram kidnapped us they asked us, "Why are you at school?" They said that we should all be married. They said that we should not go to school again or they will find us. I felt like if we go to school again they are going to kidnap us wherever we are. My brothers and friends encouraged me that I should not let Boko Haram stop me from getting an education. I should be strong and come. I am so glad that I listened to them, and I'm here today. I started college in January under a project by the Education Must Continue Initiative (www.emcinitiative.org). It is a charity run **by victims** of the insurgency **for victims** of the insurgency which has helped me and about 3000 other IDP kids go to school.

I have learned a lot since I came to the US. I went to the National Archives and I saw the US Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. I even saw a version of the Magna Carta. I learned that the people who wrote those documents have faced hard times through the years, but they didn't give up and hope and freedom won. When I heard what Patrick Henry said, about "Give me liberty or give me death," I realized that was exactly how I felt when I had to decide about jumping out of the truck to escape from Boko Haram. Here in the US, I stood under the US Capitol Dome and looked up at the statue on top called, "Armed Freedom," and realized that freedom has to have strength protecting it. I stood in the Smithsonian at your National Rock collection and was inspired to study science. I want to study medicine. I want to help Nigeria, but will it be safe?

I have twice escaped from Boko Haram attacks on my schools, but many have not. Many live in fear every day. Their homes were burnt, so many people didn't have a place to sleep, food to eat or clothes to wear. They are now IDPs in other places. My family was affected. My mum hid in the forest for months with my siblings before finally fleeing to rejoin my dad in the northwest. The Nigerian government promised to rebuild the Chibok school, but it is still burnt two years later.

Thanks to God, I am safely here in the US and doing well with my studies, but I worry about my family in Nigeria. People ask me if it will be safe for me to return to Nigeria. I ask, is it safe for anyone in Northern Nigeria? I lost my dad months ago. It wasn't the terrorism but the effects of the terrorism.

I urge everyone who hears or reads this statement who has any power to help Nigeria to please help, and also to help some of my Chibok classmates who didn't get the opportunity that I have today to be in school in a safe place. I want them to be able to go to school too, especially, my Chibok classmate and friend, Hauwa John, who has been denied a visa at the American Embassy in Nigeria three times.

Recently I saw the video of some of my classmates that were missing for two years now. I am glad to see that some of them are alive. The moment I saw them and recognized their faces, I started crying, with tears of joy coming rolling down from my eyes, thanking God for their lives. Seeing them has given me more courage not to give up. Seeing them gives me the courage to tell the world today that we should not lose hope.

I have had dreams. With what I have been through, some of the dreams are scary. But now my dreams are good. I have a dream of a safe Nigeria; a Nigeria where girls can go to school without fear of being kidnapped; a Nigeria where girls like me are not made into suicide bombers and little boys are not routinely stolen and turned into terrorists; a Nigeria, where even if the worst happens and children are stolen, that every effort is made for their swift rescue; that those who can help will help; and that those who can speak will speak out for those who can't speak for themselves. I dream and I pray for freedom, safety, and peace to win in Nigeria.