

**The U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Human Rights, and International Organization**

**Testimony by Ambassador Robin Renee Sanders (ret), CEO FEEEDS Advocacy
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Subcommittee, I want to thank you for inviting me here today to testify before you. I just returned from Nigeria and was in country when the international community became more aware of the horrible kidnapping of 247 girls by Boko Haram on April 14, 2014.

Honorable Members you have asked the panel today to discuss the ongoing crisis in Nigeria and there are several components to this issue, however, my remarks will be based on:

- My knowledge of the region, as I have been in every state in Nigeria, including travelling by road from Abuja through what is now Boko Haram's current expanded territory of operation at least 4 times during my tenure there. I have been north of Maiduguri also by road in some of the most desolate areas of the world I have been in, and I have served in Sudan by comparison;**
- What I know of Boko Haram before and since its vicious resurgence, noting that it has been in existence since the late 1990s; and,**
- My conversations and first hand observations while on my recent trip to Nigeria.**

With that backdrop, I will address what I understand are the Committees principal concerns for holding this hearing today:

- 1.) The Security Environment and Boko Haram, and areas of possible additional assistance;**
- 2.) Why Boko Haram was not initially considered a Foreign Terrorist Organization, FTO; and then;**
- 3.) Address what I am hearing from my contacts on Chibok, and concerns there.**

The Nigerian Security Services in the Face of Boko Haram:

-- Current Nigerian security services have never experienced anything like what it is facing with Boko Haram today. They need to understand that Boko Haram is unlike the Niger Delta conflict and they need to toss out that play book as regards to this conflict. Boko Haram is executing asymmetrical warfare, and for the most part this is outside of the framework of the security forces and their capability to effectively respond. The Nigerian troops that have been in recent conflicts in northern Mali, including the initial Nigerian Force Commander, and those troops who served in Darfur probably are the few that have had the closest experience in asymmetrical warfare;

--Thus, the existing challenges in some of the security structures are more evident now as they are finding it difficult to cope with the threat. It is good that Nigeria has accepted international assistance to begin to address some of these structural challenges and gaps in capability. From my time on the ground, they have always had challenges in the following areas:

--Airlift is key to troop rotation as I heard reports of PTSD while I was there; it is important because of the distances and tough road travel in the Northeast; and it is important because it will help them react faster to the changing situation on the ground as they try to cover more than 60,000 square miles of territory about the size of Georgia or Wisconsin (see on square miles:

<http://pointblanknews.com/pbn/exclusive/emergency-rule-cell-phones-cut-off-in-borno-yobe-adamawa/>; <http://www.wisegeek.com/how-big-are-the-states-in-america.htm>

--Additional materiel, especially mobile communication equipment, vehicles, technology-based bomb detection equipment (what saw in many places was rudimentary at best); improved control over the porous borders

--Improved military planning, logistics, equipment, and supplies, including sufficient spare parts, and fuel);

--Expand its small special forces unit, and its 24/7 counter terrorism center (both began to be stood up while I was there);

- Establishing a satellite CT center closer to the Northeast region so information doesn't take so long to react to or be analyzed;
- More Rapid Response Forces or what we call mobile units, and probably more outposts.
- Security Service personnel and resources are both stretched thin, Realignment is needed to better address the current threat;
- Improvement in strategic communications and review of existing strategic communications approaches, because what they have now is not working internally or externally with affected communities, particularly with the families of the missing girls. I would suggest a liaison committee led by someone respected for their human rights values that engages with and keeps the families informed. Not someone who is a spokesperson use to dealing with the press, but someone who is both an advocate, and can avoid the Malaysia flight MH370 fiasco with the families. I lectured as a Visiting Scholar last year at Nigeria's Defense College and talked about the must-do things the security forces needed to do to build better relations and respond more quickly to the affected communities.
- I traveled through Kano last month by road on my way to visit an agricultural project I am involved with in the Northwest. There were checkpoints all along the way, anywhere from 30-to-50 kilometers apart. I did not see the ability to communicate between most checkpoints. I understand that in the Northeast this is a more acute as distances between some checkpoints is greater, adding to what we already know: *That information is not reacted to in timely or effective manner.*
- I am not excusing the poor responses and reaction to date. I am just providing recommendations from a strategic perspective of things that can be and need to be addressed right now as I would hope the assistance packages for Nigeria are including.

The Long war, The Long Conflict:

- Nigeria is at the beginning of a long war or long conflict, and they have to realize this. This is no longer a localized conflict or insurgency. There is no easy fix and every attack in response to Boko Haram cannot be viewed a death knell

blow to it – a long range security framework to terrorist threat is what is needed. The security services need to regroup, re-approach, and re-address it as such in order to begin to get off their heels on the defense and get on an aggressive offense. This has not happened yet, and Boko Haram has not only succeeded in terrorizing 60,000 square miles of territory, but also as evident with the late April 2014 attacks, they have the ability to reach locations just 15 kilometers outside of Abuja, either with sleeper cells or with bombs getting past checkpoints.

-- Right now the security services are out gunned, and out strategically played. One thing I also want to put into the mix on which I am not sure there has been much focus is the language differences. Most of the security forces in the Northeast are Hausa-speaking, while the majority of the village population in Borno are Kanuri speakers. Just like the US military had to ramp up on its Arabic speakers for Iraqi, the Nigeria military will need to increase its Kanuri speakers.

--I mention this as part of the overall issue of addressing and reframing of strategic communication and outreach to the villages.

-- My next comment will be an unpopular thing to hear for many, but there are people and elements in Nigeria's military who are committed and serious, but they are under supported and need resources. This does not dilute the issues of the very real challenges for the security forces and reports in the past of corruption and failure to respond. That being said, I had several rank and file security service members come up to me on this last trip to say: "Madame you know some of us, you know we are not all bad, we do our jobs for our country. Tell people this Madame; I said I would."

-- I highlight this to underscore who is going to fight this war, this conflict if it is not the Nigerian security forces, along with assistance from the international community. They are the vanguard of this conflict, so we need to help them pull up their boots straps as an institution to address any challenges they might have to get it together because if the entire security structure becomes demoralized who is going to fight this conflict.

-- There have already reportedly been 1-2 incidents where military units allegedly have shown their frustration by shooting at commanders' convoys – one report happen while I was still in Nigeria.

-- Relationship with Neighboring Intelligent Services:

Nigeria's neighbors and human intelligence from villagers in Nigeria and neighboring countries will be critical elements of fighting this war. There has to be better control of the porous borders and cooperation; P-3 surveillance planes can assist with this, but in the end on-ground human intelligence (or humint) is going to be key. Despite the May 2014 Paris conference, a trust issue remains among the neighbors on sharing intelligence. So we need to help build trust among those services as well.

-- Food Security:

Boko Haram has been so brutal that several villages and markets have just disappeared, which means food is becoming scarce as planting and commerce has ceased. The international community needs to keep an eye on the food security situation as food shortages could become an issue down the line.

-- Designation of Boko Haram as Foreign Terrorist Organization:

The other question I understood the Committee is interested in is why Boko Haram was not named earlier as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).

--As I said earlier, Boko Haram has been around since the late 1990s, and was more commonly referred to before as the Nigerian Taliban. Prior to the last four years it executed localized sabotage, attacked police stations, and recruited young people into the group, but no kidnapping. Evidence of Boko Haram's some contact with AQIM started to surface about 9 months after (early 2010) the extrajudicial killing of its then-leader Muhammad Yusef's and his key lieutenant Al Haji Buji Foi in July 2009; this was shared with the then-government.

I was in Nigeria when Yusuf was captured and killed almost before the cameras by the Nigerian Police. From early 2010 until August 2011, almost a full year there was a lull with some small acts, again localized. The morphing of Boko Haram to using Al-Qaeda or AQIM-like tactics to achieve the goal of establishing an Islamic Extremist Caliphate began really surfacing in mid-2011 with the bombing of the UN Headquarters in August 2011, and since then Boko Haram has continually gotten more expansive in both its reach, and brutality from 2012-2014.

-- I will expect disagreements on this, but earlier than August 2011 before it bombed the UN Headquarters in Abuja, Boko Haram, in my view, would not have met the third leg of the cited FTO definition in the law:

- 1. It must be a foreign organization;**
- 2. It must engage in terrorist activity, as defined in several sections off the Immigration and Nationality and Foreign Relations Authorization Acts (Sections 212 (a)(3)(B) of the INA (8 U.S.C. § 1182(a) (3)(B), or terrorism, as defined in section 140(d)(2) of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1988 and 1989 (22 U.S.C. § 2656f(d) (2), or retain the capability and intent to engage in terrorist activity or terrorism); and,**
- 3. Its terrorist activity or terrorism must threaten the security of U.S. nationals or the national security (national defense, foreign relations, or the economic interests) of the United States.**

-- The Abuja UN Headquarters bombing showed the: reach; capability, brutality, of Boko Haram and its use of Al-Qaeda inspired tactics; underscoring that all nationals were at risk. The UN HQ is right around the corner from the US Embassy, and when I was there I could see the building from my office window.

Chibook/Chibok:

-- First my heart goes out to the families and the missing girls wherever they might be as I know they are suffering, scared, and afraid. In Paris Monday there was a Global Conference on Women, and one of the things said there regarding the Chibook girls is that this tragedy is the epitome in dehumanization that girls do not have the right to control their own fate; their education and who they might choose to marry.

--Despite reports out of Nigeria, I do not think that most/most of the girls have been in Nigeria for a long time. We have no idea how long the videos being shown were taken. And, these terrorists groups learn from each other, and Boko Haram is nothing but strategic. Therefore, I think it is unlikely that most (maybe not all) the girls have been put into smaller groups and taken across borders to Chad and Cameroon, or elsewhere, or kept in smaller groups or singular in Nigeria. So, again the human intelligence factor is going to be critical to hopefully finding some of them.

--I also do not want us to forget that from January-March 2014 young girls were being kidnapped, killed, terrorized and brutalized by Boko Haram. Yesterday, 20 more women were reported kidnapped near Chibook. During January-March 2013, young girls were burned to death in their dorms; others kidnapped, divided up based on their physical maturity level, and those who showed signs of puberty had their throats cut – all of these actions show that Boko Haram's Shekerau is acting on one of his stated goals that he would: make the mothers and daughters of Nigeria suffer in revenge for the capture of some of the Boko Haram families members by the Nigerian security forces.

--I highlight all of these things to underscore that we as the international community cannot be sporadic on these horrible human rights violations and brutality of young girls. We must all do all we can to protect the young women in the North. A few recommendations on human side of this issue, just in case the current assistance are not including these things.

--My recommendation are mostly directed at protecting and assisting the young girls who escaped, their families, and the families of those who are still missing:

- More trauma and grief counseling for families and returned girls;
- Liaison committee lead by someone respected for their human rights values that can help keep the families informed to avoid the Malaysian MH370 family relations issues;
- Ensure that the girls that have returned and their families are protected so they don't become victims again as am sure Boko Haram is also watching what happens with them. Even if we protect their faces, this doesn't mean that Boko Haram elements cannot figure out who they are, so we need to be careful with their safety;
- President Jonathan should meet with the families, even if it is not in Chibook/Chibok;
- Am not making an apples and oranges comparison necessarily, but if the world/international community could mobilize tons of financial, technical, human resources to try to find the missing Malaysia plane MH 370 of 239 people, it can mobilize to find 247 girls no matter in what country they are located.

-- Things such as mistrust among neighboring countries in sharing intelligence must take a back seat.

-- I do see an array of assistance, but nowhere near the level of mobilization that is probably needed by the entire international community – full time, all the time.

Thank You Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Bass and Members of the Committee