



TEXTS ADOPTED

P8_TA(2015)0344

The mass displacement of children in Nigeria as a result of Boko Haram attacks

European Parliament resolution of 8 October 2015 on the mass displacement of children in Nigeria as a result of Boko Haram attacks (2015/2876(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Nigeria, in particular to those of 17 July 2014¹ and 30 April 2015²,
- having regard to previous statements by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, including those of 8 January, 19 January, 31 March, 14 and 15 April, and 3 July 2015,
- having regard to the statement by the President of the Security Council of the UN on 28 July 2015,
- having regard to President Muhammadu Buhari's address to the UN General Assembly of 28 September 2015, and to the UN counter-terrorism summit,
- having regard to the Cotonou Agreement,
- having regard to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, adopted on 31 October 2000,
- having regard to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990),
- having regard to the 2003 Child Rights Act signed into law by the Federal Government of Nigeria,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,

¹ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2014)0008.

² Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0185.

- having regard to the African Union Convention on the prevention and fight against terrorism, ratified by Nigeria on 16 May 2003, and the Additional Protocol, ratified by Nigeria on 22 December 2008,
 - having regard to the EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa,
 - having regard to the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on violations and abuses committed by Boko Haram and the impact on human rights in the affected countries of 29 September 2015; having regard to the statements by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights regarding the possibility that members of Boko Haram could be accused of war crimes,
 - having regard to Rules 135(5) and 123(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas Nigeria, the most populous and largest economy in Africa, which is ethnically diverse and marked by regional and religious cleavages and a North-South divide with severe economic and social inequalities, has since 2009 become the battlefield of the Boko Haram Islamic terrorist group with its sworn allegiance to Da'esh; whereas the terrorist group has become a growing threat to the stability of Nigeria and the West African region; whereas the Nigerian security forces have often used excessive force and committed abuses during military operations to counter the insurgency;
 - B. whereas at least 1 600 civilians have been killed by Boko Haram in the last four months, raising the death toll to at least 3 500 civilians in 2015 alone;
 - C. whereas since the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgency its targeted actions against schoolboys and schoolgirls in the area have deprived children of access to education, with the figure of 10,5 million children of primary school age in Nigeria not attending school being the highest in the world, according to UNESCO figures; whereas, like al-Shabaab in Somalia, AQIM, MUJAO and Ansar Dine in North Mali and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Boko Haram targets children and women who receive an education;
 - D. whereas despite advances by Nigerian and regional armed forces, increasing attacks and suicide bombings extending beyond the border into neighbouring countries threaten stability and the livelihood of millions of people throughout the entire region; whereas children are in critical danger on account of the deteriorating humanitarian situation, with worsening food insecurity combined with poor access to education, safe drinking water and health services;
 - E. whereas the UN estimates that the violence in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states has recently resulted in the number of internally displaced people increasing dramatically to 2,1 million, 58 % of whom are children, according to IOM; whereas more than 3 million people have been affected by the insurgency as a whole, and 5,5 million are in need of humanitarian assistance in the Lake Chad Basin;
 - F. whereas Nigeria has succeeded in conducting mostly peaceful presidential and gubernatorial elections despite the threats made by Boko Haram to disrupt the ballot; whereas Nigeria and its neighbouring countries created a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) on 11 June 2015 in Abuja to comply with the decisions taken in Niamey in January 2015 on fighting Boko Haram;

- G. whereas Boko Haram has abducted more than 2 000 women and girls in Nigeria since 2009, including the kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in the north-east of the country on 14 April 2014, an act which shocked the whole world and triggered an international campaign ('Bring back our Girls') to rescue them; whereas almost a year and half later, more than 200 of the girls captured in that incident have still not been found;
- H. whereas many more children have since gone missing, or have been abducted or recruited to serve as fighters and house workers, with girls being subjected to rape and forced marriage or forced to convert to Islam; whereas since April 2015 some 300 other girls rescued by the Nigerian security forces from terrorist strongholds and around 60 others who managed to escape their captors from another location have described their life in captivity to Human Rights Watch (HRW) as being one of daily violence and terror, plus physical and psychological abuses; whereas, according to the UNSR for Children and Armed Conflict, the armed conflict in north-eastern Nigeria this past year was one of the world's deadliest for children, with killings, the growing recruitment and use of children, countless abductions and sexual violence against girls; whereas UNICEF says that more than 23 000 children have been separated from their parents and forced from their home by the violence, running to save their lives inside Nigeria or crossing the border to Cameroon, Chad and Niger;
- I. whereas most of the children living in IDP and refugee camps have lost one or both parents (either killed or missing), as well as siblings and other relatives; whereas, although a number of international and national humanitarian organisations are operating in the camps, access to basic rights for many of these children – including nutrition, shelter (overcrowded and unsanitary), health and education – remains of abysmally low quality;
- J. whereas there are at least 208 000 children without access to education and 83 000 lack access to safe water in the sub-region (Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger), and 23 000 children in the north-east of Nigeria have been separated from their families;
- K. whereas the number of attacks by Boko Haram has risen in Nigeria, as well as in neighbouring Cameroon, Chad and Niger; whereas Boko Haram continues to abduct children and women to carry explosive devices, using them, without their knowledge, as suicide bombers; whereas some of those who had sought refuge on the Chadian side of Lake Chad were again targeted by the same terrorists on Chadian soil;
- L. whereas in June 2015 the EU provided EUR 21 million in humanitarian aid to help displaced people in Nigeria and neighbouring countries affected by the violence of terrorist organisations;
- M. whereas UNICEF, together with governments and partners in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, is increasing its operations to assist thousands of children and their families in the region by providing access to safe water, education, counselling and psychological support, as well as vaccinations and treatment for severe acute malnutrition; whereas UNICEF has received only 32 % of the 50,3 million required this year for its humanitarian response across the Lake Chad region;
- N. whereas a number of the abducted women and girls who have escaped or have been rescued or freed return home pregnant and in dire need of reproductive and maternal health care, and others lack access to basic post-rape health screening, post-traumatic care, social support and rape counselling, according to HRW; whereas the Commission has stated that where pregnancy causes unbearable suffering women must have access to the

full range of sexual and reproductive health services based on their medical condition, therefore asserting that international humanitarian law shall in any case prevail;

1. Strongly condemns Boko Haram crimes, including terrorist raids and suicide bombings in Chad, Cameroon and Niger; stands with the victims and conveys its condolences to all families who have lost loved ones; denounces the ongoing relentless violence in the Nigerian Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states and other cities in the country;
2. Deplores the acts which have led to the mass displacement of innocent children and calls for immediate coordinated international action to assist the work of UN agencies and NGOs in preventing displaced children and youths from being subjected to sexual slavery, other forms of sexual violence and kidnappings and from being forced into armed conflict against civilian, government and military targets in Nigeria by the Boko Haram terrorist sect; stresses the paramount need to duly protect children's rights in Nigeria, a country in which over 40 % of the total population is aged between 0 and 14;
3. Believes that in the cases of children formerly associated with Boko Haram or other armed groups, non-judicial measures should be considered as an alternative to prosecution and detention;
4. Welcomes the recent announcement by the Commission of additional funds to boost urgent humanitarian aid to the region; expresses, however, serious concerns about the funding gap between commitments and actual payments for UNICEF operations in the region by the international community at large; calls on donors to meet their commitments without delay in order to address the chronic need for access to basic provisions such as drinking water, basic health care and education;
5. Calls on the President of Nigeria and his newly appointed Federal Government to adopt strong measures to protect the civilian population, to put special emphasis on the protection of women and girls, to make women's rights and children's rights a priority when fighting extremism, to provide help for victims and to prosecute wrongdoers, and to ensure women's participation in decision-making at all levels;
6. Calls on the Nigerian Government to launch, as promised by President Buhari, an urgent, independent and thorough investigation into crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations by all parties to the conflict;
7. Welcomes the change in military leadership and demands that all human rights abuses and crimes committed by both terrorists and Nigerian security forces be investigated in order to address the lack of accountability observed under the former presidency; welcomes the pledge made by President Buhari to investigate evidence that Nigerian military forces have committed serious human rights violations, war crimes and acts which may constitute crimes against humanity;
8. Urges the President of the Federal Republic to address the challenges involved in abiding by all campaign promises and the latest statements, the most important of which are defeating the terrorist threat, making respect for human rights and humanitarian law a central pillar of military operations, bringing back the Chibok girls and all other abducted women and children alive and unharmed, addressing the ever growing problem of malnutrition, and fighting corruption and impunity in order to deter future abuses and work towards justice for every victim;

9. Urges the Nigerian authorities and the international community to work closely together and to increase efforts to reverse the continuous trend towards the further displacement of people; welcomes the determination expressed at the Niamey Regional Summit of 20 and 21 January 2015 by the 13 participating countries, and in particular the commitment of Chad, together with Cameroon and Niger, to engage in the fight against the terrorist threats of Boko Haram; calls on the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to observe international human rights and humanitarian law conscientiously in its operations against Boko Haram; reiterates that a military approach alone will not suffice to counter the Boko Haram insurgency;
10. Recalls that Boko Haram's origins are rooted in grievances over poor governance, pervasive corruption and stark inequalities in Nigerian society; urges the Nigerian authorities to eliminate corruption, mismanagement and inefficiencies within the public institutions and the army, and to promote fair taxation; calls for the adoption of measures to starve Boko Haram of its sources of illegal income through cooperation with neighbouring countries, in particular with regard to smuggling and trafficking;
11. Urges the international community to help Nigeria and the neighbouring countries who host refugees (Cameroon, Chad and Niger) to provide all necessary medical and psychological assistance to those in need; appeals to the authorities in the sub-region to ensure ease of access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls who have been raped, in accordance with the common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions; stresses the need to implement a universal standard for the treatment of war rape victims and to ensure the primacy of international humanitarian law in situations of armed conflict; expresses its full sympathy with women and children who have survived the blind terrorism perpetrated by Boko Haram; calls for the establishment of specialised education programmes aimed at women and children who are victims of war and society as a whole, to help them overcome the terror experienced, to give appropriate and comprehensive information, to combat stigmas and social exclusion and to help them become valued members of society;
12. Urges the Commission to prioritise assistance for uprooted children and youths in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, with particular attention on protection from all forms of ferocity and gender violence and on access to education, healthcare and safe drinking water, within the framework of the Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa;
13. Calls on the Nigerian Government to take measures to facilitate the return of displaced persons, especially children, to guarantee their safety, and to assist NGOs in their efforts to improve conditions in the camps for people displaced by the conflict by, *inter alia*, improving hygiene and sanitation in order to prevent the possible spread of disease;
14. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Government and the Parliament of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and the representatives of the ECOWAS and the African Union.