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Nigeria: Authorities must protect schools from deadly attacks

The Nigerian government must act to prevent attacks on schools to protect children's lives and their right to education said Amnesty International after 30 people were reportedly killed in an attack on a boarding school by an armed Islamist group on Saturday.

Secondary schools have been ordered to close across Nigeria's north-eastern state of Yobe following the pre-dawn attack on Government Secondary School in Mamudo, near Potiskum, in which 29 students and one teacher were killed and buildings set alight.

"The protection of children's lives is paramount, and the Nigerian government has a duty to ensure that the country's educational sector is not further threatened by the killing and intimidation of students and teachers and the destruction of school buildings," said Lucy Freeman, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Africa.

It is not yet known who is responsible for the attack although the group Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for several attacks on schools in the past.

"Such attacks violate the right to life and undermine the right to education for thousands of children in northern Nigeria. They must stop immediately," said Lucy Freeman.

"The Nigerian authorities must investigate these attacks and bring those responsible to justice in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty."

According to information received by Amnesty International, dozens of children who fled to the bush after Saturday's attack are still unaccounted for.

Since January 2013, around 30 schools have been reportedly burnt, damaged or destroyed by suspected Boko Haram members in the neighbouring state of Borno alone.

The attacks have ranged from killing teachers in full view of school children to destroying school buildings. Many schools have reportedly been forced to close as a result of the attacks.

Boko Haram translates as "Western education is forbidden".

The destruction and damage of school infrastructure and facilities grossly reduces the availability of and access to education for many children in northern Nigeria where sectarian violence continues.

"When education institutions are targeted or attacked, the damage and resultant consequences can be major and far-reaching. Access to basic education in a country where education is mostly seen as a privilege, requires that proper structures and services are in place and that students can access adequate books and materials," said Lucy Freeman.

The Nigerian government is obliged under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child to which Nigeria is a state party to “take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools.”