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Nigeria: Children slaughtered, schools under siege

In the week that saw over 50 students killed by gunmen in an agricultural college in Yobe State, Amnesty International publishes a new report assessing attacks on schools in northern Nigeria between 2012 and 2013.

“Hundreds have been killed in these horrific attacks. Thousands of children have been forced out of schools across communities in northern Nigeria and many teachers have been forced to flee for their safety,” said Lucy Freeman, Amnesty International’s deputy Africa director.

“Attacks against schoolchildren, teachers and school buildings demonstrate an absolute disregard for the right to life and the right to education.”

According to the report Education under attack in Nigeria this year alone at least 70 teachers and scores of pupils have been slaughtered and many others wounded. Some 50 schools have been burned or seriously damaged and more than 60 others have been forced to close.

The Islamist group commonly known as Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for many, but not all, of the attacks.

Between 2010 and 2011 attacks were mostly carried out when schools were empty. However since the beginning of 2013 they appear to have become more targeted and brutal. They frequently happen when schools are occupied, and according to reports received by Amnesty International, teachers and pupils are now being directly targeted and killed.

In one of the cases detailed in the report the principle of a government secondary school in Maiduguri describes an attack in February 2013:

“The gunmen opened fire on everyone around. Two staff teachers were shot. One died on the spot and the

other was seriously wounded. We were all devastated.”

The same school was attacked again the following month and three people were shot and killed in the exams office.

“We were forced to close the school immediately and asked the children to go home. We remained closed for that entire period.”

In spite of the tragic loss of life involved in these attacks, Amnesty International is not aware of anyone being arrested and prosecuted by the authorities.

“The Nigerian authorities must provide better protection for schools and ensure that attacks are properly investigated and suspected perpetrators brought to justice.”

Amnesty International is calling for Boko Haram and any affiliate armed groups or individuals to immediately stop all attacks on schools, teachers and pupils.