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Nigeria: Security forces out of control in fight against terror of Boko Haram

(Abuja) The brutal actions of Nigeria's security forces in response to Boko Haram's campaign of terror are making an already desperate situation even worse. This could drive those trapped in the middle towards the very group the authorities are seeking to defeat, Amnesty International said in a report released today.

The report, *Nigeria: Trapped in the cycle of violence*, documents the atrocities carried out by Boko Haram as well as the serious human rights violations carried out by the security forces in response, including enforced disappearance, torture, extrajudicial executions, the torching of homes and detention without trial.

“The cycle of attack and counter-attack has been marked by unlawful violence on both sides, with devastating consequences for the human rights of those trapped in the middle,” said Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

“People are living in a climate of fear and insecurity, vulnerable to attack from Boko Haram and facing human rights violations at the hands of the very state security forces which should be protecting them.”

Grave human rights abuses have been committed by Boko Haram including murder, burning down schools and churches and attacking media houses and journalists. The report documents the increasing climate of fear where people are too scared to report crimes and journalists will not cover them out of fear for their own safety.

At the same time, the security operations targeting Boko Haram have been conducted with little regard for the rule of law or human rights.

Hundreds of people accused of having links to Boko Haram have been arbitrarily detained by a combination of the Joint Task Force (JTF) – a combined forces group commissioned by the President to restore law and order in areas affected by Boko Haram - the State Security Service (SSS) and the police.

Many have remained in detention for lengthy periods without charge or trial, without proper notification of family members, without being brought before any judicial authority, and without access to lawyers or the outside world. A significant number have even been extra-judicially executed.

One man explained to Amnesty International how his brother was arrested by security forces. After several attempts to find him, he eventually saw his dead body at a police station. “There were [what looked like] cable marks on his body, bruises everywhere...The right side of his head was bruised. There was shock on his face. I can’t forget that...I haven’t made a complaint. I’m afraid.”

“The government of Nigeria must take effective action to protect the population against Boko Haram’s campaign of terror in northern and central Nigeria, but they must do so within the boundaries of the rule of law. Every injustice carried out in the name of security only fuels more terrorism, creating a vicious circle of murder and destruction,” said Salil Shetty.

“Only by clarifying the truth about events, establishing accountability for abuses, and bringing to justice those responsible can confidence in the justice system be restored and human rights be guaranteed.”

Note to editors:

An Amnesty International delegation visited Kano and Borno states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) between February and July 2012.

They interviewed victims of attacks, family members of people who have been killed, arrested or detained and those whose houses had been burnt down. The team also met with key government ministers, representatives of the security forces, judges, teachers, journalists and lawyers.

The delegation requested but was denied access to prisons, police stations, military or State Security Service (SSS) detention facilities.