

COMMISSIONER'S OVERTURE

Re: The kidnapping of the high school girls of Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria

The 140th General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada was pleased to welcome to its opening worship and communion service the Nigerian High Commissioner to Canada, His Excellency, Ambassador Elder Chief Ojo Maduekwe. Chief Maduekwe is a Presbyterian son of the manse. The Moderator of the Assembly, The Reverend Dr Stephen Farris, assured the Ambassador that we would be praying for Nigeria and especially for the kidnapped girls being held by Boko Haram (meaning "Western education is sinful,") in Borno State.

International interest in this situation has intensified almost daily since the kidnapping of the 276 girls from their all-girls' government-operated secondary school by the terrorist organization, Boko Haram on April 14, 2014. Boko Haram has been linked to the international terrorist organization al Qaeda. For the first two weeks, there was confusion and speculation, ranging from the exact number of the girls abducted to the identity of the militant group and their whereabouts. Then Nigerian protesters, dressed in red and holding banners, marched to the National Assembly in Abuja, the capital city, to present a letter of complaint to the government that they felt was not doing enough to rescue the girls.

Public uproar in Nigeria finally attracted the attention of the international community via social media. Demonstrations took place in London, Washington, Rome, Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton among other cities. A Facebook page named "Bring Back Our Girls" was created as a platform to rally global support, with hopes of urging the Nigerian government to serious action.

Since these girls were kidnapped, there have been twin bomb blasts on May 20 in Jos, the capital of the Plateau state, when 100 people were killed and a bomb blast in the capital city, Abuja. In Borno State alone, 23 churches have been burnt and Christians forced to flee. While the majority of the victims of this violence have been Christians, Moslems have also been severely affected by the violence of Boko Haram. At a summit on security in Nigeria, held in France on May 17, the Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan, acknowledged that Boko Haram is "hostile to democracy". During the summit, Jonathan sought the assistance from the international community in defeating Boko Haram, saying the organization had caused the deaths of more than 12,000 Nigerians since its insurgency began in 2009.

The Nigerian government has issued statements that it was committed to rescuing the girls. Government Minister Tanimu Turaki told The Guardian newspaper that the administration was ready to talk to Boko Haram. "Dialogue is a key option in bringing the crisis to an end," he said, adding that "an issue of this nature can be resolved outside of violence."

Recently the Nigerian military stated that they know the location of the girls but is approaching the situation cautiously to ensure their safety.

Several Muslim authorities have condemned Boko Haram and its ideology. Mu'azu Babangida Aliyu, the Niger state governor, stated, "Islam is known to be a religion of peace, and Boko Haram does not represent Islam." The Sultan of Sokoto, Sa'adu Abubakar, the spiritual leader of Nigerian Muslims, called the sect "anti-Islamic" and "an embarrassment to Islam."

Recommendation No. 1 was moved by M.H. Smith, duly seconded, that the Commissioners to the 140th General Assembly, upon returning to their presbyteries and congregations, engage in prayers for the kidnapped girls from Chibok and for the nation of Nigeria during this time of terrorist destabilization. Adopted.

Recommendation No. 2 was moved by M.H. Smith, that the Moderator of the 140th General Assembly write to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria assuring him that The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds the kidnapped girls, their families and all of the people of Nigeria in its prayers at this critical time in its history and that we are praying for a peaceful and successful outcome of this kidnapping dilemma. Adopted.