

# CALL TO ACTION: STATEMENT ON THE ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE ABDUCTION OF THE NIGERIAN SCHOOLGIRLS

14 April 2015

*Boko Haram, a group of militant Islamic extremists, abducted 276 schoolgirls between the ages of 16 and 18 years from the Government Secondary Boarding School in Chibok, Nigeria, on April 14, 2014. More than 300 days since the Chibok abduction and measures by the government to find them, the vast majority of the 276 girls remain unaccounted for and their fate unresolved. The abduction and non-return of the schoolgirls provides a poignant illustration of the pervasive, global problem of discrimination and violence against girls and women, including abductions and trafficking, in every region of the world (Save the Children, 2013).*

## ***Summary and Purpose***

On the occasion of the one-year anniversary of the tragic abduction of the Nigerian schoolgirls, we, a group of psychologists in the United States committed to human rights and social justice, launch this statement in a broad appeal to the international community on the importance of fully implementing international human rights standards, which protect girls and women against abductions, trafficking and all other forms of violence and discrimination. Our statement has three major parts: First, we place abductions, trafficking and all other forms of violence and discrimination against girls and women within the contextual framework of international human rights standards. Next, we draw upon research to highlight the physical and psychological impact of these violations of human rights on girls, their families, and their communities and the role of intervention by psychologists, other mental health providers, educators and humanitarian workers in preventing violence and providing psychosocial recovery. Finally, we issue a call to action to the international community stated as concrete recommendations, grounded in international human rights standards and psychological science.

## ***Endorsed by Divisions of the American Psychological Association:***

5 – Quantitative and Qualitative Methods, 9 – Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, 12 – Society of Clinical Psychology, 17 – Society of Counseling Psychology, 22 Section 2 – Rehabilitation Psychology, Section on Women in Rehabilitation Psychology, 27 – Society for Community Research and Action, 29 – Society for the Advancement of Psychotherapy, 32 – Society for Humanistic Psychology, 35 – Society for the Psychology of Women, 37 – Society for Child and Family Policy and Practice, 39 – Psychoanalysis, 45 – Society for the Psychological Study of Culture, Ethnicity and Race, 47 - Sport and Exercise Psychology, 48 – Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology Division, 49 – Society of Group Psychology and Group Psychotherapy, 51 – Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity, 52 – International Psychology, 54 – Society of Pediatric Psychology; and by the Executive Council of the National Council of Schools and Programs of Professional Psychology<sup>1,2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **This Call to Action has been endorsed by a number of Divisions (and their subunits) of the American Psychological Association (APA). While the statement is consistent with existing APA policies, it has not been submitted for review and approval by the APA Council of Representatives to become APA policy.**

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## The Contextual Framework of International Human Rights Standards

Numerous international human rights instruments provide safeguards for girls and women to be protected by States against abductions, trafficking and other forms of gender-based violence and discrimination. For example:

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) protects children from separation from their parents against their will (Article 9), the abduction or sale of or trafficking in children (Article 35), and the unlawful or arbitrary deprivation of children's liberty (Article 37). It also calls for the protection of children's freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Article 14); and protection from physical and mental violence, injury, or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation including sexual abuse (Article 19). Finally, Article 39 requires member states of the UN to "take all appropriate measures to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social integration of children who have been victims of any form of neglect, exploitation or abuse, torture or degrading treatment, or of armed conflict."
- The Optional Protocol to the CRC on Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (UN, 2000) protects children from compulsory recruitment into armed forces or use in hostilities (Articles 2 and 4).
- The Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography (UN, 2000) expands upon the CRC and stresses the importance of international cooperation to protect children from trafficking, prostitution, and pornography.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (UN, 1979) and its General Recommendation 30 (2013) call for all State and non-State actors in armed conflict to prevent, investigate, and punish all forms of gender-based violence against women, in particular rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and to implement a policy of zero tolerance, putting an end to impunity.
- The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (UN, 2000) is also designed to prevent human trafficking and to protect women and children victimized by it.
- The Paris Commitments (UNICEF, 2009a) obligates States to implement the Paris Principles (UNICEF, 2007), including the promotion of the physical and psychological recovery and reintegration of children who have suffered from gender-based violence.

The international normative framework also includes regional human rights instruments for preventing violence against women and girls, including, for example, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (African Union, 2003); the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Union, 1999); the ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (ASEAN, 2004); the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (OAS, 1994); the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Council of Europe, 2011); and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Council of Europe, 2010).

In spite of commitments made by the international community, there are major gaps in the implementation of international and regional human rights instruments, which result in gross violations both within and across countries. Accordingly, under male-controlled norms that facilitate the discrimination against girls and women in many parts of the world, being both young and female relegates millions of girls to the margins of society where their human rights are routinely disregarded, their safety is denied, and they remain powerless, invisible, and neglected. In situations of armed conflict within or between nations, abductions, rape, trafficking, sexual exploitation and forced labor are used as

instruments of war, designed to weaken families, and break down the social fabric of communities and societies (Medical Women's Association of Nigeria, 2014; Muhigwa, 2014; Rafferty, 2013a; 2013b). Although men and boys are also victims of violence, women and girls are the primary targets (Medical Women's Association of Nigeria, 2014).

The abduction of schoolgirls evidences what UNESCO (2011) calls *The Hidden Crisis: Armed Conflict and Education*. Education is among the most important factors for improving the human rights of girls and women globally. Accordingly, the destruction of educational opportunity is one of the most damaging consequences of armed conflict. More than 40% of out-of-school children live in conflict-affected countries, where we also find some of the largest gender inequalities and lowest literacy levels in the world. Although this crisis affects both girls and boys living in armed conflict, the President of the UN Security Council (2010) has emphasized that girls are often specifically targeted in the growing number of armed attacks against schools worldwide. School-based abductions or recruitment of girls serve important purposes for armed opposition groups, depending upon the socio-economic-politico-religious context. The primary purposes include: forced sexual services, forced marriages, and trafficking, and domestic labor ((Medical Women's Association of Nigeria, 2014; UNICEF, 2009b); and because schoolgirls are smart and can read and write, they therefore perform multiple roles in addition to sexual services (cf. McKay, 2011, McKay & Mazurana, 2004, McKay, Veale, Worthen, & Wessells, 2010). Another long standing, common purpose of armed opposition groups in kidnapping schoolgirls and deliberately attacking the educational infrastructure is to oppose the type of education provided by the government, disrupt the girls' education so that the roles and statuses of girls and women do not change, and destabilize and disrupt communities (UNESCO, 2011).

Although a number of countries have made commendable efforts to combat human trafficking, it continues to grow because of the ongoing demand for sex with children, the lower social status of girls and women, extreme poverty, inadequate legislation, and lack of enforcement of relevant laws, failure to prosecute offenders, and disregard for human rights (APA, 2014a; Spohn & Tellis, 2013).

## **Research on the Physical and Psychological Impact on Girls and Women**

Psychological science suggests that the harsh conditions, persistent and extreme abuse, and trauma associated with child trafficking may seriously hamper children's physical, psychological, and social-emotional development (Rafferty, 2013a). Physical abuse and deprivation, for example, can result in direct physical injury (e.g., broken bones, bruises, contusions, cuts, and burns), indirect physical injury, such as chronic headaches, dizziness, insomnia and disrupted sleep patterns, or in extreme cases homicide or suicide (Zimmerman et al., 2008). Higher rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), tuberculosis, pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, vaginal fistula, unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortions, complications from unwanted pregnancies, and poor reproductive healthcare have also been identified among children and youth who had been trafficked (Beyrer & Stachowiak, 2003; Kumar, Subedi, Gurung, & Adhikari, 2001; Miles, 2000; Silverman, Decker, Gupta, Maheshwari, & Patel, 2006; Silverman, et al., 2007; Tsutsumi, Izutsu, Poudyal, Kato, & Marui, 2008).

In addition to the physical effects described above, victims of abduction, trafficking and other forms of gender-based violence against girls and women may develop a wide range of psychological and interpersonal problems (Beyrer & Stachowiak, 2003; Deb, Mukherjee, & Matthews 2011; Hossain, Zimmerman, Abas, Light, & Watts, 2010; Tsutsumi et al., 2008; Zimmerman et al., 2008). In extreme cases, the psychological symptoms demonstrated by children who have experienced trafficking-related abuses have been compared to the psychological symptoms identified in torture victims who report a complex set of psychological and physiological symptoms (Zimmerman et al., 2003).

Girls growing up in areas of armed conflict experience complex trauma that frequently remains unexamined. For example, girls who have been abducted miss their loved ones and community. In areas of armed conflict, girls are witnesses to violence, fear being raped and otherwise violated, and live in stressed and fearful families and communities under constant threat of violence. Such childhood trauma poses challenges to girls' resilience, contributes to their subsequent mental health distress, and in some cases, longer-term psychopathology (Betancourt, 2008; Betancourt, Borisova, Williams, et al., 2013; Haider, 2014; Kangas, Haider, & Fraser (2014); McKay, 2008; Wessells, 2006). (See also, UNICEF Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review: Children and Conflict in a Changing World (2009).)

Related research on adverse childhood experiences (Anda & Felitti, 2010; Felitti et al, 1998) including child maltreatment, suggests a link between child abuse and poorer later life physical and mental health outcomes, including: (a) psychological reactions (e.g., hopelessness, despair, suicidal ideation and attempts, anxiety disorders, low self-esteem, and depression); (b) psychoactive substance abuse and dependence (e.g., addiction, and drug overdose); (c) psychosomatic reactions (e.g., headaches, neck pain, back aches, and sleeping problems); (d) social reactions (e.g., feelings of isolation, loneliness, and hostility); and (e) severe post-traumatic stress syndrome/disorder. Children who experience sexual abuse are more likely to experience these adverse emotional outcomes (APA, 1999; Briere & Spinazolla, 2005; Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 2001; Rafferty, 2008; 2007).

### **Prevention of Violence and Promotion of Mental Health and Psychosocial Recovery**

Social science research indicates that comprehensive measures to secure gender equality and protect human rights, in accordance with the international human rights framework, are vital for the effective prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against girls and women, including abductions and trafficking. A comprehensive human rights-based framework would allow both victim-focused and law enforcement responses to be developed, implemented, and evaluated and would promote both prevention and protection measures to ensure psychosocial wellbeing (cf. Robinson, 2002). Discrimination and violence against girls and women are rooted in patriarchal structures, cultural traditions, and social norms that condone their objectification and commercialization. These traditions and norms manifest in attitudes, and beliefs, and are powerful influences in shaping behavior (Rafferty, 2013d). Social norms and cultural traditions perpetuate gender-based social inequalities, stereotypic attitudes and discrimination toward girls and women, and also perpetuate women's subordinate status in society, heighten the vulnerability of girls and women, and pose challenges to achieving gender equality and eliminating gender-based violence. Therefore, there needs to be a strong commitment to changing prevailing sexist attitudes and social norms and the forms these attitudes and norms take among the diversity of girls and women of different ethnicities, religions, etc. Education for gender equality and diversity should take place within formal educational institutions at all levels, within other public institutions, as well as within rehabilitation and recovery programs (cf., Rafferty, 2013b).

The successful protection of children and women who have been trafficked will also require activities designed to provide them and their families and communities with the necessary supports and services for mental health, psychosocial recovery, and enhanced wellbeing. As such, psychologists, health, and mental health practitioners have a vital role to play with regard to the appropriate assessment of girls', children's, and women's physical and mental health care needs, as well as in the implementation of effective strategies to provide trauma-informed and culturally competent physical, psychological, and social recovery and rehabilitation services.

# The Call to Action

## Recommendations for the International Community to Prevent, Reduce, and Eliminate Abductions, Trafficking, and other forms of Violence against Girls/Children/Women

### I. Governments

We respectfully call upon the international community to prevent, reduce, and eliminate abductions, trafficking, and other forms of violence against girls, children, and women. As a means to help achieve this goal, we urge all psychologists and psychology organizations to advocate with their national professional associations and their national government to urge all Member States of the United Nations to:

1. Ratify all human rights instruments, especially those that provide for the protection of girls and women from abductions, trafficking, and all other forms of gender-based violence.
2. Take strong and consistent measures to prevent and eliminate any violation of the rights to the survival, personal safety, health, physical, emotional, and social development, and participation of girls/children/women within situations of political unrest and armed conflict within their territories (CRC, 1989; CEDAW, 1979; CEDAW Recommendation 30, 2013).
3. Develop and implement national legislation and policies to eliminate abduction, trafficking, and all forms of violence and discrimination against the rights of girls/children/women, and ensure that such legislation and policies are applicable to all administrative levels and sections of their countries, and are consistent and in compliance with international human rights commitments.<sup>1</sup>
  - 3.1 Protect girls/children/women from abduction, sale or trafficking; from separation from their parents against their will; from deprivation of their freedom of thought, conscience and religion; from physical and mental violence, injury, or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.
  - 3.2 Take all appropriate measures to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social integration of girls/children/women who have been victims of any form of neglect, exploitation or abuse, torture or degrading treatment, or other form of gender-based violence in armed conflict.
  - 3.3 Protect girls/children under 18 from compulsory recruitment into armed forces or use in hostilities.

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<sup>1</sup>The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), the Declaration and Platform for Action of the UN World Conference on Women, Beijing China (1995), ILO Convention 182 on Minimum Age on Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999), Optional Protocol on recovery and reintegration of a child victim.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Optional Protocol to the CRC on Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, 2000 protects children under 18 from compulsory recruitment into armed forces or use in hostilities (Articles 2 and 4). Finally, the UN Convention on Eliminating All Forms of Discriminations Against Women calls for all State and non-State actors in armed conflict to prevent, investigate, and punish all forms of gender-based violence, in the involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts (2000), Optional Protocol on the sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000), UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (2000), Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), the Secretary-General's Campaign to End Violence Against Women and Girls (2008), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women General recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations (2013). In addition, the *APA Resolution on Emancipating and Assisting Victims of Human Trafficking* (2009) urges the United States government, state and local governments, foreign governments, and international non-governmental organizations to work assiduously to end human trafficking and to assist its victims.

- 3.4 Prevent, investigate, and punish all forms of gender-based violence, in particular rape and other forms of sexual abuse, thereby putting an end to impunity.
4. Fulfill and protect, in all sections of every UN member country, access to and enjoyment of education as a human right of girls and all children, by establishing schools as safe learning environments, free from all forms of violence at, and on the way to and from, school --including abductions, sexual harassment, and exploitation, rape, physical, and psychological abuse, and other forms of gender-based violence and abuse.
  - 4.1 Ensure that both public and private school facilities are physically safe structures where the psychosocial wellbeing of children can be protected.
  - 4.2 Ensure that school administrators of all schools provide safety instruction and skills to all children, teachers, and other staff.
  - 4.3 Comply with the UN Secretary-General's Five-Year Global Education First Initiative (2012) by putting every child in school, and improving the quality of teaching and the availability and quality of books and materials.
  - 4.4 Ensure that the educational curriculum and processes of schools foster global citizenship, peace, tolerance, inclusiveness and justice needed to transform societies experiencing inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict into peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive societies.
5. Take steps to develop effective systems to assess and monitor full compliance with international human rights legislation and policies against gender-based violence, including abductions, trafficking, and discrimination against the human rights of girls/children/women, and reduce and eliminate gaps in implementation of each country's human rights commitments.
  - 5.1 Advocate for compliance with provisions of the CRC and other human rights instruments on gender-based violence including abductions and trafficking of girls/children/women in situations of armed conflict and peace.
  - 5.2 Advocate for full compliance within each country adopt and follow a definition of the child in agreement with the CRC (less than 18 years), including those that have passed child rights legislation adopting a definition of the child with a lower age than that of the CRC.
  - 5.3 Conduct a comprehensive review on the compatibility of the existing national statutory, religious and customary laws with provisions of the CRC and other human rights instruments.
6. Intensify efforts to build on progress in the global struggle against trafficking of girls/children/women as called for in international trafficking standards and national legislation.
  - 6.1 Build alliances with neighboring countries, governments within each region, as well as other regions to suppress trafficking by focusing on demand factors, apprehending traffickers, and facilitating the repatriation of victims and perpetrators.
  - 6.2 Take all measures, in accordance with national and international norms, to investigate, apprehend, prosecute, and convict perpetrators who sell, buy, and/or sexually exploit girls/children/women.

- 6.3 Develop and implement timely and appropriate policies, programs, and gender- and age-appropriate services for all victims, including mental health and psychosocial support for families during and following the abduction, in accordance with the Declaration and Agenda for Action and the Global Commitments adopted at the 1996, 2001, and 2008 World Congresses Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, as well as the outcome documents of other international conferences on this issue.
- 6.4 Ensure that girls/children/women, especially the most vulnerable, have access to timely and comprehensive medical treatment (including sexual and reproductive care), mental health care, and psychosocial recovery and reintegration services and support.
7. Provide education on human rights to survival, safety, development, and participation, including the freedom of religion and belief, in schools; also provide human rights training for all persons who are involved in services to girls/children/women.
8. Engage and cooperate with a diverse range of civil society stakeholders and UN Agencies for implementation at the national, state, and local government levels of the Secretary-General's Campaign to End Violence against Women and Girls (2008) and recommendations of the UN World Report on Violence against Children (2006).
9. Encourage the adoption of a national plan of action and ensure that adequate resources are allocated to implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the impact of legislation at the national- and local levels to protect girls/children/women from abduction, trafficking, and all forms of discrimination and violence.
10. Develop data, disaggregated by sex, age, race/ethnicity, tribal affiliation, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, state, region etc. to assess community needs and to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of programs designed to eliminate abductions, trafficking, and other forms of violence against girls/children/women, as well as programs designed to identify and to provide programs and services for victims of trafficking following their rescue and return.

## **II. Psychological Societies and Other Civil Society Organizations and Institutions**

We respectfully call upon and urge individual psychologists, psychology organizations, and international and national NGOs who desire to collaborate in addressing the abduction of girls and/or the global problem of human trafficking and other forms of violence against girls/children/women to:

1. Become informed through a lens of respect about the culture, past and recent history of the country/countries, that provide the socio-political and economic contexts of the abduction and trafficking or other forms of violence against girls/children/women. Give attention to socially accepted institutionalized attitudes and practices that condone or promote violence (APA, 1996) and examine their attitudes and beliefs about at-risk groups (APA, 2014a).
2. Contact national groups of psychologists and human rights workers or UN agencies and international NGOs working in the country/countries of concern to find out what is being done, what is needed, and whether and how international psychologists or psychology organizations may collaborate in a culturally appropriate manner. Seek to identify strengths and resources that exist within the country/countries of concern for entering into a supportive, collaborative relationship (APA, 2014b).

3. Reflect on and decide from among the following what their best role(s) is/are in contributing on an individual or collaborative basis to a specific area of discrimination and violence against girls/children/women, based on their qualifications, past experiences, and cultural competencies:

3.1 Conducting or sharing research on the problem or strategies for change and/or conducting outcome evaluation of programs to prevent or provide mental health or psychosocial recovery from trafficking or other forms of gender-based violence.

3.2 Engaging in national or international advocacy.

3.3 Incorporating scholarship on armed conflicts, abduction, and trafficking into courses at all levels of higher education, including the training and education of mental health practitioners and psychosocial service providers.

3.4 Conducting national or international educational campaigns.

3.5 Incorporating a human rights, international perspective in their teaching, research, practice, or other professional activities.

3.6 Working or volunteering directly with health care or human rights organizations to join with local partners to provide culturally appropriate mental health services to girls, children or women who have been subjected to trafficking and related trauma or to develop culturally relevant assessment, treatment or service protocols for application in these contexts.

3.7 Contributing financially to, or fundraising for, agencies and organizations that advocate for, support, or treat survivors of trauma due to abduction or trafficking, or for those that combat trafficking.

3.8 Working in indirect service delivery as trainers and consultants in collaboration with recognized international humanitarian organizations (APA, 2008), offering culturally appropriate training to international colleagues in law enforcement and providers of psychosocial recovery services for victims.

4. Work within the existing advocacy structure of the American Psychological Association (APA) Public Interest Government Relations Office to support existing advocacy efforts in the U.S. Congress to pass the International Violence against Women Act (S.713/H.R.1340), which would make preventing violence against women and girls on a global scale the official policy of the United States Government. Also work within the existing advocacy structure of the APA Public Interest Government Relations Office to support efforts to advocate for the ratification by the U.S. Senate of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in keeping with the *APA Resolution on UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention's Optional Protocols* (2001), and “safe harbor” legislation to ensure that women and girls who are sex trafficked are treated as victims and not as criminals.

5. Partner with psychology organizations and human rights NGOs in other countries, working to eliminate the abduction and trafficking or other forms of violence against girls/children/women; to advocate for the provision of timely and appropriate psychosocial support and mental health services to families in communities where girls/children/women have been abducted, trafficked, commercially sexually exploited, or killed; to advocate for supports and services to be provided for the victims who may return; and to work to identify the best modalities for providing these supports and services.

6. Encourage psychologists to the advocate for full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, and to other international commitments including the



Palermo Protocol. Although the CRC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty, further steps need to be taken to ensure full implementation of its principles by investing in childhood as the foundation for healthy and sustainable human development.

7. Suggest to APA governance groups to develop other resolutions as needed to support the principles in this document.

### **III. United Nations and International NGOs**

We respectfully request that psychologists and psychology organizations contact their professional groups to urge UN agencies/programs and international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to:

1. Continue to provide consistent technical and funding assistance as needed to the Governments where the abduction and trafficking of girls/children/women are occurring. Such assistance may need to occur under terms of bilateral or multi-stakeholder partnerships involving transparent, long-term shared commitments and genuine collaboration.
2. Assess and evaluate the effectiveness of partnerships and modify strategies as necessary.
3. Publicly disseminate information on the degree of success of partnerships in reducing or eradicating trafficking of girls/children/women and promoting their human rights together with lessons learned.

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