**“The group that kidnapped 234 Nigerian school girls and its murderous campaign against education”**

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In 2010, long before the mass killing that now engulf Nigeria began, there was a masked man hoisting an AK-47, a stack of religious books and a promise. His named was Abubakar Shekau, the leader of the Islamic group Boko Haram, and he promised to annihilate all traces of Western culture and education in Africa’s most populous nation.

On Christmas Eve 2010, the group unleashed a flurry of bomb attacks in Nigeria that killed 38 Christians worshiping at church or shopping for gifts. “We will continue with our attacks on disbelievers and their allies and all those who help them,” the group said.

As the months and years passed, the number killed by Boko Haram rose.

May 2011: two bombs, 15 killed. August 2011: suicide bombing, 21 dead. January 2012: church bombings, 185 dead.

The killings reflect sectarian tension between Christians and Muslims in the country. Many of the killings have been indiscriminate and brutal. Boko Haram is today recognized as one of the most murderous terrorist groups in the world.

On April 16, in the middle of the night in northeast Nigeria, dozens of armed men who answered to the name Boko Haram captured 234 girls sleeping in dormitories at Chibok School and disappeared in the dark. In the weeks since, despite parents’ searches deep in remote forests, there has been no sign of the girls.

The fact that the girls were in school speaks to the motive. The terror group, has roots in an anti-education ideology. Its disdain for an education model left behind by Britain is manifested both in the translation of the group’s name — “Western education is sinful” — and its terror attacks.

In the past, when boys have been kidnapped to turn into soldiers, or have been killed at schools that have been raided, the girls have been spared, told to go home, get married and give up Western education.

A video was released by Boko Haram’s leader after the kidnapping. "I abducted your girls. By Allah, I will sell them in the marketplace," he said in the hour-long video that starts with fighters lofting automatic rifles and shooting in the air as they chant "Allahu akbar!" or "God is great." Reports have emerged that some of the girls have been forced to marry their abductors - who paid a nominal bride price of $12- and Christians have been forced to convert to Islam.

The group rose out of the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. A 30-year-old man named Muhammad Yusuf, who blamed British-style schooling for all the country’s problems, founded the group that would become Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. The young leader introduced a Taliban-inspired model of teaching that rejected Darwin, among other thinkers, in favor of so-called Koranic sciences. The schools lured the unemployed, the impoverished, the students who had flunked out of government universities. Preaching the necessity of Sharia law, the group grew in number and ferocity.

In 2010, after the masked Abubakar Shekau delivered his impassioned screed, the group renewed its purpose of attacking “sinful education.” In July 2013, 29 students were burned alive at a school in northern Nigeria. Days later, Shekau said, ”Teachers who teach western education? We will kill them! We will kill them in front of their students, and tell students to henceforth study the Qur’an.” Boko Haram massacred 40 more students two months later. In February of this year, 59 boys attending boarding school were shot dead, and their school razed.

With such a brutal precedent, parents of the missing Nigerian schools have succumbed to panic. Underscoring just how powerless the government has been to save the children, the parents themselves have taken motorcycles deep into remote forests in search of their daughters. “We met some men in the bush; they told us the Boko Haram camp is still inside and far,” one parent told Reuters. ”They said we may not come out alive.”

It has ignited a social media campaign on Twitter under the hashtags #BringBackOurGirls and #BringBackOurDaughters — but to parents, this is far from enough. ”All we want from the government is to help us bring our children back,” one father named Pogu Yaga, wept.