

More Chibok girls released after two years held captive

by [Weston Williams](#) in the [November 8, 2016](#) issue

([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) Families reunited with 21 of the 276 Chibok schoolgirls kidnapped by the terrorist group Boko Haram after they were released in mid-October to the Nigerian government.

In the time since militants captured the girls in April 2014, some escaped their captors and made their way home, while others were liberated by Nigerian forces. This is believed to be the largest group released by Boko Haram since the initial kidnapping.

Nearly 200 of the girls, however, are still missing. But the release of so many through negotiation provides a glimmer of hope for their families.

[Most of the girls' families are part of the Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). Many of the girls' parents were killed, according to Rebecca Dali, executive director of a nongovernmental organization working with EYN.]

Presidential spokesman Mallam Garba Shehu wrote that the girls' release was "an outcome of negotiations between the administration and Boko Haram brokered by the International Red Cross and the Swiss government. . . . The negotiations will continue."

In September, the Nigerian government sought help from the United Nations for negotiation with the group in response to Boko Haram's expressed willingness to release the girls in exchange for captured leaders of the terrorist organization.

Boko Haram has made a reputation as one of the most dangerous terrorist groups in the world, though it was largely ignored by the West until the kidnapping of the Chibok girls caught international attention, spurring headlines and the social media campaign #BringBackOurGirls.

Since then, Boko Haram has split, with the main arm renaming itself Islamic State West Africa Province and declaring its allegiance to the self-proclaimed Islamic State

extremist group. The portion of the original group that still calls itself Boko Haram holds the Chibok girls and is not affiliated with the Islamic State.

The large release may be a result of increasing willingness to negotiate as Boko Haram loses ground in the Sambisa Forest, where the group is headquartered. The Nigerian military has been conducting numerous raids on their territory, rescuing several other Chibok girls in the process.

However, reports from the Nigerian military have often overstated their success against the group. For example, the military has repeatedly declared that they have killed Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram, only to have him show up alive and well in later propaganda videos.

Violence related to Boko Haram has displaced more than 2 million people and left 4.5 million needing food aid in recent months, according to the UN World Food Programme.

But progress has been made against the terrorist group, and the liberation of 21 girls is a big step toward the goal of bringing the rest of the Chibok girls back, as well as other captives of the organization.

“I can only weep, right now,” Obiageli Ezekwesili, one of the leaders of the #BringBackOurGirls movement, wrote on Twitter in response to the news. “You know that kind of cry that is a mix of multiple emotions. Lord. Some of our girls are back!”

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