

Where is Leah Sharibu, Boko Haram Captive?

Kyle Abts – ICON Director

Leah Sharibu still remains a captive of the terrorist group Boko Haram. Donald Trump reminded the world when he met with Nigeria's President Buhari on April 30th in the Oval Office, that there is still one girl remaining in captivity.

Many in Nigeria and in the international community want to know where she is and what is being done to release her. The government was able to negotiate the release of over 100 of the girls who were kidnapped in Dapchi, but nothing else has been mentioned of Leah.

We met Mrs. Rebecca Sharibu, Leah's mother, at a secret location in Yobe state, in order to avoid creating a scene with someone who is deemed, a "foreign agent". The family feels they are not safe and are in danger after Leah refused to recite the Shahada prayer, which would signify her conversion to Boko Haram's Islam.

We listened to Rebecca recount the ordeal from when they heard her daughter was taken to when the day arrived with the returned captives, only to discover her daughter was not amongst those who were freed. She struggled to share that when she arrived at the rendezvous site in Dapchi, a few girls ran to her car weeping, "They cried as they were telling me how Leah refused to recite the Shada, but we tried to help her memorize it, she kept saying 'No'".

She shared how the school officials and not any security or government officials were the initial point of contact, but as time elapsed no one was telling her anything. In fact, there remains 37 Christian girls who are students at the Dapchi Government School who fear that they, too, might become victims of an imminent Boko Haram attack

Donald, Leah's younger brother, and her father, Nathan pray for her release while Rebecca tries to keep living day-by-day. The Sharibu family are all Christian and live in the predominantly Muslim Yobe State, where there is a history of volatility and intolerance.

Rebecca is simply requesting, "Please safely return my daughter to us". We were unable to verify what the Yobe State government is doing to help release Leah. Leah's mother has not been informed at the progress from the Local, State or Federal authorities.

We can debate, discuss and argue all we want but each day that passes we are distracted to discovering where she is now and what is being done to find her?

Certainly, there is a darkness that shrouds Dapchi regarding the disappearance of these girls from their school on that ill-fated evening, but also the shadowy narrative that saw the majority of these young female students return to their village. How were these repulsive Boko Haram terrorists able to gain access to these girls to steal them away, but then return them with such impunity?



Mrs. Rebecca Sharibu, Leah's mother

So, we return to the immediate concern: Where is Leah Sharibu right now? What is being done to find her, right now?

ICON directly queried the United States Center for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to determine if Boko Haram can be deemed an Entity of Particular Concern. If this could be done it would exert additional pressure on the Nigerian government to locate and release Leah Sharibu from her captors.

Despite her hope and patience, Rebecca Sharibu remains in fear. Her anxious thoughts drift as she contemplates Boko Haram's next move. Are these terrorist mindful of her plight and, perhaps, her exact location. She wonders will they return to attack her village? Is she safe? Is her son safe?

It was for that very reason that ICON, along with other concerned people, were able to relocate her to a safer location. She knows that God is her ultimate protector, but she is thankful to have an opportunity to reduce her fears while her remaining child can focus on his education and possibly build new friendships. She is still optimistic that Leah can be returned but this relocation will release some anxiety as she can focus on praying and hoping.

Meanwhile, Nathan Sharibu, who is Leah's father, is a police officer and is on assignment in a different state. He has been told not to talk with anyone concerning the kidnapping of his daughter. Yet how can someone ask any parent to remain quiet while your child is suffering at the hand of terrorists? He shared with ICON that all he wants is for his daughter to be safely returned and the violence to cease.

As the abduction of the Dapchi girls, along with the Chibok girls, is fading from the minds of the world, Leah's parents pray and hope for the release of their daughter. The Nigerian government needs to negotiate the release of Leah Sharibu, like it did for over 100 of the girls who were kidnapped in Dapchi. We urgently need to know where she is and what is being done to release her.

Where is Leah Sharibu?

Leah's parents need to know.

The people of Nigeria need to know.

The world needs to know.