

**Statement on Recent Boko Haram Atrocities and Upcoming Election in Nigeria** Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

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Over the past year armed attacks by the extremist Islamist group Boko Haram have increased in scale

and scope in Nigeria. With over 10,000 people reportedly killed in Boko Haram-related violence during 2014, parts of the country's northeast have been rendered ungovernable. Recent massacres of civilians in Borno state mark a significant escalation in Boko Haram's determination to seize or raze major population centers and indiscriminately kill civilians. With impending national elections on 14 February, civilian populations are at an increased threat of further mass atrocity crimes.

Recent attacks on Baga, Borno state, which started on 3 January, represent a particularly horrifying turning point in the conflict. Hundreds of civilians were massacred and thousands of buildings in Baga were burned down while at least a dozen surrounding villages were also destroyed by Boko Haram. Now Boko Haram is directly threatening Maiduguri, a city of 2 million people. Boko Haram also continues to carry out its traditional terrorist attacks and has reportedly used young girls to detonate suicide bombs, including during attacks on markets in Maiduguri and Potiskum on 10 and 11 January. Mass kidnappings of civilians, including children, also continue.

Without urgent action by the Nigerian government, neighboring countries, the African Union and the United Nations, the grave escalation of violence will continue to imperil the lives of millions of vulnerable civilians across the region.

Boko Haram's extremist interpretation of Islam allows no room for followers of Nigeria's diverse animist traditions, or for Christians or Muslims who do not adhere to its views. Even those who submit to its rule are not safe and grave fears exist for civilians trapped in Boko Haram-controlled areas, most of whom remain cut off from humanitarian access.

There is a heightened risk to all Nigerian civilians in the run up to general elections scheduled for 14 February. Boko Haram's opposition to the democratic process and frequent attacks on public gatherings puts voters throughout the country, but particularly in the northeast, at extreme risk. The potential inability of hundreds of thousands of Nigerians displaced by Boko Haram attacks to vote could also call into question the legitimacy of the election.

The Nigerian government has been manifestly unable to contain the insurgency, with Boko Haram now reportedly controlling 70 percent of Borno state, including its borders with Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The 3 January capture of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) base, a regional military initiative that involves Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, and increasing cross-border attacks into Cameroon demonstrate that the threat posed by Boko Haram now extends beyond a domestic security issue.

Boko Haram constitutes a serious threat to international peace and security. Recognizing the primary responsibility of the Nigerian government to protect its population, the UN Security Council and regional actors must become more actively involved in ending the insurgency and defeating Boko Haram. The Nigerian government must provide enhanced protection to voters across the country, particularly in the northeast and major cities that have been the target of Boko Haram attacks, including Abuja. Nigeria and regional governments involved in the MNJTF must urgently finalize a concept of operations and expeditiously establish a new MNJTF headquarters. The African Union and UN Security Council should provide urgent technical expertise to assist in fully operationalizing the MNJTF and mandate its rapid redeployment.

The Nigerian government and the international community must also recognize that Boko Haram cannot be defeated through military means alone. The international community should assist the Nigerian authorities in holding all perpetrators of mass atrocities accountable, including the leadership of Boko Haram as well as members of the security forces who have been accused of extra-judicial killings and other grave violations of human rights as they battle the insurgency. The underlying causes of conflict in Nigerian society, including poor governance and poverty as well as the social and economic marginalization of certain communities, must be addressed as part of a broader reform strategy. Read the statement online [here](#) .