

Principal pleads with kidnapers to release abducted girl students

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Apr. 21 (GIN) - While divers conducted their final searches in Korea for the high school students drowned in a misguided ferry excursion, in Nigeria, Principal Asabe Kwambula pleaded with kidnapers of over 100 high school girls to "have mercy on the students."

"I am pleading with the government to secure the release of the children, to save the lives of these innocents," she said. "I am with the parents, praying continuously for the teenagers' safe return."

Last Tuesday, unknown persons, some wearing military uniforms, dragged some 200 girl students of the Chibok Government Secondary School in Borno State into waiting trucks. They drove deep into the Sambisa forest in north-east Nigeria, according to several girls who managed to escape by leaping from the trucks.

Isa Umar Gusau, a spokesman for the Borno governor's office, put the number of missing students at 234 -- 129 science students and 105 art students.

While security forces claim they are in "hot pursuit" of the kidnapers, residents say they have not seen soldiers in the area since the attack. A military press release that claimed that all but eight of those abducted -- between 16 and 18 years of age - had been rescued turned out to be false. It was retracted the following day.

Angry parents and men from the town have gone into the Sambisa forest to find the students, despite the dangers of confronting extremists.

Failure to locate the young women has been particularly puzzling in light of the nearby presence of highly-trained American forces working with African soldiers in Libya, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic among other hot spots.

In fact, U.S. "special ops" forces were specifically sent this year to track down reputed warlord Joseph Kony, one-time head of the Lord's Resistance Army from 1986 to 2009 now believed to be hiding in the Central African Republic and in ill health.

Another search spearheaded by U.S. special operations took place in October last year when a team of Navy SEALs was deployed to find two American sailors kidnapped by pirates.

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U.S. Marines were most recently in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, to train Nigerian troops in "basic riot-control formations, how to use shields and shin guards and how to properly use collapsible batons," according to senior Marine Staff Sgt. Camilo Zamora on the website of the Dept. of Defense.

"When we were conducting the take-down techniques, the Nigerians were aggressive, which is exactly what you want. It was motivating and showed their professionalism," Zamora was quoted to say.

The kidnapping comes as oil-rich Nigeria prepares to host the World Economic Forum on Africa from May 7-9. President Goodluck Jonathan announced he will deploy 6,000 troops to protect delegates but the plan has prompted widespread criticism in the media which asked: "If we can spend such resources to protect foreigners for a glorified shindig, why can't we protect our own people?"