

As Zimbabwe election approaches, Christian leaders stress peace, civility



President Emmerson Mnangagwa. (PHOTO: World Economic Forum via Flickr CC BY NC SA 2.0.)

Originally published in [Catholic News Agency](#)

Christian leaders in Zimbabwe are stressing the need for civility and a peaceful transition as the country prepares for a major presidential election next month.

Leaders from different Christian groups met on May 28-30 in the capital city of Harare for a conference themed “Religious Leaders Supporting the Zimbabwe Peace Process.”

The conference was attended by major religious leaders, including the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, and Union for Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe.

Participants analyzed the peace processes in neighboring countries that have faced election violence, such as South

African and Kenya.

Paul Muchena, national coordinator for the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, said the conference's main goal was "to enhance the church's participation in peace processes through such initiatives as dialogue, mediation, peace and reconciliation leading to national transformation."

The July 30 elections will be the first since former president Robert Mugabe was ousted from power last November, ending his 37 years in office.

Mugabe had been in power since 1980. At the beginning of last November, thousands of protestors called for Mugabe's resignation after he fired Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa.

The Zimbabwe National Army then staged a coup and Mugabe was placed under house arrest while an impeachment hearing was opened against him. He announced his resignation on Nov. 21, and Mnangagwa assumed power.

Charges were brought against the former president by the Zanu-PF Members of Parliament. He was accused of violating the constitution in past elections and of illegally granting his wife, Grace Mugabe, political power.

The president was also accused of economic mismanagement. According to the BBC, the average Zimbabwe citizen is now 15 percent poorer than before Mugabe took power.

Mnangagwa posted a tweet on May 30 announcing the upcoming elections.

"These elections will be free, fair and transparent, and the voice of the people will be heard," he said. "I call on all candidates to campaign peacefully and focus on the issues that really matter."

Zimbabwe has formally invited the European Union to send an election observation mission, the first time in 16 years that

the EU will be monitoring an election in the country.

During the conference of religious leaders, Bishop Rudolf Nyandoro of Gokwe, chairman of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, decried slandering political practices. He cautioned that hate speech and slogans can motivate violence and are un-Christian.

“The behaviours and mannerisms we develop in politics especially when we are sloganeering, remove the Christian life and values we purport to have,” he said.

The bishop said Christians cannot place political ambitions over the desire for God. He urged people to remember that every person is created in the image and likeness of God.

Zimbabwe opposition pledges \$100bn economy, ties with Israel, if it wins



A sign language anchor, right,

gestures as Zimbabwe's opposition leader, Nelson Chamisa delivers his speech, during the launch of the party's election manifesto in Harare

Originally published in [San Francisco Chronicle](#)

Zimbabwe's main opposition party announced on Thursday it will create a \$100-billion economy within a decade and re-establish ties with Israel – a major foreign policy shift – if it wins July 30 elections.

The MDC-T, which has re-energised under 40-year-old leader Nelson Chamisa, launched its election manifesto while the state broadcaster, which is closely aligned with the ruling party, provided rare live coverage.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who took power in November when longtime leader Robert Mugabe stepped down under pressure from the military and ruling party, has promised free and fair elections in a country with a history of disputed polls. This will be the first vote without Mugabe since independence from white minority rule in 1980.

Both Mnangagwa and the opposition are pledging to improve the once-prosperous economy, which collapsed under Mugabe, and attract foreign investors put off by years of international sanctions over alleged human rights abuses.

The opposition promised a leaner government, more transparency and business-friendly laws.

Deepening political ties with Israel by opening an embassy there would mark an important shift for Zimbabwe, which enjoys close relations with the Palestinians, who have maintained a diplomatic mission in the southern African country since 1980.

The opposition said it wanted to get closer to Israel “for spiritual renewal”.

Chamisa also pledged to re-engage the West, which has indicated that a free and fair election is a key step toward lifting sanctions.

“We will not look West or East, but we will look everywhere following the dollar,” he said.

US missionary, captive for 20 months, is alive, reports Niger’s president



For 20 months, there has been no news of Jeff Woodke (Photo: Facebook/Blaise Gaitou)

Originally published in [World Watch Monitor](#)

A US missionary kidnapped in Niger in October 2016 is alive, according to the West African nation’s president.

Jeff Woodke, who worked for Jeunesse en Mission Entraide et Developpement (JEMED), a branch of the US-based Youth With a Mission, was abducted by unknown assailants late in the evening of Friday 14 October, 2016, from the town of Abalak in northern Niger.

For 20 months, there has been no news of Woodke, but on Monday, 4 June, President Mahamadou Issoufou told TV channel France24 that both he and a German aid worker kidnapped in April this year are alive.

“We have some news; we know they’re alive,” the president said. “We continue to create the conditions for their release. Perhaps the contacts that are underway will help to achieve that goal.”

It is the first proof of life since the kidnapping of the two Western citizens in the Sahel country.

Little had been known, or at least divulged, about Woodke’s condition or location, other than that his captors were tracked to neighbouring Mali by Nigerian authorities. No group has publicly claimed responsibility.

Last July, a coalition of jihadist groups active in the Sahel region (NIsrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen, also known as the Group to Support Islam and Muslims), affiliated to Al-Qaeda, released a video showing six foreign hostages, including three missionaries, but not Jeff Woodke.

The three missionaries in the video were: Colombian nun Gloria Argoti, kidnapped on 7 February from her convent in Karangasso, southern Mali; Australian surgeon Ken Elliott, kidnapped in January 2016 from Djibo in northern Burkina Faso, near the Mali border; and Swiss missionary Béatrice Stockly, kidnapped in Mali’s northern town of Timbuktu, also in January 2016.

All are still captive.

Jeff Woodke's wife, Els, issued a video pleading for his safe return when there was no sign of him in that video, believing that he could also be held by those who issued it.

"I am sure that the families of the captives were very encouraged by this message and appreciated the mercy shown by Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen in sending this news and instructions about their loved ones," said Mrs Woodke in her video.

"But my husband Jeff is not mentioned, so I did not receive the benefit of the reassurance and directions of how to proceed that the other families did. This has been very hard for me, for Jeff's sons and his father to understand."

The German Joerg Lange, employed by the aid group Help, was kidnapped by armed men on 11 April, in Niger's western town of Ayorou, which shares a border with troubled northern Mali.

No group has claimed responsibility for his abduction, but a security source, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP that his kidnapers had "already taken him to northern Mali".

On Monday, President Issoufou said he did not know exactly where the pair were being detained, but that "it is more likely that they are in Mali".

Nigerian leaders take protest to US – warn Fulani violence could flood West with

refugees



General TY Danjuma

By Special Correspondent

Former Minister of Defence and respected business mogul, General TY Danjuma (Rtd) has taken his protest against killings in the North Central region of Nigeria to the United States of America.

Speaking at a session hosted by the International Committee on Nigeria (ICON), in collaboration with Heritage Foundation and 21 Wilberforce, he said the issue of extremism among some Fulani people has led to horrific attacks on villages that echo Boko-Haram tactics.

General Danjuma who was at the event with Taraba State Governor, Daruis Ishaku discussed implications of Nigeria's escalating religious and ethnic violence. Representatives from the U.S. government and prominent NGOs also joined the discussion.

According to Danjuma "Evidence is there that President Buhari has failed. Corruption continues and ineffective governance does not confront attacks on villages."

"If chaos continues in Nigeria, refugees will flood over West Africa, then Europe and eventually America – whether you build

a wall or not," warned General Danjuma.

Darius Ishaku, Governor of Taraba State (where Roman Catholic churches have been attacked by Fulani extremists in recent weeks), stated that his own leadership abilities are hampered by the structure of Nigerian governance. He said, "We do not have state or local police ... Governors do not have power or influence to make changes in their own states."

Also in attendance, Former Congressman Frank Wolf, Senior Distinguished Fellow at 21Wilbefore, added that, "Europe can barely handle Syrian and Iraqi refugees so they'd be overwhelmed if Nigeria collapsed."

He stated that Nigeria is the lynchpin of regional stability and a strategic partner with the US in the struggle against extremism and this matter should be tackled with all seriousness

General Danjuma and Governor Ishaku asked concerned American organizations to help Nigeria nurture its democracy.

"We need 'civilized democracies' like the US to help with our Nigerian democracy in ways that provide security for citizens of every religious affiliation, bring justice to perpetrators of violence, and empower civil society to confront atrocities and stand together to promote peace.

It will be recalled that President Trump in his recent meeting with Nigeria President, Muhammadu Buhari at the White House decried religious violence in Nigeria.

According to him "We encourage Nigeria's federal, state, and local leaders to do everything in their power to immediately secure affected communities and to protect innocent civilians of all faiths, including Muslims and Christians."

Stunning photo captures people praying inside Ebola quarantine zone



Originally published in [Faithwire](#)

A powerful photo has emerged of a bishop praying for a Congolese priest as he kneels inside an Ebola quarantine zone. The priest was placed into quarantine after he tested positive for Ebola. He has since recovered from the illness and has been released.

The image was taken by photographer Will Swanson, who posted it to Twitter.

“Incredible image of a priest with Ebola being prayed for from afar by his bishop in DRC. There is an outbreak of Ebola in the country but officials say it can be contained,” he tweeted.



Will Swanson
@willswanson



Incredible image of a priest with ebola being prayed for from afar by his bishop in DRC. There is an outbreak of ebola in the country but officials say it can be contained [#EbolaDRC](#) [#DRC](#) [#Ebola](#) via [@arnoldkatako](#)

11:18 AM - May 25, 2018

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According to Catholic Herald, Fr Lucien Ambunga was said to have contracted the disease after ministering to a dying patient. The bishop has been identified as Bishop Fridolin Ambongo of Mbandaka-Bikoro. The latest outbreak of the awful disease has killed 25 people, according to the health ministry of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The total number of confirmed cases currently stands at 37, according to VOA News. Though the outbreak appears to be slowing, mainly due to the widespread dissemination of vaccinations, the World Health Organization has said that there is still more work to be done in order to contain the spread of disease. "The Ebola outbreak in DR Congo is not over and we need to continue to work," said WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic, according to VOA News.

"... There are lots of areas that are difficult to reach that we have to go to, that we need to make sure that we get to all the contacts. So, there still are contacts that have not been reached. So, it is really too early to say that the outbreak is contained."

According to WHO, the first doses of the vaccine arrived in the three Congolese cities on May 21, and over the following two weeks about 1,200 people have received the drug, as reported by The Hill.

In 2014, a massive Ebola outbreak caused the deaths of thousands in West Africa. Almost 5,000 died from the disease

in Liberia alone. In Sierra Leone, around 4,000 people died, and in Guinea around 2,500 succumbed to the highly contagious illness

10 villagers beheaded by 'Islamic jihadis' in Mozambique



Women carry water home in Mozambique.

Originally published in [The Christian Post](#)

Ten people, including women and children, were decapitated in the East African nation of Mozambique by suspected Islamic jihadis, government officials have said.

The attack came on Sunday in the Monjane village in the Cabo Delgado province, which has large oil and gas reserves and ruby and sapphire deposits.

Government officials have declared that at least two children

and four women were among those beheaded. AFP reports that the children killed were boys ages 15 and 16.

National police spokesman Inacio Dina told a news conference in Maputo that the suspects used machetes and have not yet been arrested. However, a manhunt is underway.

“There are 10 citizens who have been hideously killed,” Dina said. “[W]e will hunt and find them and take them to the court as happened with others.”

Although there has been no definitive confirmation, the attack is believed to have been carried out by a radical Islamic faction that has carried out an insurgency and other attacks in the province in the last year.

The group is called Ansar al-Sunna but is also known locally as al-Shabab. The group has no relation to the Somalia-based terror group that has the same name.

A local resident of Manjane village told AFP that the village leader was one of the victims of the attack.

“They targeted the chief as he had been providing information to the police about the location of al-Shabab in forests,” the unnamed resident said.

Al-Shabab is believed to be responsible for attacks on police stations and a military post in the town of Mocimboa da Praia in October. Last October’s attacks were believed to be the first terrorist attacks in the country and lead to the death of two police officers.

According to BBC, police have arrested over 200 people connected with the string of terror attacks since last October.

“A number of independent assessments of the situation in Cabo Delgado conducted over the last three months have concluded that the security situation (there) remains fragile and

continued attacks probable,” Alex Vines, an analyst on Mozambique who works for the London-based NGO Chatham House, told AFP.

The BBC notes that recent academic research has shown that early members of al-Shabab were followers of a radical Kenyan cleric killed in 2012.

The attack comes after the Mozambique Parliament passed a new anti-terrorism law earlier this month making punishments of terror-related time stiffer.

“This attack is a worrying sign of the deterioration of the situation,” Eric Morier-Genoud, a lecturer in African history at the Queen’s University Belfast, told the Nigerian news outlet Vanguard. “On the one hand the rate of attacks appears to intensify, on the other hand, the methods seem to be radicalised, with decapitations becoming more and more common.”

Trump funding ban forces international abortion giants to cut African operations



A baby with mother in Uganda (PHOTO: Human Life International via [Lifesite News](#)).

Two of the world's most prolific abortion performers have been forced to partially shut down their operations in Africa, thanks to one of Donald Trump's earliest actions as president.

The UK-based Marie Stopes International (MSI) has closed 22 of its 62 Madagascar-based outreach teams, 17 of its 35 in Uganda, and 600 of its 1 200 in Zimbabwe, Church Militant [reported](#). The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) has closed 22 programs in sub-Saharan Africa. Both groups will also be canceling programs in Togo, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso.

"Commitments have been made, but the money has not been forthcoming," IPPF's Kwamboka team complained. "This reliance on aid from other countries (...) cannot go on."

The abortion giants' financial woes stem from Trump's [reinstatement](#) of the Mexico City Policy last year, which bars the United States' \$8.8-billion (R110-billion) in foreign aid from being distributed to entities that perform abortions. Since Ronald Reagan conceived the policy, each president routinely reverses his opposing-party predecessor's decision on it upon taking office, although Trump took the additional step of expanding it to groups that promote or

discuss it.

The policy requires foreign aid recipients to certify that they will not “perform or actively promote abortion as a method of family planning in foreign countries or provide financial support to any other foreign (NGO) that conducts such activities.”

The left-wing organisation calling itself Human Rights Watch [claims](#) the Mexico City Policy has a “devastating impact” because it also deprives countries of the nutrition, vaccination, child care, and other disease treatment services provided by the organizations that refuse to comply.

However, MSI and IPPF are two of only four non-government organizations (NGO) that have rejected the funds, and the aid money continues to be distributed to 733 other NGOs. Further, it is MSI and IPPF who ultimately chose to forgo the money in exchange for continuing abortions.

Mark Green, administrator of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), has [testified](#) before Congress that while it is impossible to financially meet all of the world’s needs, “(e)verything we are trying to do is to work with country partners on their journey to self-reliance – these countries one day should lead their own development.”

In addition, a [2010 report](#) found that in Ethiopia, for instance, the Mexico City Policy has had a positive impact on the population’s understanding of abortion by leading to people to ask, “If abortion is a positive development for Ethiopian women’s health, then why does the U.S. government not support it?”

Restoring the Mexico City Policy was the first of [numerous pro-life actions](#) the Trump administration has taken, including pro-life judicial and administrative appointees, rolling back the Obamacare abortifacient coverage mandate, opening a federal investigation into Planned Parenthood, supporting

abstinence education and religious liberty protections, advocating a ban on late-term abortions, and most recently [cutting abortion facilities off](#) from more than \$50-million (R632.3-million) per year in family planning funds.

Nigeria's clock ticking over Christian deaths, warn bishops



Tens of thousands rallied in various Nigerian cities asking for peace and for an end to the killings of Christians. (Credit: Courtesy to Crux.)

Originally published in [Pulse](#)

After the murder of 19 people at a Catholic Church, including two priests, Christians in Nigeria mobilised on Tuesday, urging the president to help “end the killings” because the “clock is ticking, and the bomb must be defused quickly.”

The rallies took place simultaneously in different cities across the country, on the same day those murdered by Muslim Fulani herdsmen in late April were buried.

In different statements, bishops spoke of "ethnic cleansing," described people living in "palpable fear," said that Christians are being "massacred," and that human life is worth less than cattle in parts of Nigeria and warned of falling into "anarchy" if the government fails to bring peace.

They also accused President Muhammadu Buhari of being complicit in an agenda to "Islamize" Nigeria, after failing to protect Christians who are not allowed to build churches in rural areas or recover girls who are kidnapped and forcibly converted to Islam.

Tens of thousands participated in the rallies that took place across the country, carrying signs such as "We are peace-loving people, stop attacking our churches," "stop the Christian genocide," "enough of bloodshed in Nigeria," "life is precious, a gift from God," and "we say no to the killings of Christians in Nigeria."

In a statement by Cardinal John Onaiyekan read at the rally in Abuja by one of his auxiliary bishops, he called on Buhari to fulfill his campaign promises of ending the killings and to treat all citizens equally.

"We remind you that the rampaging squads of terrorist herdsmen who have turned Nigeria into a killing field seem to be above the law," Onaiyekan said. "We have not heard of any arrests or prosecution of these murderers, who continue to amuse themselves with the blood of innocent Nigerians."

The violence seen in attacks such as the one on April 24 is often fueled by ethnic and religious undertones, as well as grazing rights and dwindling amounts of fertile land.

Over the past several months, there's been an upsurge in

violent confrontation between armed herders and unarmed farmers, with the Fulani killing more than 100 people since the beginning of the year.

According to the cardinal, there's no Nigerian who "goes to bed with his two eyes closed," because those who do are "murdered in their sleep."

Still addressing Buhari, who wasn't present at the rally, Onaiyekan said that the basis of the government is the safety of the citizens. "We are not asking for too much," he said.

"Mr. President, when will the killings end? The clock is ticking, and the bomb must be defused quickly," he said in the statement sent to *Crux*.

In the diocese of Warri, an oil hub in South Nigeria, thousands rallied too. The diocese released a statement on Tuesday, decreed by the bishops' conference to be one of "prayer and solemn, peaceful, prayerful procession and demonstration against the incessant killings in all parts of Nigeria."

"We say with a loud voice, enough is enough," the statement by Bishop John Oke Afareha said.

According to Afareha, the fear and insecurity in Nigeria are "palpable and unacceptable," and even though Catholics can't take up arms to defend themselves, "we can arm ourselves with prayer and voice our displeasure to the government, even as we challenge them to rise up to their constitutional responsibility of safeguarding the life and property of all Nigerians everywhere and at all times."

All life is sacred, the bishop said, irrespective of tribe, creed or political affiliations, and as such, it must be protected and cherished.

He also urged the government to "deploy its machinery without complicity" to stop the bloodletting and the killings, bringing to justice these "enemies of peace and save Nigeria

from anarchy.”

“As the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church, so may the lives of these victims be the seed of restoration of peace, unity and responsible governance in our country,” Afareha said.

Archbishop Alfred Adewale Martins of Lagos released an “open letter” to Buhari, signing it in the name of the three million Catholics in his diocese.

He denounced the rising attacks by herdsmen, who are no longer satisfied, he said, with attacking farms and feeding their cattle with the produce of someone else’s work, but are now attacking people in their places of worship.

“If it was [Islamic terrorist organization] Boko Haram, as we know it, it would have been sad but not as alarming as when so-called herdsmen are the ones perpetrating these crimes,” Martins said.

“Innocent people are now being murdered at will and their means of livelihood forcefully taken from them,” Martins continued. “Children are being turned to orphans, wives to widows, husbands to widowers. Communities are being wiped away in manners that can only be likened to ethnic cleansing.”

Human life, he lamented, has less value than cattle in Nigeria.

Despite the country’s constitution that guarantees freedom of worship, Martins said it doesn’t apply in some parts of the country, particularly in Southern Kaduna and the north central region of Nigeria, where Christians are being “massacred, displaced from their ancestral lands and treated as second class citizens.”

The prelate also stated that in many rural areas, Christians are not allowed to build churches nor worship God in peace,

and girls are kidnapped and then never released because they refused to deny their faith and convert to Islam.

“Unfortunately, incidents such as these have led to the fear of an agenda to Islamize Nigeria,” Martins wrote. “Permit me to say, Your Excellency, that you are often accused of being in support of this agenda.”

The bishop also says that even though the Catholic Church in Nigeria has always advocated peace, religious tolerance and inter-religious dialogue, providing an atmosphere for dialogue and national cohesion, it has too frequently been “at the receiving end of attacks,” with the “callous killings” in Benue State being but the last.

“Mr President, we have been provoked far too many times and now we say again, ‘Enough is enough,’” he said, by way of warning, yet toning it down by adding that they will continue to promote peace “in obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ,” and also conscious of what Mahatma Gandhi allegedly preached: “An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.”

Addressing Buhari directly, Martins wrote that their call for the president’s intervention is born of the fear that the crisis could snowball into “ethnic, tribal or religious war.”

Tanzania opens embassy in

Israel



Tanzania's Minister for Foreign Affairs Augustine Phillip Mahiga addresses the United Nations General Assembly in the Manhattan borough of New York, September 26 2016. (PHOTO: Reuters)

Originally published in [The Jerusalem Post](#)

Tanzania opened an embassy in Ramat Gan on Tuesday, the 15th African state to open an embassy in Israel, and the fourth to open one in the last three years.

Tanzanian Foreign Minister Augustine Mahiga, on his first visit to Israel and the highest level visit here by a Tanzanian official, said the embassy signifies the importance his country attaches to its "renewed" friendship with Israel.

Tanzania established diplomatic ties with Israel in 1963, and – like most other African states – severed them under intense Arab pressure after the Yom Kippur War in 1973. The ties were re-established in 1995.

The election of President John Magufuli in 2015 led to a

distinct uptick in ties between the two countries. Magufuli, a devout Christian, replaced his Muslim predecessor. When Netanyahu met Mahiga at a mini-summit with six African leaders at Entebbe in 2016, he received a promise that Tanzania would open an embassy in Israel.

Tanzania's Ambassador to Israel Job D Masima took his position here nine months ago and has worked until now out of temporary offices.

Asked by The Jerusalem Post why Tanzania elected to open its embassy in Ramat Gan [instead of Jerusalem](#), Masima replied that the important thing was to open it somewhere inside Israel.

Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked, who attended the official opening of the Tanzanian Embassy and who visited that country two weeks ago, said at the ceremony that she hoped one day to see the Tanzanian flag fly in Jerusalem. She said Israel was grateful to Magufuli for opening the embassy and hoped the new embassy will signify an upgrade of Israeli-Tanzanian cooperation.

Israel does not have an embassy in Tanzania and is represented there by its embassy in Nairobi.

**Mother of Boko Haram captive
begs: 'Please don't tire of
praying for my Leah'**



President Muhammadu Buhari with the released Dapchi Girls and parents at the Aso Rock Villa, Abuja. (PHOTO: [The Advocate](#))

Originally published in [Open Doors USA](#)

We recently heard from our team in Africa who visited with the family of Leah Sharibu – the only girl who wasn't freed from Islamic extremist group Boko Haram after they kidnapped more than 100 girls from a secondary school in the town of Dapchi in Nigeria. Leah refused to deny Christ and convert to Islam. In this conversation with her mother, Rebecca Sharibu, and one of her classmates, we learn more about the night of the attack and the painful days that followed – and gain greater insight into Leah's character and the maturity of her unwavering faith.

“Monday, February 19, is a date I will never forget in my life.”

For 19-year-old Affodia Andrawus, a Christian classmate of Leah Sharibu, the night evokes feelings of fear and horror. In her own words, Affodia recounts the events leading up to the attack on the Government Girls School in Dapchi where she and

more than 100 girls, including Leah, were living and studying.

“After our evening prep (study time), we were sitting down about to eat. Suddenly, we heard gunshots. We were trying to get ourselves coordinated when we heard more gunshots, and this time a bullet fell in front of the hostel where we were. The gunshots increased a lot, so we (Christians) decided to hold hands and run away. We knew we would be the target.

“Our teachers saw us running and tried to (reassure us), but the gunshots grew stronger. We continued to run. Leah’s hostel is in front of the gate, so we ran that way, calling for her. But she was caring for a sick roommate, Liyatu, and refused to leave her. Leah tried to carry Liyatu while we ran toward the fence. But Leah couldn’t run fast and kept falling with Liyatu. Liyatu eventually managed to run to the staff quarters. Leah and some of the other students ran towards the gate where, unfortunately, the Boko Haram truck was parked. We kept shouting her name, but she was put on the truck.

“The rest of us jumped the fence and kept running. We ran to a thick bush behind our school and hid there that night.”

That afternoon, teachers from the school found the girls and led them back to the school. There, they saw their parents and other students who had returned.

“There were tears of joy as parents saw their children,” Affodia says. “Then those whose children were still missing began to weep and wail.”

After the school chaplain took roll call, Leah Sharibu was the only Christian missing.



Leah Sharibu is the only Christian abducted from the school in Dapchi and has not been returned.

Abduction of the Dapchi girls

Rebecca Sharibu also remembers the night of February 19 as a night of terror. That evening, she and her family learned that Boko Haram fighters had entered their town of Dapchi. While many residents ran for their lives, the Sharibus stayed. Soon, Rebecca's sister called to tell her that Boko Haram had entered Leah's school and had abducted some of the girls.

"The night was so long, and my heart kept skipping a beat," Rebecca remembers. "All I could think of was my Leah."

Early the next morning, eager to check on her daughter, Rebecca Sharibu rose at 5.30 am. She brought her torch for light as she walked to the school in darkness, praying for her daughter.

"When I got there, I saw some parents crying and hugging their daughters, but I didn't see my Leah," Rebecca says.

The crowd continued to grow and eventually, school officials asked families to go outside and wait for more information. Sitting at the school gate, Rebecca waited 11 hours until 4.30

pm, hoping and praying to see her daughter's face. But Leah did not return. Fearing the worst, she spent the night at the school gate, still waiting.

The next day, government officials told parents the girls had been found and were undergoing hospital treatment. They said that two girls had died in the crossfire between the military and Boko Haram.

"I was so sure my Leah was amongst those in the hospital," Rebecca says. "My heart was at rest hearing this."

Then the mixed messages started coming. Officials returned, now saying they weren't sure where the girls were.

"There is nothing that can be done. Please go home," they said.

"At that point, many parents broke down and collapsed," Rebecca says, "but I was just there, feeling blank."



Rebecca Sharibu, Leah's mother, is still waiting and praying for Leah's return.

The kidnapped girls returned

A month later on March 21, Rebecca answered an early morning phone call. Boko Haram had returned with the kidnapped girls, school officials reported. Parents could meet their daughters at a local park.

Rebecca remembers running to the park, so overcome with anticipation that several times she fell over her feet. When she got there, she saw no one but heard that the girls had been taken to the school, instead. She was weak from running, and the school wasn't close. A good Samaritan offered to take her there.

"We first went to the palace, but no Leah. Then we went to the hospital and saw many girls receiving treatment."

Still, Leah wasn't there.

At the hospital, Rebecca saw one of Leah's classmates.

"Where is my Leah?" she asked.

The friend's report would bring Rebecca Sharibu to her knees. The young girl told her what had happened as they got on the truck to be taken home.

"Leah was told to say some Islamic incantations before she would be allowed onto the truck. But she refused. She said, 'I will never say it because I am not a Muslim.' They became angry and told her if she wouldn't denounce Christ, she would remain with them. Still, Leah refused. We watched Leah being left alone with the other members. We kept crying and waving at her 'til the truck vanished."

Hearing that her daughter was still in captivity, Rebecca fainted and was rushed to the hospital for treatment.



Affodia Andrawus, a friend of Leah, narrowly escaped being kidnapped by Boko Haram.

An unwavering faith

Leah's resolve and unwavering faith are sources of great pride for the mother who each morning has been faithful to lead devotions and study God's Word with her teenage daughter.

"I am so proud of my Leah because she did not denounce Christ," she says. "And because of that, I know God will never forsake her. When she went away to school, I gave her a copy of the Bible so she could have her personal devotions even when I am not there. As her mother, I know her to be an obedient daughter, respectful and someone who puts others before herself."

Affodia agrees, adding that at school, Leah is known for her patience.

"No matter how much Leah is mistreated or insulted by other students, she will never retaliate," Affodia shares, "Instead, Leah will look for a way to make peace with everyone."

“If anyone is sick among the Christians, Leah is always the first to go and greet and pray for that person,” Affodia said. “Her life is really an example for all to follow.”

Affodia explained that two Sundays before the Dapchi kidnapping, the school chaplain preached about standing for Christ, no matter what.

“I believe that God allowed Leah to be the only Christian that was abducted for a reason – so that through her, the world and even her abductors would come to know Christ. Leah indeed has spread the gospel to all the world!”

Rebecca Sharibu knows that throughout the world, Christian believers are praying and advocating for the release and return of her daughter.

“But for now, I haven’t seen my Leah. I want to plead that Christians not grow tired of praying for her – ’til she returns.

“My heart is heavy but joyful in this trial because my Leah refused to denounce Christ, just as our church says, ‘being joyful in suffering.’ My encouragement is this: I know that even if Leah is dead, she is with the Lord.

She has encouraging words for anyone tackling pain and grief: “For those who are going through situations and trials, just be hopeful and hold on to God.”