

# Gunmen abduct students from Baptist school in Nigeria

July 6, 2021

Gunmen abducted about 140 students from a Baptist boarding school in Nigeria in an early morning attack on July 5.

At about 1:45 a.m., assailants shooting wildly broke down a portion of the wall surrounding the Bethel Baptist High School on the outskirts of Kaduna and kidnapped students at gunpoint.

About 180 students are enrolled at the school, established by Bethel Baptist Church in 1991.

State police told news agencies tactical teams were pursuing the kidnappers, and they reported 26 people—including a female teacher—had been rescued. An unspecified number of students escaped and hid for hours before returning to the school.

## ‘Our church is in serious pain’



Elijah Brown

“Today is a day of mourning, as we grieve over what is the most serious attack and greatest tragedy to impact the Baptist community in Nigeria. I echo the words of a Baptist leader from Kaduna, ‘Our church is in serious

pain,” said Elijah Brown, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance.

Brown said he talked to about a half-dozen Baptist leaders in Nigeria on July 5. They included the pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, whose son was among the students who managed to escape from his abductors.

“None of the Baptist leaders want to ascribe motivation to the attack but noted that it is an ongoing context of impunity and lack of legal justice and banditry,” Brown said.

Seven years ago, Boko Haram kidnapped 276 girls from a majority Christian school in Chibok, Nigeria. In April, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom noted a rising number of terrorists and bandits [copying the tactics](#) of Boko Haram and other extremist groups.

## **More than 1,000 abducted since December**

Since December, more than 1,000 students in Nigeria have been abducted in a series of mass kidnappings, the [BBC reported](#).

“While the identity and the motivation of the assailants are not known, I call upon the gunmen who broke into the Bethel Baptist High School and kidnapped teenagers pursuing an education to immediately return these students to their families without any further harm,” Brown said.

“I call upon the state and national government to bring every resource to bear to help locate and free these teenagers, to increase security at every school throughout Kaduna, and at a time when there seems too many have experienced legal impunity to hold the perpetrators accountable in a court of law.

“I urge all of us to advocate, work for strengthened good governance

throughout the Middle Belt, and to fervently stand in prayer for these young people who are right now living through this horrific trauma. Their release and restoration is the first priority, and our prayers remain with them and their families who are bearing enormous grief.”

## **‘Gravest attack’ but not the first**

While the abduction of the boarding school students marked “the gravest attack on the Baptist community, it is not the first” in the region, Brown added.

In April, Haske Baptist Church—also in Nigeria’s Kaduna state—was attacked during a Sunday morning worship service. Zacaria Dononyaro, a health care worker, was killed. Gunmen abducted four people in the April attack on the church, and they remain missing.

According to a [vulnerability index](#) BWA developed, Nigeria ranks second only to the Central African Republic in terms of countries where Baptists are most vulnerable. The index gauges four factors in determining vulnerability—violent conflict, religious freedom challenges, hunger and threats to livelihood.

In December, the U.S. State Department designated Nigeria as a “[country of particular concern](#),” labeling it among the most egregious violators of religious freedom. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom had recommended that action since 2009.