

UNICEF Headquarters New York:

For the past number of years, *Mercy Reaches Mercy* has been alerting readers about the growing number of attacks on educational institutes around the world and more especially those educating girls. Our sisters on the ground in both Nigeria and Nuba, Sudan can testify to this fact. More recently, there has been a sinister use of children, mainly girls as “human bombs”.

A recent report by UNICEF – The United Nations Children’s Organization highlights this and other atrocities in their August 2017 report. According to UNICEF - The number of children, mainly girls, used by the Nigerian armed group **Boko Haram** as "human bombs" has quadrupled this year.

In northeastern Nigeria for example, 83 children have been used as human bombs in the last 8 months of 2017. This has not received much media coverage!

- Of the 83 children who were forced to wear suicide vests and carry the bombs, 55 of them were girls. All were under the age of 15 years.
- 27 were young boys
- One of the bombers was a baby girl strapped to a girl.

All of the above atrocities were carried out by Boko Haram a name which means, “western education is forbidden”

“UNICEF is extremely concerned about an appalling increase in the cruel and calculated use of children, especially girls, as 'human bombs' in northeast Nigeria," the agency said.

UNICEF did not give an explanation for the rise in numbers, which have quadrupled in the past year.

"We feel this is just the way Boko Haram terrorizes women and children in the community," Milen Kidane, UNICEF's chief of child protection, told Al Jazeera from Nigeria's capital, Abuja.

Hafsat Muhammed, a Nigerian rights activist and journalist, said the actual number of children used by the armed group is even higher.

"The conflict has reached to a stage that these insurgents are diverting attention by using children," she told Al Jazeera.

Muhammed said that armed groups like Boko Haram give children a sense of belonging in a society where they do not have the basic necessities.

"Children tend to fall into the hands of Boko Haram, who would then reign over them and use them, just because they feel that they belong and they have persuaded them that maybe this is the cause of life," she explained.

The *Mercy Reaches Mercy* project, which has provided scholarships and educational possibilities for the past 10 years is key to securing an alternative route for children who feel they have been left behind. This year as we work towards building a new school in North Eastern Nigeria, we are saying a firm YES to education and NO to the terrorists.

Deirdre Mullan RSM, PhD

Partnering Religious Congregations with UNICEF

