

# Terrorism and Sexual Exploitation

There is not, strictly speaking, a universal definition of terrorism. The use of terror does not limit itself to political, ideological, ethnic or religious ends, and one can find an almost infinite number of motives to "terrorize." From this point of view, the human imagination remains unlimited. Terrorism can put thousands of bewildered civilians on the street, and cause death, pain and suffering to vulnerable people of all ethnic groups and all religions. If armed conflicts have always been a fertile ground for the perpetration of sexual violence against women and children, the current proliferation of geographic areas rendered unstable by terrorist organizations has led to the resurgence of sexual exploitation at a high rate.

In April, 2015, during a reading in front of the United Nations Security Council, Zainab Bangura, special Representative of the General Secretary in charge of the question of the sexual violence in conflict, evoked a logic of sex terrorism "involving non-state armed groups adopting extremist ideologies" (*United Nations*, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014). Some of the most concerning terrorist groups are the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Iraq and Syrian Arab Republic), Boko Haram (Nigeria), Al Shabaab (Somalia), Ansar Dine (Mali) as well as groups affiliated with Al Qaeda. Concerns about these groups continue to rise as the sexual violence committed by these organizations seems, above all, connected to strategic, ideological and financial objectives. Since the territorial conquests of ultra-radical Sunni groups in Iraq in 2014, the Christian minorities, Yazidis and Turkmens have been particularly targeted.

Our western societies are also not immune to sexual violence against vulnerable people. Let us remember that in France in 2014, 118 women were killed by their partners (*Government of the French Republic*, June 2015). This averaged as one woman killed every three days. While this chapter will not judge or attempt to advise other cultures on issues involving sexual exploitation, this chapter will put into perspective and analyze, in light of recent events, the large-scale ideologies and deliberate processes of sexual exploitation set up by the Islamic State.

## Frame

The horrific correlation between terrorism and sexual exploitation is caused by a particular geopolitical context. It occurs in areas of conflict or post-conflict, particularly where legal authorities are contested and state structures are absent, where the law is not applied and where the most vulnerable are no longer protected.

Women and girls are, by far, the main victims of such sexual violence. Migration and the displacement of populations away from their homes due to fears of abuse make these people more vulnerable to abuse. Everywhere in the world, sexual violence increases when the

number of refugees and/or displaced people grows. Refugee camps, which can be administered by national or international structures, do not necessarily protect vulnerable individuals.

Belonging to an ethnic or religious minority not tolerated by the ideology of an armed group (terrorist or regular force army) may be the driving force of a deliberate strategy of persecution including sexual violence.

In a report from March 2015 on the link between sexual violence and conflict, the United Nations Security Council mentions only 19 countries whose “credible information” on sexual violence is accurate. 45 terrorist or state groups are supposed to be involved in this type of violence worldwide.

These forms of sexual exploitation include rape, sexual slavery, prostitution, forced marriage and human trafficking, when young women are lured to conquered territories or sold by terrorist groups for prostitution networks.

### **The Situation in Iraq and in the Syrian Arab Republic**

Between 2003, the year of the intervention of the United States, and 2014, with the capture of Mosul and the proclamation of the Caliphate by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Iraqi state structure has experienced multiple upheavals that weakened the Iraqi authorities and fractured its population. Political strife and armed conflicts combining resistance to occupation, competition between groups, clans, families, militias, and religious sensitivities have led to a situation of chaos which has led the Islamic state to emerge powerfully, influentially and dominantly, challenging the borders outlined by the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916. Iraqi women have paid a high price in a country where the structures supposed to protect them remain almost nonexistent. The number of displaced women leaving conflict areas has been increasing. Iraq had some 1.6 million widows at the end of 2014 (*Puttick*, February 2015). Faced with a disastrous economic situation, without resources, fleeing killings and forced marriages, sometimes imprisoned, these women became easy prey for traffickers. That being said, criminal networks did not wait for the Islamic State to prosper. According to the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), 4,000 women and girls were reportedly trafficked within 7 years after the US invasion. Militias tracked these women down in the markets, public squares where they were isolated, kidnapped and resold to trafficking networks. Many of them are exploited sexually in Baghdad (prostitution is illegal in Iraq), or sent abroad to Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and in the Gulf monarchies. In 2011, 95% of the prostituted persons exploited in Syria were of Iraqi origin (*Puttick*, February 2015). Families of prostituted persons, who often do not know what they are agreeing to, sell their relatives into sex trafficking networks in Iraq and elsewhere.

In 2011, popular demonstrations began in the Syrian Arab Republic, following the “Arab Spring” revolutions that had begun appearing in Arab countries in December 2010. When the army fired on demonstrators in March 2011, the country plunged into violence. The flow of refugees increased to 1.5 million people displaced within Syria and between 300,000 and 400,000 having already fled to Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq in Autumn 2012.

The country split into armed factions (Free Syrian Army, Groups affiliated to Al-Qaeda including Islamic State) that were opposed by Bashar el-Assad’s army—an army that was

similarly divided. In light of this chaos, the Islamic State quickly and successfully extended into Syria and into Iraq, notably taking Mosul on June 10<sup>th</sup> 2014. Meanwhile, the group also distanced itself from the al-Qaeda nebula, thus affirming and proclaiming its independence on 29 June 2014, with the restoration of the Caliphate, headed by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

### **Implementation of a Strategy of Sexual Violence by the Islamic State: the case of Yazidis**

It is in this context that the Islamic State (IS) instates a “pattern of sexual violence, slavery, abduction and human trafficking” that begins with the persecution of minorities (*United Nations*, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015). From August 2014, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) received the first reports showing that slavery, rape and other forms of sexual and physical violence against women and children are committed deliberately in order to eliminate and/or assimilate ethnic and religious minorities: Turkmens, Shabaks, Christians, and especially Yazidis are targeted (*UNAMI, OHCHR*, 2014).

Following the military attack on Mount Sinjar in August 2014, a large part of the Yazidi population, accounting for 1.5% of the Iraqi population, were unable to flee the fighting zone to areas held by the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) in Iraqi Kurdistan and therefore, found themselves trapped. Women and children were then separated from the men and taken to different locations in Northern Iraq (Mosul, Tal Afar, Tal Banat, Ba’aj Rambusi, Sinjar) and Eastern Syria (Raqqa, Rabi'a), via means of transport requisitioned for this purpose. On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, witnesses claim that Yazidi women were taken from the village of Maturat in the South of Sinjar district to a prison (Badoush) in Mosul. On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, between 450 and 500 women were led to the citadel of Tal Afar and 150 women and girls were transported to Syria before being "distributed" to ISIS fighters as rewards or sold into slavery according to their age and marital status (*UNAMI, OHCHR*, 2014).

Women and girls are separated into three groups (married women with children, married women without children, women and unmarried girls) and evaluated according to their beauty (*Yazda, The Free Yezidi Foundation*, September 2015). Some are "distributed" to fighters by lottery (*Sara Mercier*, 2015). Human Rights Watch (HRW) has received the testimonies of 11 women and 9 girls having managed to flee. The testimonies consisted of reports of rape, sometimes by several fighters, forced marriages, and forced religious conversions (*HRW*, April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015). Some claim to have been sold several times. Before these "sales" or the "distribution," young Yazidi women are all detained in jail or closed centers. There are two reports of rape by combatants on two girls aged 6 and 9 (*Yazda, The Free Yezidi Foundation*, September 2015).

While many perpetrators have been reported to be of Iraqi, Syrian, Libyan, Algerian, and Saudi descent, there have also been Europeans mentioned in the testimony. According to UNAMI, on November 6<sup>th</sup> 2014, approximately 2,500 women and children were still held by the Islamic State in northern Iraq. An organization of the Yazidi community provided to HRW a list of 3,133 missing persons, 2,300 of whom are considered to have been kidnapped. On March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015, 974 Yazidis had escaped or were redeemed (ransom) by their captors including 513 women and 304 children. That being said, Mirza Ismail, the president and founder of the Yazidi International Organization, said in a speech to the American congress

that she believes 7,000 have been taken, with the majority being women and girls. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of female and young girls held in the conquered IS territory.

Most of the testimonies demonstrate major psychological distress, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, amongst victims who have managed to escape or were exchanged for ransom. The HRW testimony of a young, 12-year-old victim named Jalila who describes the violence she endured: “*Sometimes I was sold. Sometimes I was offered as a gift. The last man was the most violent; he tied my hands and legs*” (HRW, April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015).

### **Theorization of Sexual Violence: A Process of Justification**

In a French language publication by the Islamic State, an article entitled “The 'Revitalization' of Slavery Before Time” justifies the slavery of “non-believers”. The article tries to legitimize sexual violence against the ethnic minorities like the Yazidis by claiming that they are uncivilized (*Dar Al-Islam*, no.5). Being neither Jews nor Christians, Yazidis cannot pay the *djizîa* (finds its justification in the Koran, Sura 9,29), which is an obligatory tribute that is paid by non-Muslim populations in exchange for a sovereign protection and this thus validates their enslavement because they do not belong to the religions of the book (Torah, Bible, Qur’an).

After their capture, “the Yazidi women and children are then divided according to Sharia law among the fighters of the Islamic State that participated in the Sinjar operations. A fifth of these slaves are transferred to the Islamic state authorities to be distributed as a fifth of the booty.” The Islamic State organization also considers that the slavery of concubines is firmly established under Sharia law. The IS believes that to fight against this slavery would be to deny or mock the verses of the Qur’an or the Hadith of the Prophet. Later in the article, it is written that the “abandonment of slavery led to an increase of *al-fâhichah* (adultery, fornication)” (*Dar al-Islam*, No.5 ).

Through releasing extensive documents justifying slavery, the Islamic State is attempting to validate its actions by putting itself above international law. A brochure issued by the *Department of Research and Fatwa of the Islamic State* was broadcast via a pro-daech<sup>1</sup> Twitter account. Excerpts of this broadcast were published in the *New York Review of Books* in September 2015. These excerpts reveal that sexual relations are immediately authorized with prisoners who are virgins, as it is “lawful to buy, sell or give prisoners and slaves as they are simply property...” (*New York Review of Books*, September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015). Sexual relations with a slave that has not yet reached puberty is permitted if “her body is developed enough for the act.” It is also permissible to beat one’s female slave with “disciplinary beatings” but it is forbidden to hit the face. Evidently, these excerpts reveal a theoretical rhetoric that attempts to justify sexual and physical violence. These acts are justified through interpretations of religious texts despite the fact that these violent practices are “unanimously condemned by all religious Muslim authorities alike” (*Le Figaro Vox*, August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015). While these attempts to justify violent practices may have less to do with sex and more to do with the mission to return to the origins of the Caliphate, this does not lessen the intolerable violence against

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<sup>1</sup> Arabic acronym for the Islamic State organization.

women and girls of the Yazidi community or other ethnic groups. As the Islamic State is not a homogeneous group, it is difficult to know the degree to which its members apply these “rules” or if there is even an internal surveillance network within these organizations.

In another IS article entitled “Slave-girls or Prostitutes”, the slavery of the Yazidi population is once again justified (*Dabiq*, No. 9). The article insists on the right to possess women held captive, as well as to possess slaves separated from their husbands even if they are not divorced. The IS has denied its use of violence. The IS claims that the purpose of this slavery is not for sexual pleasure but rather, is to help slaves embrace the religion of Allah in order to “break free of their chains.” According to the IS, no one is forced into slavery: “*I haven’t heard of, nor seen anyone in the Islamic State who coerced his slave-girl to accept Islam,*” and those who have “*claimed to have run away from the Islamic State, made up lies, and wrote false stories (...)*” (*Dabiq*, no.9). The Islamic State firmly rejects any form of condemnation from Western countries and maintains that the West should look at itself before condemning the IS’s sexual slavery: “*Are slave-girls whom we took by Allah’s command not better than your prostitutes who are used by all men? Your prostitute lives by selling her honor, within the sight and hearing of the deviant scholars from whom we don’t hear even a faint sound. (...), then her enslavement is seen as a violation to human rights and sexual relations with her is seen as a rape?*” (*Dabiq*, no.9). For the Islamic State, “Politically correct” Western judgments will have no place within the Caliphate and nothing will prohibit the opening of slave market. It should be noted that Jabhat al-Nusra, the terrorist group affiliated to Al-Qaeda which also fights in Syria does not share the same point of view on sexual slavery and denounces it by using the opinions of high religious authorities. According to Jabhat al-Nusra, sexual slavery will only lead to retaliation by enemy groups (*MEMRI, Inquiry and Analysis Series*, August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015). Moreover, the United Nations and Amnesty International mention abuses by Kurdish and Iraqi security forces on Sunni Arabs in the conquered territories near Sinjar (*BBC News*, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015). Behind this propaganda that attempts to justify slavery looms a business strategy.

## **Strategy and Business**

A report by the Jihad and Terrorism Threat Monitor (JTTM) published in September 2014 on the website of the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) shows a conversation on Facebook between a French fighter in Syria and supporters of the IS. This discussion demonstrates the way they consider Yazidi women:

“- \$350 per slave in Mosul if you want lol  
- I had seen around \$180 per slave lol  
- 180, she must be ugly...”

The search for women for IS fighters is part of a deliberate strategy of the Islamic state to assimilate the polytheistic community of the Yazidi into the Caliphate, as well as to attract new members by promising them a slave woman, which ensures the stability and motivation of IS troops. After seizing the Sinjar Mountains and capturing Yazidi women and girls, IS fighters received these women as a gift based on their level of involvement and their fighting spirit. To recruit new members in the conquered territories and push young men of local Sunni communities to join its ranks, women have also been proposed as “gifts.” These women

are seen as a kind of payment, which we could easily qualify as procuring, which shows the extent to which these captives are viewed as objects. Likewise, to establish its local authority and “buy” peace with local clans and large families, women are offered through forced marriages or as concubine-slaves, which serves as a pact that seals an alliance between the IS and local families and tribes.

In his report on conflict-related sexual violence, the United Nations Security Council says the IS issued an "order" setting prices based on the age of the Yazidi and Christian victims. The younger an individual is, the higher the price rises: 172 US\$ (159 €) is the price set for a girl under 10 years.

**ISIS'S DESPICABLE 'PRICE LIST' FOR YAZIDI AND CHRISTIAN SLAVES**

**A translated version of the document (left) was shared online by humanitarian and peace prize winner Dr Widad Akrawi, and reads as follows:**

**We have received news that the demand in Women and Cattle market has sharply decreased and that will affect Islamic State revenues as well as the funding of mujahideen in the battlefield, therefore we have made some changes. Below are the prices for Yazidi and Christian women.**

**The price for Yazidi or Christian women between the age of 40 - 50 is \$43 (£27)**  
**\$75 (£48) for 30 to 40-year-olds**  
**\$86 (£55) for 20 to 30-year-olds**  
**\$130 (£83) for ten to 20-year-olds**  
**\$172 (£110) for one to nine-year-olds**

**Customers are allowed to purchase only three items with the exception of customers from Turkey, Syria and Gulf countries.**

**Dated and sealed by ISIS in Iraq October 16, 2014.**

Source : Spencer R., « Islamic State slave price list shows Yazidi, Christian girls aged 1-9 being sold for \$172 », *Jihad Watch*, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

The order also stipulates that a fighter cannot own more than three slaves (or concubines), which does not apply for fighters with Turkish, Syrian, or Gulf nationality. There are several reports of slave markets. A girl named Jinanqui, was found one day in a room with dozens of other women and heard a conversation between two 'buyers': “She has big tits, that one. But I want a Yazidi with blue eyes and a pale complexion. These are the best, it seems. I am ready to pay the price” (*Oberlé*, 2015). The reason Saudis are entitled to the 'right' to more than 3 slaves, “is to encourage business (...) it is a good deal: the home of the finances of the Islamic state increases its revenues to support the mujahedeen, and our foreign brothers find their fulfillment” (*Oberlé*, 2015).

Alongside this domestic trafficking, there is also external trafficking that uses the same routes as other traffic circuits (weapons, oil) and therefore benefits from connections with international prostitution networks, or creates new ones. The German consortium ARD produced in December 2015, a documentary report of slave trafficking led by the Islamic

State (*Gatestone Institute*, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015). The trafficking of women and children takes place via the smartphone application WhatsApp, with supporting photographs, in a kind of virtual slave market with a money transfer to an office of intermediaries in Gaziantep (Turkey). Yazidi negotiators can thus “rebuy” their community members for anywhere between of 15,000 to 20,000 US\$ (13,849 to 18,466 €) but the individual is awarded to the highest bidder, which is not always Yazidi community members. Prostitution networks can therefore potentially participate in this human trafficking. M. Guidère believes there could be resold interconnections between this trafficking and criminal Nigerian prostitution networks "to European markets" (*Le Figaro Vox*, August 17, 2015).

### **Ideology on the Place of Women (which should be questioned)**

Contrary to popular belief, the abundant "literature" produced by the Islamic State and its supporters on the role and place of women in its Caliphate suggests that the question of women is not simply a minor issue. Women are used as a means to establish a vision for the territories the IS occupies, to recruit men as well as young women for male combatants, and to justify its position on the role of women and thus, denounce the ethical “standards” of the West. In January 2015, a document entitled "Women in the Islamic state: Manifesto and case study" was broadcast by Al-Khansaa brigade via the organization's medias (*Quilliam Foundation*, February 2015). In a hypocritical reinterpretation of feminism, this document shows a deep aversion to the Western view of human rights and gender equality. For the IS, the outrageous materialism, sexual advertisements, prostitution, pornography of the West are seen as an affliction of western women. The IS maintains that gender equality is another lie of the West since women have neither the same jobs nor the same wages as their male colleagues. Moreover, according to the Al-Khansaa manifesto, this pseudo-equality between women and men can only lead to "emasculatation" of men as they forget their responsibilities.

The manifesto indicates clearly that the role reserved for women is of high importance: it is a question of becoming "founding mothers" of the Caliphate by giving birth to the future "lion" fighters. Women are there primarily to procreate and populate the territories. This role revolves around three fundamental responsibilities: supporting her husband, raising children, following the religious precepts. While the text clearly highlights the importance of women's role in the Caliphate, it also limits their identity and function. Women are divinely more limited than men because they were “made by Adam and for Adam” (*Quilliam Foundation*, February 2015). Women are meant to be confined to the home, with the exception of women who work as teachers, doctors, and if necessary, fighters. Marriage is essential for all women, and girls as young as 9 years-old can be married. While the education of girls is sometimes permitted for girls between the ages of 7 and 15, it should not be prolonged or encouraged as it is a distraction from Allah. The Islamic State believes that women who do not follow these precepts should be punished. While women have an essential role, it is nevertheless a secondary role to that of men. Women must “stay in their rightful place,” procreate, and support their husbands.



## Recruitment of Women is Similar to Trafficking

In working towards its objectives of territorial conquest and establishment of a Caliphate, the Islamic State devotes part of its activities to recruiting women from the West, Africa (including Maghreb) and the Middle East. It is the women who are already settled in Syria, who play the role of matchmaker and organize the recruitment of women abroad by publishing promises of marriage announcements on social networks (Facebook, Twitter). By using these network websites to capitalize on young women's desires to find their "bearded prince," these women recruiters advertise the physical attractiveness and allure of IS fighters. Recently, the recruiters have developed their marketing strategy to include advertisements that promote the "quality of living" of the IS territories. Social networks, such as Twitter in particular, are largely used for this purpose. According to the Quilliam Foundation, there were between 45,000 and 90,000 Twitter accounts that were owned by pro-IS supporters, including several hundred that were used for recruitment. The recruitment includes strategies of "lovebombing," whereby *loveboys* constantly compliment the "prey" and raise their confidence. The *loveboys* establish privileged secret relations with the "prey" and encourage them to isolate themselves from their family. Inside the Islamic State, people from the same geographical origin who master the same language, group together to create "sects" within the IS. Therefore, recruiters try to bring in French speaking women for the French combatants. According to David Thomson, a journalist specializing in jihadist networks, these young women cannot leave home without a promise of marriage. Consequently, this has to be done via Skype or FaceTime, before their departure.



Source : The Sawab Center© - [#DaeshDeniesHerDignity](#)

On March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the Senate Commission of Inquiry on the organization of ways to fight against the jihadist networks in France and Europe listed 119 women nationals present on the IS territory. The majority of the young women going to the IS get there via Turkey (generally Gaziantep). Jihadist manuals, which are distributed via social networks, indicate



how to arrive at its territory, how to dress, and where to cross the border. Many promises of romantic marriages, however, end in tragedy and regret for the women. This is largely because their safety in the IS is not assured. Women are completely deceived by their loverboys. The reality of life in the IS is very different from the image presented to young girls. Girls recruited by the IS are deceived in a similar way to women deceived by trafficking networks, who are lured by offers of false employment and are then exploited.

## **Direct and Indirect Consequences of the Conflict**

### ***Syrian Refugees and Sexual Violence***

The civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic has led to an unprecedented influx of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries in particular. The Office of the United Nations for Human Rights counted 4.596.161 refugees on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015 of which 2.503.549 are in Turkey, 1.070.189 in Lebanon, 633,466 in Jordan, 244,527 in Iraq, of whom a large majority are women and children (*Web Portal regional response to the refugee crisis in Syria*). Refugee camps were established in these countries to deal with this massive influx of refugees. These refugees, who often have no resources and are unemployed, become an easy prey for prostitution networks. Many cases of sexual violence were reported in several destination countries and many victim testimonies revealed exploitation in and outside of refugee camps (*Women Peace and Security*, April, 2014). Sadly, many perpetrators of this sexual violence are members of international organizations that are supposed to be protecting refugees (*Kvinna till Kvinna*, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014). The 2015 U.S. Department of State report on Trafficking in Persons reports cases of forced marriage and prostitution by men from Jordan and the Gulf countries. 6 individuals were prosecuted in Jordan for forcing a young 17 year old Syrian refugee into 21 temporary marriages for prostitution purposes, for two years. Refugee-related prostitution networks have largely developed in Turkey and Lebanon. In March 2015, a Turkish man with suspected links with the Islamic state was sentenced for forcing prostitution upon underage Syrian girls in the south of the country (*The Christian Post*, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015). In nightclubs and cabarets in Lebanon, Syrian "artists" have replaced the young Eastern European women. In certain streets and public gardens, the presence of young Syrians has become extremely visible. Lebanese security forces dismantled several networks. 27 cases involving Syrian prostituted people and traffickers-managers were reported in 2014 (*Al-Monitor*, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014). Syrian refugees were also forced into prostitution in hotels or establishments of prostitution in Baghdad, Basra and in other places in the South of Iraq (*U.S. Department of State*, July 2015).

### ***Prostitution in Iraq***

Like in Syria, the number of young Iraqi women displaced within the country has been growing since 2003. The Shiite militias and criminal gangs continue to abduct young isolated women in order to resell them, sometimes to prostitution rings.

Although illegal, prostitution still exists in Iraq and Baghdad. It is reported to have around a dozen brothels (*The New Yorker*, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015). The breakdown of state structures as well as the rampant corruption amongst those responsible for enforcing the law, leads to the increase of the sexual exploitation. On July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014 28 prostituted persons were

murdered, probably by religious militias, in a prostitution establishment on the outskirts of Baghdad (Zayouna). The Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) opened 8 centers across the country to protect victims of sexual violence. Some of these places are kept secret—the government does not allow NGOs to operate outside the Iraqi Kurdistan. That being said, trafficking networks were active prior to the conflict, and the list of destination countries for Iraqi victims -Turkey, and Middle East countries- has not changed. No convictions were pronounced in 2014 despite the promulgation in 2012 of a new specific anti-trafficking law.

### **The Case of Boko Haram**

Sunni Islamist terrorist group, Boko Haram (whose name, according to the BBC can be translated as "Western education is forbidden"), emerged over the course of the 2000s. The armed conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government forces led to major displacement of people: there were between 170,000 and 200,000 refugees in neighboring countries in April 2015 (*UK Home Office*, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015). On March 7<sup>th</sup> 2015, the organization pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. Once again, women and children were the first victims. Sexual violence (abuse, rape, trafficking, forced marriages) affected both those captured by Boko Haram as well as refugees, whether on the road or in camps. On April 14<sup>th</sup> 2014, the terrorist group abducted 276 girls from a public school in the Borno State, which is in the North-East of the country. While some have been released or have escaped, Boko Haram continues to kidnap girls so that they serve as fighters or are sold. The modus operandi is similar to that of the Islamic State: after a capture of civilians, women and unmarried girls are separated from the group. They are then likely to be forced into marriages with fighters of the group. Those who refuse, and do not convert, "are sold to Nigerian networks of prostitution" (*Challenges*, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015). If the Islamic State has multiple funding sources (oil, traffic, financial support from sympathizers, taxes in the conquered territories), this is not the case for Boko Haram, for whom the "trading of infidels" through networks of trafficking and prostitution represents an important part of their income. According to M. Guidère, trafficking of abducted women would bring to the group "between 100,000 US\$ and 200,000 US\$ [92,330 € and 184,660 ₦ per month". Again, the evidence shows a nightmarish violence: "They made me a sex machine. They took turns sleeping with me. Now I am pregnant and I cannot identify the father" (*International Business Times*, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015). The Human Rights Council of the United Nations states that they received multiple reports mentioning that during retreats for coalition and government forces, fighters of the Boko Haram group can kill the women and girls they maintain in slavery (*United Nations*, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015). The evidence collected by HRW on 30 women and girls confirmed this sexual violence of forced marriage with kidnapers, sexual abuse and rape. Christians and students in particular, represent the majority of young women targeted by the organization (*HRW*, October 2014). In a video from 2014, Abubakar Shekau, the group's leader, claimed they forced detained girls as young as 9 years old, into weddings with their men (*BBC News*, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

Under international law, this sexual exploitation for ideological, strategic and financial purposes cannot be tolerated. Sexual violence against ethnic and/or religious minorities by terrorist groups is an attack upon the integrity of those who suffer. If sexual exploitation is pursued for the sake of the organization's strategy and business, we must thus ensure that this organization's strategy be combatted and that this business model be thwarted. If sexual exploitation is pursued due to ideological justifications, then we must, with the legal tools we have, deconstruct the attempts at justifying and theorizing sexual slavery. Should we compromise in the name of cultural relativism? The answer is simple—no violence against women is acceptable. Neither here, when a woman is beaten to death by her husband or exploited in prostitution networks, nor there when she is considered as a slave and sold or distributed to the goodwill of men. But in order to fight against sexual violence towards women and girls and for gender equality, we must put our best foot forward. When members of national or international organizations, including some with UN mandates, abuse young women displaced in refugee camps, we must denounce these intolerable acts of sexual violence, regardless of where they occur, who commits them, and how they are justified.

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