Commonwealth Teachers’ Group

Statement on the

Abduction of School Girls in Nigeria

The Commonwealth Teachers Group (CTG) is gravely concerned for the safety of the 234 school girls abducted from the Government College in Chibok, on 14th April. The safety and security of pupils while at school is of paramount importance. The CTG harshly condemns the seizure of these female students while at school.

Islamist militants from the Boko Haram group have claimed responsibility for the kidnapping, and a leader warned that he would sell the girls into slavery. This is a heartbreaking and uncertain time for the families of those kidnapped.

Boko Haram stands against Western influence by targeting schools, as well as attacking churches, mosques and government buildings. In the past few weeks seven teachers have been murdered and 27 members of their families were abducted as a result of kidnappings in the Borno State, Nigeria. This brings to 171 the numbers of teachers who have been assassinated since 2009 in Nigeria. This level of violence makes it all the more important that the Safe Schools Initiative, which has been announced by a coalition of Nigerian business leaders working with the United Nations, to increase the security for pupils and teachers in their school grounds, moves forward as quickly as possible. We are pleased that Education International has pledged its support of this campaign.

Support and action is underway from the world community in the hunt for the missing girls. Education International’s General Secretary Fred Van Leeuwen has played a crucial role in discussions with Gordon Brown, Global Education Envoy for the UN. Teacher organisations in Cameroon, Chad and Niger are helping in efforts to locate the girls who may have been dispersed out of Nigeria into these countries. Gordon Brown has expressed thanks for the involvement of these teacher organisations.

Forty per cent of Nigerian children aged 6-11 do not attend any primary school within the Northern region, which is the lowest school attendance rate in the country, particularly for girls. Despite a significant increase in net enrolment rates in recent years, it is estimated that about 4.7 million children of primary school age are still not
in school. (UNICEF, Nigeria). Abducting children from school is capable of putting the entire school system under serious threat.

We echo the words of Malala Yousafzai ‘If we remain silent then this will spread, this will happen more and more’. The CTG calls for these terrible atrocities to stop. The threat of danger to those in education in Nigeria, and in other vulnerable countries, must cease. Schools must be safe against terrorism and the fear of violence from extremist militants. It is vital that the girls are brought back safe from the atrocious ordeal.

We call on Education International to encourage affiliates to take action and to take part in the global mobilisation on 16th June on the UN Day of the African Child for the girls’ safe return.

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26th May 2014

Montreal, Canada