

Nigeria Army Rescues 200 Girls From Forest

From [*The Telegraph*](#)

Nigeria's army says it has rescued 200 girls and 93 women during a military operation against Boko Haram militants.

The offensive took place in the Sambisa Forest, in the northeast of the country, and destroyed three militant camps there, the army said on its Twitter account.

Earlier, Nigeria's military spokesman Major General Chris Olukolade said Boko Haram fighters have been pushed out of all areas of northeast Nigeria, except for Sambisa. "It is not yet confirmed if the girls are the Chibok girls," he added. "The freed persons are now being screened and profiled."

The forest, which is about 60 miles from Chibok, has been pounded by air raids for weeks and ground troops reportedly entered it last week.

Nigeria's army has made false claims in the past about releasing captives from Boko Haram. There has been no independent confirmation of the military statement, so it should be treated with caution.

Boko Haram raided a Christian boarding school in the town of Chibok on April 14 last year, carrying away 276 teenage girls. Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram, later paraded the girls before a camera, showing that all were clad in niqabs. He announced their forcible conversion to Islam and promised that all would be "sold in the market".

Boko Haram treats women and children as booty of war and routinely enslaves and sells its captives. Afterwards, Sambo Dasuki, the Nigerian national security adviser, said the army

believed that the Chibok girls had been “dispersed and sold” in accordance with Shekau’s threat.

If so, they are unlikely to be among the captives apparently discovered in Sambisa forest yesterday.

Since last year, however, Nigeria’s army has taken delivery of new weapons and benefited from Western military advice and intelligence. The British Army has helped to train companies of Nigerian infantry. The result is that the army has been able to carry out an effective counter-offensive against Boko Haram.

Whether those gains can be held – and the many thousands of captives released – is still open to question. Boko Haram recovered from a crushing defeat in 2009 and may prove able to do so again.

Nearly 300 girls and women are safer tonight than they were yesterday and that has to be good news.