

Nigerian army rescues women from Boko Haram

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([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) The Nigerian military entered Boko Haram territory in the Sambisa Forest several times last week, reportedly rescuing 677 women.

Nigerian ground troops have hit hard in the forest, believed to be one of Boko Haram's remaining strongholds. With the rescues in the past week, it raises the question of why the strong push now, and will the military continue until Boko Haram is no longer a threat?

The army announced one of the rescues, which took place Thursday, on the official Twitter account of the Nigerian Army this Saturday:

FLASH: Another set of 234 women and children were rescued through the Kawuri and Konduga end of the #Sambisa Forest on Thursday
#COINUpdate

— DEFENCE HQ NIGERIA (@DefenceInfoNG) May 1, 2015

The rescue came only days after another rescue, during which troops rescued 160 women and girls. The military offense began earlier in the week, and troops rescued around 300 individuals. The targeted area is the Sambisa Forest, a 23,000-mile dense forest area (roughly the size of West Virginia) that is difficult to navigate.

"The assault on the forest is continuing from various fronts and efforts are concentrated on rescuing hostages of civilians and destroying all terrorist camps and facilities in the forest," said Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Chris Olukolade, The Associated Press reported.

So far, it does not appear that any of the rescued women and girls were part of the 260 Chibok hostages, whose abduction sparked international outcry, as well as the

hashtag #BringBackOurGirls. The U.S. has criticized the Nigerian government for their insufficient rescue efforts, claiming their military forces had become “afraid to even engage” in the battle against Boko Haram.

So why now?

Perhaps recent victories have emboldened the Nigerian army. Neighboring countries and towns have also had success in recapturing territory from the militant group in northeast Nigeria. President Goodluck Jonathan, whose term ends at the end of May, pledged last Thursday to “hand over a Nigeria completely free of terrorist strongholds.”

Incoming president Muhammadu Buhari, a former military general who will take office May 29, said he will “stamp out Boko Haram.”

Boko Haram continues to attack and kill civilians and towns, and their extremist ideology remains. During the rescue of the women, it is reported that some of the women fought back against their rescuers. Reports indicate that it is not known whether some of the women rescued this week voluntarily joined Boko Haram, if they are family members of militants, or if they were simply being used as human shields against the forces, The Associated Press reported.

After months of captivity and, in some cases, forced marriages, some of the women identify with the extremist group's ideologies. Overall, the women and girls looked physically healthy, although there are some signs of malnourishment.

Al Jazeera reported that Nigeria's military said it has flown in medical and intelligence teams to screen the rescued girls and women and find out their identities. Amnesty International asked the government to act quickly, "to ensure that the trauma of those 'rescued' is not exacerbated by lengthy security screening in detention."