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NIGERIA | Prayer, Fasting Called for Leah Sharibu

The Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) called for three days of prayer and fasting for the release of Leah Sharibu, the Nigerian school girl held by the Boko Haram terrorist group for refusing to renounce her faith in exchange for freedom.

Fifteen-year-old Leah Sharibu was among 110 girls abducted by the al Barnawi faction of Boko Haram on Feb. 19 from the Government Girls Science and Technical College in Dapchi, Yobe state. Five girls died while being transported to the terrorists' hideout and 104 were returned to Dapchi on March 21. The returning students confirmed that Leah was held back "on religious grounds," informing her mother, Rebecca, that she had been made to disembark from the vehicle bound for Dapchi after refusing to recite the Islamic profession of faith.

In a communiqué issued at the end of a four-day General Church Council meeting, ECWA President Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Gado called on all ECWA members to fast and pray from April 27-29 for Leah's release, and urged Christians everywhere to join them. Leah and her parents are members of the ECWA.

April 15 marked the fourth anniversary of the abduction of over 200 school girls from the Government Girls Secondary School (GGSS) in Chibok, Borno state by the Shekau faction of Boko Haram. A handful of girls escaped. Others were released following a series of negotiations, and allegedly in exchange for imprisoned Boko Haram members and significant payments.

However, 112 girls remain unaccounted for. According to Ahmad Salkida, a journalist who took part in negotiations under the Jonathan administration to free the girls, 82 were killed in crossfire or bombings, and only 30 remain alive, five of whom have reportedly "become permanently embedded" in Boko Haram's "doctrines and teaching programs," and have allegedly asked not to be included in future discussions on releases.