

Beat: Local

4 abducted Nigerian schoolgirls escape Boko Haram, official says

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USPA News - Four more girls who were among the more than 200 schoolgirls abducted in northeastern Nigeria last month have escaped their captors, a Nigerian official said on Wednesday, but there were conflicting reports about the circumstances of their escape. Bana Lawan, chairman of the local government in the Chibok area of Borno State, confirmed that four more girls had escaped, adding to the 53 girls who escaped soon after the mass abduction.

He said the girls were released on Tuesday after they became ill, but another official told the Reuters news agency that the girls may have escaped weeks ago and that their parents had failed to contact authorities. "Latest report reaching us is that instead of 53, those that have escaped are now 57 ... The people of Chibok are anxiously waiting for the safe return of their children," Lawan was quoted as saying by The Punch newspaper. He added that two parents of abducted girls had died of medical causes since last month's kidnapping. Wednesday's news came just two days after Nigerian Defense Staff Chief Alex Badeh said the military had located the abducted schoolgirls, though he refused to say where. "We cannot come and tell you the military secret, just leave us alone, we are working to get the girls back," Badeh was quoted as saying by the Daily Independent newspaper. The chief added, however, that the military would not use force to free the abducted schoolgirls, saying such an operation would endanger the children. "Nobody should say the Nigerian military does not know what it is doing. We can't kill our girls in the name of trying to get them back," he said. Some 276 schoolgirls were abducted by the Boko Haram when the militants attacked a secondary school in Chibok town on April 15, but a few dozen were able to escape in the immediate aftermath, leaving at least 219 children still missing. But uncertainty remains over the figures, with some claiming the numbers to be higher and others lower. The Boko Haram is seeking the imposition of an extremist stance of the Shariah law, which is a Muslim code of conduct. The group's name, in the local language of Hausa, roughly translates as 'Western religion is sacrilegious' or 'non-Islamic religion is a sin.' The U.S. formally designated the group a foreign terrorist organization in November, and the UN Security Council added the group to its terror sanctions list last week.

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