

## **ANTI-KIDNAPPING OPERATION AND AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY ON HUMAN RIGHT VIOLATION IN NORTH WEST 2015-2024**

**<sup>1</sup>MOHAMMED Aminu Yusuf, <sup>2</sup>MOHAMMED Bello Baban'Umma <sup>3</sup>Shuaibu Umar Abdul**  
<sup>1,2&3</sup>Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Science Nasarawa State University, Keffi

### **Abstract**

*Since 2015, North-West Nigeria is grappling with a battle against kidnapping to safeguard lives and property, but this effort has faced persistent criticism from Amnesty International, which alleges the use of inhumane methods violating the human rights of both insurgents and crime victims. Engagements with security forces and affected communities have unveiled perplexing aspects of this situation. This research aims to examine the contributions and issues surrounding Amnesty International's claims regarding human rights violations in anti-kidnapping operations in the Northwest. To achieve this, the study relies on both primary and secondary data sources and adopts structural functionalism as its theoretical framework. The findings revealed that Amnesty International encounters challenges in Nigeria, including limitations in authoritative capacities, doubts about alignment with Western values, suspicion, recurrent calls to leave the country, and low support, all of which impede the organization's effectiveness in addressing human rights issues. Moreover, the survey data underscores strong support for "Campaign to Promote Human Rights" and "Support for Mass Public Demonstrations," reflecting Amnesty International's diverse strategies to mitigate human rights violations worldwide and promote accountability and justice through public awareness, influencing policymakers, empowering local groups, and condemning human rights violators. As a recommendation, Amnesty International is advised to concentrate on image management, establish robust government relationships, and enhance grassroots awareness and engagement in developing countries like Nigeria to effectively promote human rights ideals.*

### **Introduction**

Since 2015, North-West Nigeria has been engaged in a battle against kidnapping to prevent the loss of lives and property. However, this fight has faced incessant criticism from international organizations like Amnesty International for apparently resorting to inhumane methods that violate the human rights of both the insurgents and the victims of crime. Encounters with security forces and affected communities have brought to light some perplexing aspects of this situation. In scenarios where a suspect is treated as a hardened criminal without the backing of the law, and security agents unilaterally adopt a shoot-on-sight policy, resulting in the deaths of many innocent souls with impunity, there is clear and compelling evidence of human rights violations (Balarabe, 2012)

Regarding cases of extra-judicial killings by Nigerian security forces, Amnesty International's reports are disturbing. One of the most horrifying incidents involves reports of the government or its agents committing arbitrary, unlawful, or extrajudicial killings. At times, authorities investigated but did not hold police, military, or other security force personnel responsible for the use of excessive or deadly force, or for the deaths of persons in custody. Instances of unlawful or extrajudicial killings in the army, air force, and navy were numerous. (Abbah, 2019).

On June 18, 2017, in Bena, Zamfara State, Nigeria, following a kidnapper's attack on security personnel, during which detainees were released, the military randomly killed 51 men, many of whom were innocent civilians. Other documented cases of mass extra-judicial executions include the execution of 64 detainees in Dansadau. In some instances, the bodies of those executed were returned to their families, often discarded near their homes or on the outskirts of villages. In other cases, families were never officially informed of their relatives' deaths and only discovered the executions through released detainees or eyewitness accounts, or sometimes not at all.

The report also recounts the harrowing stories of detainees who died, primarily due to starvation and thirst, with some days seeing as many as 21 to 45 deaths. There are cases of rape by security agents, and

the authorities seemed indifferent to the survival of the victims of kidnapping. Desperation drove some victims to drink urine, but even that resource was sometimes unavailable. A common thread among the accounts of eyewitnesses and victims of military abuse is that victims were predominantly subjected to torture to extract confessions of belonging to the kidnapping, even though they were innocent. It is therefore pertinent to assess the role of Amnesty International in addressing human rights violations in the anti-kidnapping operations in the northwest.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Nigeria is a state party to several regional and international human rights treaties that prohibit human right violation. These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT) and its Optional Protocol (OPCAT); the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR).

However, in the context of the anti-kidnapping operation in North-east Nigeria, Amnesty International's reports have revealed a protruding source of concern regarding human rights violation in the anti-kidnapping operation. These reports highlight disturbing findings, including instances where Nigerian military forces have been implicated in extra-judicial executions, arbitrary arrests, and acts of torture during security operations against kidnappers. One harrowing account from the report have, shed light on the grim reality that many detainees often died due to starvation and thirst, and some even resorted to drinking urine out of desperation.

A recurring theme in the accounts of eyewitnesses and victims of human right violation by security forces to extract confessions and gather information about insurgent activities. The reports from Amnesty International raise important questions about the justification for such practices in this context.

Despite international recommendations and commitments to address issues on human right violation in anti-kidnapping operations, these problems persist in Nigeria and security forces continuing to violate human rights. The lack of transparency regarding investigations into these violations remains a significant concern, highlighting the need for this research for greater accountability and respect for human rights in the anti-kidnaping operation in the North West.

### **Research Objectives**

- i. To investigate the issues surrounding Amnesty International claim regarding human rights violations in the anti-kidnapping operations in the Northwest.
- ii. To examine the contribution of Amnesty International in addressing human right violation in the anti- kidnapping operations in the Northwest

### **The Concept of Human Right**

Human rights are fundamental and universal rights that are inherent to all individuals, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, or any other characteristic. They are often considered to be the basic standards for human dignity, equality, and well-being. Human rights protect individuals from discrimination, abuse, and oppression, while also promoting their freedoms and opportunities. These rights are typically codified in international treaties and agreements, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) serving as a foundational document.

According to Donnelly (2008), human rights imply the rights one has because one is a human being. The definition placed all human on the same footing but have not given us in-depth descriptions of the privileges all human beings need to enjoy or hazard human need to be protected from.

In his submission, Onwuzombe (2017) defines human rights as those rights which all human beings are given by virtue of humanity, he further identifies such rights as the right to life, freedom of thought, the dignity of the human person, fair hearing and personal freedom, conscience and religion.

### **Concept of Human Right Violation**

A human rights violation refers to any act or behavior, whether committed by a government, an individual, or an organization, that infringes upon or violates the fundamental rights and freedoms that are recognized and protected under international human rights law. It can occur in various forms and may include actions that directly or indirectly harm individuals or groups, discriminate against them, or deny them their basic rights and dignity. These violations are considered illegal and unjust under international standards. Here are some common examples of human rights violations:

Human rights violations can lead to serious harm, suffering, and social injustice, and they are subject to condemnation, accountability, and redress under international law. Efforts to combat such violations often involve advocacy, legal action, international diplomacy, and the work of human rights organizations.

### **Empirical Review**

According to Omede and Rufai (2014), human rights organizations are pivotal actors in the development of any nation since they play a critical role in various aspects of political, social, and economic progress. They argue that the transformation of societies, particularly those in the developing world like Nigeria, relies heavily on the effectiveness and efficiency of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). One of the primary functions of NGOs contributing to societal development is safeguarding human rights and ensuring accountability within government institutions. Developing nations often grapple with human rights abuses, restrictions on freedom of expression (a crucial element of human rights), absence of the rule of law, corruption, and a lack of transparency and accountability in institutions.

However, organizations like Amnesty International have consistently acted as advocates for the marginalized in countries worldwide, especially in developing regions, thereby enhancing governance quality and the government's capacity to uphold principles of accountability, transparency, and openness. These organizations function as corrective mechanisms to curb governmental excesses and prevent human rights violations on various fronts.

Similarly, (Brett, 2000) asserts that the active involvement of NGOs like Amnesty International is essential for the promotion of human rights, as they empower oversight bodies to function more effectively. They aid in reviewing national-level reports submitted by states parties, provide information to treaty bodies, facilitate information dissemination, and contribute to the implementation of recommendations from treaty bodies. The West Asia-North Africa Institute (WANA, 2018) concurs that civil society groups play a pivotal role in monitoring human rights policies and legislation enacted by governments and decision-makers across various countries. They critique practices that are detrimental to citizens and advocate for the protection of citizens' rights at all levels.

Similarly, Zafarullah and Rahman (2002) have observed the proliferation of human rights organizations worldwide in recent decades. These organizations have played a crucial role in advancing human rights, acting as voices for the oppressed and mistreated, organizing collective action on behalf of the marginalized. They argue that the intensification of human rights advocacy has been driven by the expansion of human rights issues becoming central topics in social, economic, and political debates, as well as the rise of robust and accountable non-governmental organizations like Amnesty International, which have garnered substantial global support and presence.

Reflecting on the performance of robust human rights organizations worldwide, particularly in Bangladesh, (Zafarullah and Rahmah, 2002) explains that in Bangladesh, establishing democratic practices and individual freedom has been challenging due to persistent military involvement in state affairs. He adds that the nation has been plagued by a lack of political consensus, weak government

institutions, and unfavorable methods of political contestation, undemocratic political party structures, political and governmental support, and ineffective local governance. All of these factors have resulted in unequal access to justice and widespread human rights violations in the country. This perspective by Zafarullah underscores that, in many Asian countries, human rights abuses remain prevalent even after decades since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and despite the ongoing efforts of human rights organizations like Amnesty International.

Chukwuemeka (2016) asserts that robust human rights organizations have demonstrated their ability to complement the efforts of international and national governments in promoting human rights worldwide, particularly in war-torn African nations. He argues that strong human rights defenders like Amnesty International have developed profound insights into the extent of human rights protection, abuses, and patterns in many countries. They leverage this expertise to collaborate closely with local civil society groups, working to advance the rights of various communities in numerous African countries.

Eseyin and Udoh (2015) explore the complexities of human rights protection, asserting that the defense of human rights is a crucial component of democratic governance. They emphasize that various international and regional instruments, as well as national laws, have been established to uphold human rights principles. However, they argue that human rights protection can be challenging because certain human rights may conflict with others, making the pursuit of human rights a multifaceted endeavor.

In summary, the literature highlights the growth and prominence of human rights organizations worldwide and underscores their significant roles as advocates and defenders of human rights. Despite the considerable number of studies on human rights and these organizations, there is a scarcity of research focusing on the specific impacts of prominent organizations like Amnesty International. Most existing studies tend to aggregate all human rights organizations or categorize them as either domestic or international. This study breaks from convention by dedicating specific attention to Amnesty International.

Moreover, it is important to note that various sources cited in the text address specific instances of human rights violations in Nigeria and the role of NGOs and human rights organizations in addressing these abuses. These sources emphasize that despite Nigeria's commitment to international human rights standards, human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, denial of freedom of speech, and other abuses, continue to be prevalent.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study employs the structural functionalism theory to analyze the role of Amnesty International in promoting human rights and strong institutions in Nigeria. Structural functionalism posits that different aspects of a society's social structure and organization are interrelated and affect one another. In this context, it highlights the importance of well-functioning political structures and institutions in safeguarding human rights and strong governance. While Nigeria's political system may not have distinct and well-patterned structures, they are still of paramount significance. The theory allows for a clear understanding of how Amnesty International contributes to the realization of human rights and strong institutions within the Nigerian context by examining the relationships and functions within the system.

Furthermore, the system theory, as proposed by Gabriel Almond, views society as a complex system where each unit must perform its designated functions for the society's survival and development. This theory aligns with structural functionalism, emphasizing that all parts of the system must fulfill their roles for societal progress. Failure of any unit to perform its functions can lead to societal instability and hinder development. In the Nigerian context, breaches of peace and law and order pose significant challenges to development. The study underscores the need for cooperation among all societal units, including security agencies, to ensure the country's overall safety and development. Addressing issues such as unlawful killings, torture, and violence against women and children is essential for enhancing internal security and, consequently, national security.

In summary, the study utilizes structural functionalism and system theory to explore the role of Amnesty International in promoting human rights and strong institutions in Nigeria. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of various societal elements and highlights the importance of cooperation and effective functioning of all units within the system for societal development and security. The study also addresses key security challenges in Nigeria, underscoring the need for comprehensive efforts to protect lives and property.

**Methodology (Research Design)**

The study implored mixed research design where both primary and secondary method of data collection, the effort to acquire primary materials involve collecting information through the use of questionnaire and interview to assess opinions, thoughts and feelings on the subject of discussion.

**Population of the Study**

The target population for the study comprises community leaders, security men, vigilante and victims of human right violations and staff of Amnesty International in Abuja office. These targets of population were chosen because of their firsthand information close relationship with subject under discussion.

**Table 1.1:** Showing the Target Population

<b>Sampled area</b>	<b>Local Government</b>	<b>Population</b>
Kaduna	Birnin Gwarri	78
	Kajuru	65
Zamfara	Dansadau	69
	Shinkafi	67
Katsina	Jibiya	78
	Batsari	43
<b>Total</b>		<b>400</b>

**Source:** Researcher’s Field Work, April, 2022

**Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

As for the questionnaire cluster and simple random techniques was used in the selection of respondents for the questionnaire for the fact that the individuals and groups through which the desired information for this study were sourced from people who have understanding of the subject under empirical assessment. Going by the population of the study six (6) local governments were selected from the sampled three Therefore, the sample size of the study was 400 using Taro Yamani

**Techniques for Data Analysis**

Data generated through questionnaire was analysed with the aid of descriptive statistics to enable the researcher to present the data obtained in a significant way, which allows for easiest interpretation of data. While that of interview was qualitative

**Data Analysis**

Table 1.3 Response on issues Surrounding Amnesty International Claim of Human Right Violations in the Anti-Kidnapping Operation in The North-West

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Suspicion	62	17.18%.
western-centric	76	,21.05%.
Recurrent Demand	67	18.56%
lack of authoritative capacities	91	25.21%
Very low support	65	18.01%
Total	361	100%

**Source:** Researcher’s Field Work, April, 2022

Table 1.3 revealed the implications of these options in the dataset point to various challenges and concerns it appears that you have provided a table showing the frequency and percentage of different options in a dataset. The table revealed that the respondents view amnesty with Suspicion 17.18%. Western-Centric, 21.05%. While recurrent Demand making up roughly 18.56% of the total responses. However, Lack of Authoritative Capacities constituting around 25.21% of the total responses. This suggests that a substantial part of the dataset may be focused on discussing issues related to the lack of authoritative capacities. On the other hand, Very Low approximately 18.01% of the total responses. It implies that there is a significant concern within the dataset regarding the level of support available for something.

In summary, the dataset seems to be focused on various topics, with "Lack of Authoritative Capacities" being the most frequently mentioned, followed by "Western-Centric." Overall, the implications of these options in the dataset point to various challenges and concerns.

Despite the significant role Amnesty International is playing in Nigeria from 1967 to date, the organization is not without some criticism and challenges which have continued to affect the viability of the organization in the fight against human right abuse. The major criticisms against Amnesty International is the perception that the organization is western-centric (Conor, 2009).

This implies that the organization is driven by western ideologies especially as it relates to what constitute human rights. It is important to note that western cultures are often a subject of resistance in other worlds especially in the Middle East Asia and Africa, thus, the activities of Amnesty International in such cultures are looked with some suspiciousness. In many of such country’s membership for the organization and support is very low. Another challenge Amnesty Nigeria is facing is the recurrent demand by the citizen and government authorities for the organization to leave Nigeria. In August 2019, the organization was accused of being sponsored by the opposition party and taking sides with the nation's enemies. The protest was a result of rumours that they planned a nationwide protest by a coalition of civil organization. The protest tagged "Revolution Now" was supposed to hold August 5 across the country. Amnesty International, however, said they will not be threatened and will continue to fight for human rights and hold government accountable (Adepegba and Akinkuotu, 2019).

Another challenge facing Amnesty International and indeed other international human right groups is their lack of authoritative capacities. The Universal Declaration on Human Right is not binding on the Nigerian laws. Amnesty International can only draw the attention of the Nigerian government and international communities to issues of human rights abuses. Sometimes, the Nigerian government and regimes are very slow in taking actions, hence, requires more time and resources on the side of the organizations. The plethora of such cases might significantly slow down the progress of Amnesty International.

**Table1.4:** Responses on the Contribution of Amnesty International in addressing human right violation in the anti- kidnapping operations in the northwest

<b>Reponses</b>	<b>Respondent Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Campaign to promote human right	170	47.09%
Support for Mass Public Demonstrations	107	29.64%
Training of Local Groups	21	5.82%
Provision of Human Rights Education to Citizens	38	29.64%
Lobbying	25	10.53
<b>Total</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>6.93%</b>

**Source:** Researcher’s Field Work, April, 2022

Table 1.3 revealed that campaign to promote human right received the highest number of responses, with nearly 47.09% of the total respondents supporting it. It seems to be a popular choice among the respondents. Support for mass public demonstrations is the second most popular choice, with about 29.64% of the respondents in favor of this approach. Training of local groups is selected by a smaller percentage of respondents, indicating that it may not be as widely supported as the previous two activities. Providing human rights education to citizens has garnered the support of around 10.53% of the respondents, making it more popular than training local groups. On the other hand, lobbying received support from approximately 6.93% of the respondents, making it one of the less favored options in this survey.

Overall, the data suggests that the "Campaign to Promote Human Rights" and "Support for Mass Public Demonstrations" are the two most popular activities among the respondents, with a significant majority of support. "Training of Local Groups," "Provision of Human Rights Education to Citizens," and "Lobbying" have fewer supporters, with varying degrees of endorsement.

The secondary data also corroborated with the findings of the questionnaire that Amnesty International employs a range of strategies to advance and safeguard human rights. One of its techniques is letter campaigns, where members and supporters sign and send customized letters to government officials and policymakers, urging them to rectify human rights violations. These campaigns have become more accessible through online platforms like social media. The organization also supports peaceful mass demonstrations conducted by other groups, providing assistance to amplify the message of human rights issues. Moreover, Amnesty International engages in targeted campaigns that use various communication

channels to inform authorities about the results of their investigations and offer recommendations. Their annual reports for each country have established the organization as a reliable source of information on human rights issues and have even garnered the attention of international bodies.

Amnesty International focuses on training local groups to promote peace, stability, and human rights. They provide human rights education to citizens, believing that informed individuals are more likely to protect their rights and report abuses. The organization also engages in lobbying, systematically influencing policymakers to support human rights in their policies. Lastly, Amnesty International utilizes a strategy called "shaming and naming" to tarnish the reputation of human rights violators through public condemnation. By employing these diverse methods, Amnesty International aims to reduce human rights violations globally and foster a culture of accountability and justice

## **Findings**

From the foregoing data analysis, the following findings are made:

- The findings revealed key insights and challenges related to Amnesty International's activities in Nigeria. Notably, it highlights concerns about the organization's authoritative capacities, with 25.21% of responses emphasizing limitations in influencing change. Additionally, there are doubts about alignment with Western values (21.05%) and suspicion towards Amnesty International (17.18%). Recurrent demands for the organization to leave Nigeria (18.56%) pose further challenges, reflecting issues with its presence. Lastly, concerns about very low support (18.01%) for certain aspects in the dataset are evident. In summary, the dataset showcases a range of concerns, with authoritative capacities and Western-centric perceptions being the most prominent. These findings emphasize the challenges Amnesty International faces in addressing human rights issues in Nigeria, including questions about alignment with Western values, recurrent calls to leave the country, and limitations in enforcing human rights. Despite the significant role Amnesty International has played in Nigeria since 1967, these challenges continue to affect its effectiveness in combating human rights abuses and promoting change
- The findings indicates that among the surveyed respondents, "Campaign to Promote Human Rights" receives the highest support at nearly 47.09%, making it the most favoured approach. "Support for Mass Public Demonstrations" is the second most popular choice, with approximately 29.64% of respondents in favour. In contrast, "Training of Local Groups" receives less support, with "Providing Human Rights Education to Citizens" having more backing than training local groups. "Lobbying" is the least favoured option, with around 6.93% support. Amnesty International employs a range of strategies to advance and protect human rights, including letter campaigns, support for peaceful demonstrations, targeted communication campaigns, and the publication of annual reports. The organization also focuses on training local groups, providing human rights education, lobbying, and uses a strategy known as "shaming and naming" to publicly condemn human rights violators. These diverse methods reflect Amnesty International's commitment to reducing human rights violations globally and promoting accountability and justice.

The findings further align with their broader mission and aim to address human rights issues through a multi-pronged approach. They leverage public support and awareness through campaigns and demonstrations, inform and influence policymakers through lobbying and targeted communication, and work at the grassroots level to empower local groups and educate citizens about their rights. Additionally, their annual reports and the "shaming and naming" strategy serve to hold human rights violators accountable on a global scale. By employing this range of methods, Amnesty International strives to create a culture of justice and accountability while working to reduce human rights violations worldwide.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the hitherto mentioned information, it is evident that state security agents in Nigeria, which include the police, army, and state security officers, often collaborate with foreign nationals to commit various human rights abuses without facing consequences. These abuses are frequently associated with cases of rape, torture, inhumane treatment, and the use of excessive or deadly force to suppress heightened tension, particularly in North West. These actions clearly violate the fundamental right to human dignity. Furthermore, the security forces frequently employ excessive and unwarranted force to carry out their orders, often disregarding proper procedures, which resulted to an unjust killing of individuals. Amnesty International has raised concerns about these practices in the context of the anti-kidnapping operations in the North West, emphasizing the need for verification of these allegations. Are all outright violations of the human dignity which this paper condemns such.

## **Recommendations**

- i. The research recommends that countries, such as Nigeria, which have not yet criminalized certain heinous crimes, should consider doing so, with the caveat that interrogational torture may be permissible in a "ticking bomb scenario" under strict conditions, provided there is clear evidence, such as CCTV footage or a reliable witness, indicating that the torture victim possesses information that can save innocent lives but refuses to disclose it. In such cases, interrogational torture may be used as a last resort, given the urgency of the situation. While this approach may raise concerns about the potential for false evidence and abuses, the research argues that these issues can be addressed through judicial procedures. Just as self-defence can legally pardon taking another person's life in certain circumstances, a court can determine whether law enforcement agents acted on false evidence when using interrogational torture, ensuring that the rights and dignity of both the accused and innocent lives in danger are considered in a legal and transparent manner.
- ii. Amnesty International should do more around image management and establish a firm relationship with the Nigerian government and other places where the organization is seen as a tool for promotion of western ideologies.
- iii. There is also a need for Amnesty International to create more awareness and knowledge of its activities in grassroots areas of developing countries like Nigeria. This is because the top-down approach to fight for human rights is not a viable strategy. Locals need to understand the ideals of Amnesty as well as have easy access to engagement.

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