

PROTECTING CHILDREN IN CAPTIVITY: A SECURITY GOVERNANCE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR RESPONSE, RESCUE AND REINTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

On 27 May 2026 President Bola Ahmed Tinubu issued a Children’s Day statement addressing the abduction of children and teachers in Oyo and Borno states. The statement directed intelligence-led rescue operations, strengthening of school protection measures, implementation of the Safe Schools framework, and post-rescue reintegration support. This position paper analyses the statement as a policy intervention and examines the roles, responsibilities and duties of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and its security agencies in preventing, responding to, and recovering from child abduction. Drawing on Nigerian constitutional provisions, the Terrorism Prevention and Prohibition Act 2022, the Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015, the Evidence Act 2011, the Child Rights Act 2003, and the doctrinal works of Barrister Adebayo Akinade on security operations, criminal intelligence, communal conflict and strategic security, the paper argues that effective response requires a legally grounded, intelligence-led, community-anchored system. It identifies prospects, challenges, and provides actionable recommendations for institutional reform, inter-agency coordination, forensic capacity, and victim support. The paper concludes that the statement can catalyse measurable improvement only if translated into funded, audited programmes with clear accountability.

Keywords: Child Abduction, Safe Schools, Criminal Intelligence, Fusion Cells, Federal Government, Security Agencies, Nigeria, Rule of Law, Reintegration.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Child abduction for ransom, forced recruitment and ideological indoctrination has become a persistent feature of insecurity in Nigeria’s North-East, North-West and parts of the South-West. The 27 May 2026 Presidential statement acknowledges that children and teachers in Oyo and Borno remain in captivity and directs security agencies to intensify intelligence-led rescue operations.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite successive policies on Safe Schools and counter-kidnapping, implementation gaps persist: fragmented intelligence sharing, weak forensic capacity, unclear legal guidelines for undercover operations, and inadequate post-rescue support. Without defined roles and accountability for the Federal Government and security agencies, directives risk remaining declarative.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

Aim: To propose a governance and legal framework that clarifies the roles, responsibilities and duties of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and its security agencies in preventing and responding to child abduction.

Objectives:

1. Analyse the 27 May 2026 Presidential statement as a policy intervention.
2. Examine constitutional and statutory duties of the Federal Government and security agencies.
3. Assess operational requirements for intelligence-led rescue, school protection and reintegration.
4. Identify challenges and propose evidence-based recommendations.

1.4 Methodology

Doctrinal legal analysis, policy analysis of the Presidential statement, and synthesis of academic literature, including works by Barrister Adebayo Akinade.

1.5 Significance

The paper provides a roadmap for translating political directives into operational, lawful and measurable action, aligning Nigeria with international standards on child protection and counter-terrorism.

2.0 CONTEXT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT

2.1 Core Directives

1. Intelligence-led rescue operations for abducted children and vulnerable citizens.
2. Strengthening school protection: vulnerability mapping, state-federal coordination, rapid response links, community early warning.
3. Deepening Safe Schools implementation with clear reporting, responsibility and timelines.
4. Reintegration support for recovered children: medical care, counselling, education, dignity.
5. Whole-of-society engagement: roles for parents, traditional and religious leaders, youth groups, vigilantes, media.

2.2 Policy Significance

The statement shifts from symbolic recognition to operational directives. It creates political cover for inter-agency fusion, resource allocation, and community engagement.

3.0 LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Constitutional Duties

- Section 14(2)(b) 1999 Constitution: Security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.
- Section 33: Right to life.
- Section 36: Right to fair hearing and due process.
- Section 37: Right to privacy, subject to lawful interception under court order.
- Section 45: Permissible derogation for public safety, provided measures are reasonably justifiable.

3.2 Statutory Framework

Terrorism Prevention and Prohibition Act 2022: Criminalises terrorism, financing and support; Sec. 33 mandates inter-agency intelligence sharing.

Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015: Regulates arrest, detention and investigation; Sec. 29 allows arrest based on reasonable suspicion derived from intelligence.

Evidence Act 2011: Governs admissibility of electronic and forensic evidence.

Cybercrimes Act 2015: Regulates lawful interception and access to computer data.

Child Rights Act 2003: Domesticates CRC; mandates protection, rehabilitation and reintegration of children.

National Safe Schools Declaration 2019: Policy commitment to protect schools.

3.3 International Obligations

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.
- UN Security Council Resolution 2133 2014 on preventing ransom payments.
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

4.0 ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES

4.1 Federal Government of Nigeria

1. **Policy and Coordination:** Issue national strategy, allocate budget, monitor implementation through the Office of the National Security Adviser.
2. **Legislation and Regulation:** Enact regulations on criminal intelligence, undercover operations and data retention.
3. **Resource Mobilisation:** Fund forensic labs, fusion cells, Safe Schools infrastructure and victim support fund.
4. **Oversight and Accountability:** Establish independent oversight boards to review complaints and operational compliance.
5. **Diplomatic and International Cooperation:** Engage ECOWAS, AU and INTERPOL for cross-border intelligence sharing.

4.2 Nigeria Police Force

1. **Primary Responsibility for Internal Security:** Prevent and investigate kidnapping under Sections 271-276 Criminal Code and TPPA 2022.
2. **Intelligence-Led Operations:** Deploy Special Squads based on credible intelligence; maintain chain of custody for evidence.
3. **Community Policing:** Establish ward-level security committees and protected informant schemes.
4. **School Liaison:** Maintain rapid response links with schools in vulnerable LGAs.

4.3 Department of State Services

1. **Domestic Intelligence:** Generate threat assessments on kidnapping networks and terrorist affiliates.
2. **Support to Rescue Operations:** Provide technical surveillance and undercover support under judicial authorization.

3. **Counter-Radicalisation:** Address ideological drivers of child recruitment.

4.4 Nigerian Army and Air Force

1. **Support Role:** Provide airlift, perimeter security and tactical support in high-risk areas upon request of civil authority.
2. **Civil-Military Coordination:** Operate within parameters of the Harmonised Rules of Engagement.

4.5 Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps

1. **Protection of Critical Infrastructure:** Secure schools and public buildings.
2. **Community Liaison:** Support community early warning systems.

4.6 National Intelligence Agency

1. **External Intelligence:** Monitor trans-border kidnapping syndicates and financing flows.
2. **Information Sharing:** Provide actionable intelligence to domestic agencies under TPPA 2022 Sec. 33.

4.7 Federal Ministry of Education and State Ministries

1. **Implement Safe Schools Framework:** Conduct vulnerability mapping, develop evacuation plans, train staff.
2. **Reporting and Accountability:** Maintain incident reporting systems with clear timelines.

4.8 Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development

1. **Reintegration Support:** Coordinate medical, psychosocial and educational services for recovered children.
2. **Victim Support Fund Management:** Oversee disbursement with CSO oversight.

4.9 National Orientation Agency and Media

1. **Strategic Communication:** Counter disinformation, promote responsible reporting.
2. **Public Sensitisation:** Educate communities on reporting mechanisms.

5.0 OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

5.1 Intelligence-Led Rescue

- **Intelligence Cycle:** Planning, collection, processing, analysis, dissemination, feedback per Akinade 2021.
- **Fusion Cells:** State-level centres integrating NPF, DSS, NFIU, military and community reps, per Akinade 2019.
- **Forensic Capacity:** Digital forensics, DNA, ballistics to support prosecution.

5.2 School Protection

- **Vulnerability Mapping:** GIS-based assessment of schools in high-risk LGAs.
- **Rapid Response Protocols:** Pre-agreed procedures between schools and nearest security unit.
- **Community Early Warning:** Train community members on observation and reporting.

5.3 Reintegration and Victim Support

- **Multidisciplinary Care Teams:** Medical, psychological, educational professionals.
- **Continuity of Education:** Alternative learning pathways for displaced children.
- **Monitoring and Follow-Up:** Track reintegration outcomes for 24 months.

6.0 PROSPECTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. **Legal Mandate for Fusion:** TPPA 2022 provides statutory basis for inter-agency sharing.
2. **Police Trust Fund:** Can finance forensic and analytical capacity.
3. **Technology Adoption:** Geospatial intelligence dashboards and secure communication platforms.
4. **International Support:** Access to technical assistance from UNODC, INTERPOL, ECOWAS.
5. **Public Awareness:** Presidential statement creates space for responsible citizen engagement.

7.0 PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

1. **Fragmentation:** Siloed intelligence among agencies reduces effectiveness.
2. **Resource Constraints:** Inadequate funding for forensic labs and training.
3. **Legal Ambiguity:** Lack of clear regulations on undercover operations and data retention.
4. **Community Distrust:** Fear of reprisals limits reporting.
5. **Disinformation:** Fake security content undermines operations and public trust.
6. **Implementation Deficit:** Past Safe Schools commitments not fully executed.

8.0 COUNTERMEASURES, TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES

8.1 Intelligence and Investigation

- Target commanders, financiers and logistics networks.
- Use link analysis, pattern detection and financial forensics.
- Ensure evidence complies with Evidence Act 2011 for admissibility.

8.2 Legal Compliance and Oversight

- Obtain judicial authorization for interception and undercover operations.
- Document all operations for supervisory review and potential litigation.
- Establish complaints mechanism under National Human Rights Commission Act 2010.

8.3 Community Engagement

- Protect informants through witness protection provisions.
- Recognise and reward communities that provide actionable intelligence.
- Integrate traditional and religious leaders into early warning systems.

8.4 Strategic Communication

- Rapid debunking of fake news by authorised spokespersons.
- Public briefings limited to verified information to avoid compromising operations.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Enact Criminal Intelligence Regulations:** Define collection, retention, sharing and deletion protocols.
2. **Operationalize State Fusion Cells:** Mandate monthly joint assessments and legal review.
3. **Establish Zonal Forensic Hubs:** Fund digital forensics labs in North-East, North-West and South-West.
4. **Codify Undercover Operations Guidelines:** Require judicial approval and periodic audit.
5. **Create Victim Support Fund:** Ring-fence budget for medical, psychosocial and educational support.
6. **Publish Safe Schools Scorecard:** Quarterly public report on implementation metrics.
7. **Strengthen Oversight:** Empower NHRC and civil society to monitor operations.
8. **Enhance Regional Cooperation:** Operationalize ECOWAS intelligence sharing protocols.

10.0 CONCLUSION

The 27 May 2026 Presidential statement provides a clear policy direction for protecting children in captivity. Its success depends on translating directives into funded, lawful and coordinated action by the Federal Government and security agencies. A system that integrates criminal intelligence, community policing, forensic capability and victim support, anchored in the Constitution and statutory law, offers the best prospect for safe recovery and prevention.

The doctrinal framework developed in the works of Barrister Adebayo Akinade provides practical guidance for institutionalising this system. Legal compliance is not an obstacle to security but the foundation of its legitimacy and effectiveness.

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