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GENERAL

**Across Regions**

**Nearly 5,000 immigrants died in 2014 searching for a better life**

Nearly 5,000 migrants lost their lives this year in hope of finding a better deal for themselves and their families in another country, making 2014 the deadliest year ever for migrants, according to a report released by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The report says 4,868 people died on the journey to destinations where they believed a better future awaited them and their families, a figure that doubles the 2,378 deaths registered in 2013. The greatest number of fatalities occurred in the Mediterranean, where 3,224 people drowned in vessels that were unsuitable for navigation.

**IOM -** [**http://www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/news-and-views/press-briefing-notes/pbn-2014b/pbn-listing/iom-director-general-calls-for-a.html**](http://www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/news-and-views/press-briefing-notes/pbn-2014b/pbn-listing/iom-director-general-calls-for-a.html)

**Hundreds of M23 rebels escape repatriation**

About 1,000 former fighters from Democratic Republic of Congo's rebel group M23 have escaped from a camp in Uganda where they were being held as soldiers tried to repatriate them, the Ugandan army has said. The rebels escaped from the camp in Bihanga, about 300km southwest of the Ugandan capital Kampala, as they feared for their safety if they were sent back to the Democratic Republic of Congo, a Uganda army spokesman said. Several of the ex-rebels were wounded by gunshots after those in the camp refused to board army trucks sent in before dawn to take them to the airport, according to M23 chief Bertrand Bisimwa.

**Al Jazeera -** [**http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2014/12/hundreds-m23-rebels-escape-repatriation-2014121793440996998.html**](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2014/12/hundreds-m23-rebels-escape-repatriation-2014121793440996998.html)

CEE/CIS

**Ukraine**

**Prime Minister appeals for help from NATO, EU**

The Ukrainian premier said that, while visiting NATO headquarters in Brussels, he had asked the alliance for help in shaping a new defense and security strategy for his country. "It's difficult for us to fight with a nuclear state that is armed to the teeth," The Ukrainian PM said, accusing Russia of seeking to eradicate an independent Ukraine. Prime Minister claims that Russian aggression has caused Ukraine to lose some 20% of its economic output. The country has also had to dramatically increase military spending.

**DW -** [**http://www.dw.de/ukrainian-pm-appeals-for-help-from-nato-eu/a-18133326**](http://www.dw.de/ukrainian-pm-appeals-for-help-from-nato-eu/a-18133326)

**EU says Ukraine needs $15 billion, has limited ability to help**

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates Ukraine needs another $15 billion in financing to withstand an economic crisis but the EU has only limited capacity to help, European Commission President said on 17 December. An IMF team visited Kiev last week for talks on its existing $17 billion bailout package. The European Commission President said he expected Ukraine to request another $2.5 billion from the EU but he said the EU's member governments would have to chip in as the EU's executive Commission did not have enough money in its budget.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/17/us-ukraine-crisis-loans-idUSKBN0JV2DD20141217**](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/17/us-ukraine-crisis-loans-idUSKBN0JV2DD20141217)

**During visit, senior UN official pledges broad support for Government**

The top UN political official today voiced the Organization’s “unwavering commitment” in helping Ukraine address the range of political, humanitarian, security and development challenges it continues to face amid ongoing fighting in the country’s east. In late February 2014, the situation in Ukraine transcended what was initially seen as an internal Ukrainian political crisis into violent clashes in parts of the country, later reaching full- scale conflict in the east. The latest figures from the OHCHR, and the WHO, paint a stark picture of the reality on the ground for millions of people living in the regions directly affected by the conflict, such as Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Dnipropetrovsk, where hundreds of thousands of IDPs remain trapped.

**UN News Centre -** [**http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49635#.VJJkymgo7ct**](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49635#.VJJkymgo7ct)

**Uzbekistan**

**Investigate Uzbekistan’s forced labor: HRW**

The World Bank’s internal watchdog should investigate whether bank projects are contributing to forced labor in Uzbekistan, the Cotton Campaign said. The Cotton Campaign, a coalition of human rights, labor, investor, and business organizations dedicated to ending forced labor in the cotton sector of Uzbekistan, echoed calls that independent Uzbek groups made in a November 2014 letter to the Inspection Panel. The World Bank Inspection Panel will decide by 19 December whether existing bank projects benefit the forced labor system under which Uzbek authorities forcibly mobilize more than a million citizens each year to pick cotton.

**HRW -** [**http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/12/17/world-bank-investigate-uzbekistan-s-forced-labor**](http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/12/17/world-bank-investigate-uzbekistan-s-forced-labor)

EAP

**Cambodia**

**Alarm over surge in HIV cases in Cambodia**

Panic has struck a small community in Cambodia’s northwestern province of Battambang after more than 100 villagers, including 19 children, tested positive for HIV in the past week, officials said. Teng Kunthy, secretary-general of the National AIDS Authority, said that as of Wednesday, 106 villagers in Roka Commune had been diagnosed with HIV since December 8. Police are questioning an unlicensed doctor who has been accused by many in the community of about 9,000 people of spreading the disease by allegedly providing [medical treatment to patients using the same needle](https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/local-doctor-questioned-as-16-more-test-positive-for-hiv-in-battambang-74414/).

**Al Jazeera -** [**http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2014/12/alarm-over-surge-hiv-cases-cambodia-201412186440825825.html**](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2014/12/alarm-over-surge-hiv-cases-cambodia-201412186440825825.html)

**China**

**China approves experimental Ebola vaccine for clinical trials**

China has approved a domestically developed experimental Ebola vaccine for clinical trials, the official Xinhua news agency said on Thursday, citing the People's Liberation Army logistics unit. Scientists around the world are racing to develop Ebola vaccines after the world's worst outbreak of the virus. The Chinese vaccine is being developed by the Academy of Military Medical Sciences, Xinhua said, a military research unit which is also involved in developing a drug to treat the disease.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141218110150-wrn4f/?source=search**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141218110150-wrn4f/?source=search)

ESA

**Kenya**

**Angry lawmakers force delay in vote on Kenyan security law**

Kenyan opposition lawmakers disrupted a vote on Thursday to authorise tough terrorism-related measures that rights activists say threaten civil liberties and free speech, forcing the parliamentary speaker to postpone the session. Television footage showed members of the opposition yelling, tearing up papers and shouting down the speaker of parliament, Justin Muturi, who then suspended the session and said it would resume in the afternoon. Journalists were barred from the parliament's press gallery and the live transmission was discontinued.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141218103649-kyqg6/?source=jtTheWire**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141218103649-kyqg6/?source=jtTheWire)

LAC

**Across LAC**

**Tolerance of child sex crimes in LAC thwarts convictions**

Latin America must tackle a social tolerance of children being sold for sex work and the growing online sex trade to boost low conviction rates for child sex trafficking, a rights group said. ECPAT International, which campaigns against the sexual exploitation of children, said there are on average just nine convictions each year for child sex exploitation, including trafficking, in any Latin American country. There are no reliable data on the prevalence of children being sexually exploited in Latin America. Anti-trafficking groups estimate two million children are sold for sex every year, in a crime that all too often goes unpunished.

**Reuters –** [**http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/12/15/rights-latam-sextrade-idINKBN0JT22Z20141215**](http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/12/15/rights-latam-sextrade-idINKBN0JT22Z20141215)

**Colombia**

**Colombia rejects FARC's verification proposal for a cease-fire**

Colombia's government has welcomed a plan by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia to call an indefinite cease-fire but said it rejected the FARC's condition that independent verification be implemented for it to begin, it said in a statement on Thursday. Announcing its cease-fire plans on Wednesday, the FARC said it would call it off if attacked by government forces, though the government has repeatedly rejected calls for a bilateral cease-fire, leaving the viability of the offer in doubt. The FARC, which is in peace talks with the government, has said for its cease-fire to begin, it would need to be monitored by independent observers.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141218115014-uvxfk/?source=search**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141218115014-uvxfk/?source=search)

**Cuba**

**US, Cuba restore ties after 50 years**

The US and Cuba agreed on 17 December to restore diplomatic ties that Washington severed more than 50 years ago. After 18 months of secret talks, US President Barrack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro agreed in a phone call on a breakthrough prisoner exchange, the opening of embassies in each other's countries, and an easing of some restrictions on commerce. The Vatican and Canada facilitated the deal. Obama said he was ending what he called a rigid and outdated policy of isolating Cuba that had failed to achieve change on the island. His administration's policy shift includes an opening to more commerce in some areas, allowing use of US credit and debit cards, increasing the amount of money that can be sent to Cubans and allowing export of telecommunications devices and services.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/17/us-cuba-usa-gross-idUSKBN0JV1H520141217**](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/17/us-cuba-usa-gross-idUSKBN0JV1H520141217)

**Haiti**

**President meets with opposition amid unrest**

The Haitian President met with opposition leaders in a bid to stabilize the politically fractious country as pressure mounted on him to appoint an interim prime minister. Opposition leaders said they discussed how the President could implement the recommendations, which include renewing the membership of the electoral council, and freeing several people the opposition considers political prisoners. Two brothers who spent 17 months in prison after accusing the presidential family of corruption were released on 17 December afternoon. The Haiti President's administration also is drafting a list of candidates for an interim PM to steer the troubled country through political unrest.

**AP -** [**http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/haiti-president-meets-opposition-amid-unrest-27673606**](http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/haiti-president-meets-opposition-amid-unrest-27673606)

MENA

**Across MENA**

**UN and partners seek US$8.4 billion for new Syria programme in 2015**

As Syria's war heads towards a fifth year, the UN and partners today launched a major new humanitarian and development appeal, requesting more than US$8.4 billion to help nearly 18 million people in Syria and across the region in 2015. The appeal includes two main elements: support for more than 12 million displaced and conflict-affected people inside Syria, and addressing the needs of the millions of Syrian refugees in the region and the countries and communities hosting them.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141218101625-etmwp/?source=search**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141218101625-etmwp/?source=search)

**Egypt**

**Ninth Egyptian dies of H5N1 avian influenza: Health Ministry**

A 20-year-old Egyptian woman died from avian influenza on 17 December, the ninth death in the country from the virus out of 18 identified cases, the Health Ministry said. The Ministry spokesperson said the woman came to a hospital in the province of Assiut on 15 December "in severe respiratory distress". She was then transferred to another hospital where she died. Out of the nine other infected patients, seven have been discharged and two others are still sick in hospital, he said. According to the WHO, from 2003 through 2 October 2014, there have been 668 laboratory-confirmed human cases of H5N1 infection officially reported from 16 countries. Of these cases, 393 have died.

**Reuters** - **http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/17/us-health-birdflu-egypt-idUSKBN0JV2BH20141217**

**Iraq**

**ISIL 'executes 150 women for refusing to marry militants' and buries them in mass graves**

ISIL has executed at least 150 women for refusing to marry militants in Iraq, Turkish media has reported. A statement released by Iraq's Ministry of Human Rights on Tuesday said the militants had attacked women in the western Iraqi province of Al-Anbar before burying them in mass graves in Fallujah. Some of the women killed were pregnant at the time, according to the Anadolu Agency. "At least 150 females, including pregnant women, were executed in Fallujah by a militant named Abu Anas Al-Libi after they refused to accept jihad marriage," the statement said.

**Independent -** [**http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-execute-150-women-for-refusing-to-marry-militants-and-bury-them-in-mass-graves-9930766.html**](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-execute-150-women-for-refusing-to-marry-militants-and-bury-them-in-mass-graves-9930766.html)

**State of Palestine**

**Palestinian UN draft calls for Israel occupation end by 2017**

Jordan formally submitted to the UN SC on Wednesday a draft resolution calling for peace between Israel and the Palestinians within one year and an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories by the end of 2017. The Palestinian-drafted resolution was formally submitted to the 15-member council, which means it could be put to a vote as soon as 24 hours later, but it does not guarantee it will happen. Some drafts formally submitted have never been voted. Diplomats say negotiations on the text could take days or weeks. Jordan's UN envoy Dina Kawar said she hoped the council could reach a unanimous decision on the resolution.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141218023310-o010y/?source=search**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141218023310-o010y/?source=search)

**Syria**

**Syria, UN discuss ‘freeze’ in Aleppo fighting**

The Syrian regime is in talks with a UN peace envoy over a possible "freeze" in fighting in the northern city of Aleppo, UN and pro-regime sources said Wednesday. Deputy UN envoy Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy presented Monday a copy of a plan for[Aleppo](javascript:void(0)) to Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Muqdad, "and the Syrian side asked for time to study it," daily newspaper[Al-Watan](javascript:void(0)) said.

**Daily Star** - [**http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2014/Dec-17/281407-syria-un-discuss-freeze-in-aleppo-fighting.ashx#sthash.HIPnXT2M.dpuf**](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2014/Dec-17/281407-syria-un-discuss-freeze-in-aleppo-fighting.ashx#sthash.HIPnXT2M.dpuf)

**230 bodies “found in mass grave” in Deir al-Zour**

The bodies of more than 230 people believed to have been killed by ISIL have been found in a mass grave in eastern Syria, activists say. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said they were thought to be members of a tribe that fought the jihadist group in Deir al-Zour province in the summer. The mass grave was discovered after the Sheitat were allowed to return to their homes by IS leaders, it added.

**BBC** - **http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30515483**

**Yemen**

**Shiite militiamen seize state offices**

Shiite Huthi militiamen have stormed government installations in Sana’a, tightening their grip on power in the city they overran in September, witnesses said on 17 December. Gunmen from the Ansarullah movement occupied the headquarters of the state-owned Safer oil and gas company and barred employees from entering the premises, company sources said. The movement appointed a new chief for Safer, the country's largest producer of natural gas and second-largest oil producer, the sources reported. In another show of force, militiamen stormed the headquarters of state television and radio, according to sources at both media. They have said the move is part of their fight against alleged corruption.

**Daily Star -** **http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2014/Dec-17/281414-shiite-militiamen-seize-yemen-state-offices.ashx#sthash.AxBiAeKD.dpuf**

**Reuters -** [**http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/16/us-yemen-houthis-hadi-idUSKBN0JU16V20141216**](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/16/us-yemen-houthis-hadi-idUSKBN0JU16V20141216)

SA

**Afghanistan**

**Insurgents storm bank in south, killing 10 people**

Afghan insurgents stormed a bank in the country’s restive southern province of Helmand on Wednesday, killing at least 10 people including three policemen, authorities said. In the attack, in the provincial capital, Lashgar Gah, five suicide bombers raided the city’s branch of the New Kabul Bank. One of the attackers blew himself up at the front entrance to allow the other four in, said Omer Zawaj, the spokesman for the provincial governor. Once inside, other attackers fired at security forces, who arrived and surrounded the building, Zawaj said. Helmand police spokesman, Fareed Obaid, said three police officers were among those killed.

**BBC -** [**http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30519225**](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30519225)

**Kxan -** [**http://kxan.com/ap/afghan-insurgents-storm-bank-in-south-killing-5/**](http://kxan.com/ap/afghan-insurgents-storm-bank-in-south-killing-5/)

**Suicide bomber kills one on outskirts of Kabul**

One policeman was killed and two were injured on the outskirts of Kabul on 18 December, in a blast caused by a suicide bomber attempting to enter Kabul in a vehicle laden with explosives, an interior ministry spokesperson said. "A patrol was sent around 7 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. to look for the suicide car bomber, but unfortunately the bomber was able to detonate his explosives," the spokesperson reported. The attack took place in a village just beyond the airport, he said.

**Reuters -** [**http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFKBN0JW0B220141218**](http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFKBN0JW0B220141218)

**Pakistan**

**Pakistan court grants bail to alleged Mumbai attacks mastermind**

A court in Pakistan on Thursday granted bail to Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, the man accused of masterminding the 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai, lawyers told Agence France Presse. Relations between the two nuclear-armed rivals worsened dramatically after the carnage in Mumbai, in which 10 gunmen attacked luxury hotels, a popular cafe, a train station and a Jewish center. Pakistan has had five Mumbai suspects in custody for more than five years and the failure to advance their trials has been a source of particular irritation in perennially-frosty ties with India.

**AFP-** [**http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/159674-pakistan-court-grants-bail-to-alleged-mumbai-attacks-mastermind**](http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/159674-pakistan-court-grants-bail-to-alleged-mumbai-attacks-mastermind)

WCA

**Across WCA**

**Donors and WHO responded too slowly to West Africa Ebola outbreak – report**

WHO and the nations that fund it failed to respond quickly and effectively to the deadly West Africa Ebola outbreak despite repeated warnings by aid agencies, a UK parliamentary committee said on Thursday. Ebola cases are rising dramatically in Sierra Leone, and the House of Commons International Development Committee said the international response was still "being outpaced on all fronts" by the spread of the Ebola virus in the former British colony.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141218025831-ktz3m/?source=leadCarousel**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141218025831-ktz3m/?source=leadCarousel)

**UN warns 1 million people could be hungry by March due to Ebola**

Half a million people in three West African nations rocked by Ebola are going hungry and that number could double by March if food supplies do not improve, two [UN](http://bit.ly/1svRsCF) agencies warned on Wednesday. In Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, the countries at the heart of the worst recorded outbreak of Ebola, workers have been staying away from markets and fields for fear of spreading the virus that has killed more than 6,800 people since March. Border closures and quarantines are disrupting supply chains, hindering market access and exacerbating shortages, raising fears that one million people from a combined population of 20 million could be going hungry by March.

**FAO -** [**http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/272678/icode/**](http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/272678/icode/)

**Reuters** - **http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/17/food-ebola-africa-idUSL6N0U125M20141217**

**Sahel food insecurity top priority for 2015**

In December 2014, 19.8 million people in the Sahel are estimated to be food insecure, with at least 2.6 million having already crossed the emergency threshold and requiring urgent food assistance. Millions more are expected to see their food security deteriorate during the course of the 2015 lean season due to the exhaustion of stocks, pasture scarcity, food price variations, or livelihood erosion caused by recurrent crises. Projections indicate that in 2015, 5.8 million children under five will suffer from global acute malnutrition (GAM), of whom 1.4 million will suffer from severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and 4.4 million from moderate acute malnutrition (MAM). On average, one out of three children in the Sahel suffers from stunting. An estimated 571,000 children under the age of five die annually from malnutrition and related causes.

**OCHA -** [**http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/operations/west-and-central-africa/document/hno-sahel-2015-humanitarian-needs-overview-sahel-region**](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/operations/west-and-central-africa/document/hno-sahel-2015-humanitarian-needs-overview-sahel-region)

**CAR**

**Number of children associated with armed group soars amid conflict**

The number of children recruited by armed groups in the CAR have quadrupled since the outbreak of a civil war two years ago, a report says. Up to 10,000 children, some as young as eight years old, are being forced to fight, carry supplies and perform other frontline roles compared to around 2500 at the beginning of the crisis in December 2012, the research by aid agency Save the Children has found. Children recruited by armed groups often become victims of physical and mental abuse, and some have been ordered to kill or commit other acts of extreme violence. "Countless children have suffered appallingly, and continue to suffer from the violence, which is ongoing despite a ceasefire agreement between the two factions in July 2014," says the report titled *Caught in a Combat Zone*.

**The Age -** [**http://www.theage.com.au/world/child-soldier-numbers-soar-amid-conflict-in-central-african-republic-20141217-128wl9.html**](http://www.theage.com.au/world/child-soldier-numbers-soar-amid-conflict-in-central-african-republic-20141217-128wl9.html)

**UNICEF warns two out of five children without vital aid**

Two out of five children urgently needing humanitarian aid in CAR are without it, thanks to a critical lack of funding and continued conflict, a year after extreme violence tore through the country, UNICEFhas said today. “Children in the CAR are no longer making headlines, but over 2.5 million of them continue to live in constant fear,” said Manuel Fontaine, UNICEF Regional Director for West and Central Africa. “They have little access to essential services and rely entirely on humanitarian aid. As we prepare to mark the New Year, we must seize the chance to give these children a better future.”

**UN News Centre-** [**http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49636#.VJJsX60o7ct**](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49636#.VJJsX60o7ct)

**Violence, lack of cash prevent UNICEF from providing critical services to children**

A year after extreme violence tore through CAR, two out of five children in urgent need of UNICEF’s support are without vital humanitarian aid – according to the agency. UNICEF says shortfalls in funding and violence have prevented it from delivering critical services to thousands of children in CAR. UNICEF said Wednesday that it was unable to vaccinate 33,000 children against measles this year or to treat 5,000 severely malnourished children under 5. In addition, it could not deliver other basic health services to hundreds of thousands of people. The agency did give medicine to more than 1 million people and distribute mosquito bed nets to thousands of families. But its work has been hampered by violence.

**AP -** [**http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/12/17/violence-lack-cash-prevent-unicef-from-providing-critical-services-to-central/**](http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/12/17/violence-lack-cash-prevent-unicef-from-providing-critical-services-to-central/)

**UNICEF -** [**http://www.unicef.org/media/media\_78130.html**](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_78130.html)

**28 die in clashes**

Clashes in CAR between Muslim and Christian fighters have killed 28, left dozens wounded and sent civilians fleeing for safety, a Red Cross official said Thursday. The fighting began Tuesday in Mbres when a member of a Christian militia was killed by a grenade allegedly thrown by a group of Muslims, according to a pastor in the town, which is in the country's center. The fighting escalated when Christian fighters counter-attacked and members of the country's former Muslim rebel alliance arrived from a nearby town to join the melee.

**AP -** [**http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2879052/Official-28-die-clashes-Central-African-Republic.html**](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2879052/Official-28-die-clashes-Central-African-Republic.html)

**Nigeria**

**Boko Haram kidnaps at least 185 people**

Boko Haram has kidnapped at least 185 people from the northeast Nigeria village of Gumsuri, carting the hostages away on trucks towards the Sambisa Forest, a notorious rebel stronghold, two local officials and a vigilante leader said on Thursday. The mass abduction occurred on Sunday. Both officials, who requested anonymity, said the local government established the number of people abducted by contacting families, ward heads and emirs. A vigilante leader based in the Borno state capital Maiduguri, Usman Kakani, told AFP that civilian fighters who were in Gumsuri during the attack provided a figure of 191 abducted, including women, girls and boys.

**AFP -** [**http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/Boko-Haram-kidnaps-at-least-185-people-in-Nigeria-20141218-2**](http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/Boko-Haram-kidnaps-at-least-185-people-in-Nigeria-20141218-2)

**54 Nigerian soldiers sentenced to death for mutiny**

A Nigerian military court on Wednesday sentenced 54 soldiers to death for mutiny after they refused to deploy for an operation against Boko Haram Islamists in the northeast, their lawyer said. "They sentenced 54 to death and acquitted five," said prominent human rights lawyer Femi Falana, following a court martial that began on October 15 and was conducted behind closed doors. Frontline troops have consistently complained that they lack the weapons and other supplies needed to face Boko Haram in insurgent strongholds.

**AFP -** [**http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/159622-54-nigerian-soldiers-sentenced-to-death-for-mutiny**](http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/159622-54-nigerian-soldiers-sentenced-to-death-for-mutiny)

**Sierra Leone**

**Health teams scour Sierra Leone capital in Ebola drive**

Health workers in Sierra Leone began combing the streets of the capital Freetown for Ebola patients on Wednesday, moving house-to-house as the government launched a major operation to contain infection in West Africa's worst-hit country. President Ernest Bai Koroma said on national television that, as part of "Operation Western Area Surge", travel between all parts of the country would be restricted and public gatherings would be restrained in the run-up to Christmas.

**Reuters -** [**http://www.trust.org/item/20141217155427-bvsb5/?source=dpagehead**](http://www.trust.org/item/20141217155427-bvsb5/?source=dpagehead)

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