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The threat of girls' education

How should we respond to the attack on girls' education?

A futile debate about Islamism takes focus away from the assault of religious extremism on girls' education

"Boko Haram", which translates to "Western education is a sin" shocked the world with the kidnapping of the 230 Nigerian schoolgirls on 14 April. Outcries have been heard from all corners, including "Bring back our girls" marches and Facebook and Twitter hashtag campaigns. The girls have however still not been returned home.

Under Boko Haram's version of Sharia law, women should be at home raising children and looking after their husbands, not at school learning to read and write. It has repeatedly targeted places of learning in deadly attacks that have highlighted its fundamental philosophy against women's education.

According to writer Bina Shah, an award-winning Pakistani writer from Karachi, the debate around this incident should not become a matter of condemning Islam as condoning the practice of sex slavery. It should be added that other than the extremists,

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most Quran-believing Muslims want to see girls educated. Shah holds, "All of this rhetoric serves only to direct justifiable anger and ire in the wrong direction. It is a distraction from the reality that "Islamist" movements use the most powerful tool in their arsenal - not physical weapons, but the firm belief that their fight is sanctioned by God - to provide

justification for their illegal, violent and deplorable actions". The truth of the matter is that while this incident is primarily an expression of political conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government, the deeper truth is that the right of girls to

an education is under attack in Nigeria, but also elsewhere in the world. Shah further points out that the claims of Boko Haram and other extremist groups should not be ignorantly accepted as true and shared by all Muslims.

Shah points out that certain regions in Pakistan experience similar threats made against young

girls who want an education and are willing to risk their lives for it. She refers to the story of Malala Yousafzai, who was shot in 2012 for speaking up about education for girls and a 2014 incident where an extremist group called Tanzeem-ul-Islami-ul-Furqan has been making threats against educating girls in the Panjgur district of Balochistan. Here, a bus taking girls to the a well-known Panjgur private school, Oasis School, came under attack by the militants, who burnt the bus and subjected its

down girls' education or to face the consequences. The pamphlets declare female education as haram, an Islamic term referring to things forbidden in Islam." This in turn echoes the grim situation facing girls when the Taliban had overrun the Northern Areas, particularly Swat. Schools were similarly shut down and girls forbidden from pursuing their education.

The Nigerian government has similarly shut down several schools

to keep all children safe and able to receive an education.

Sources:

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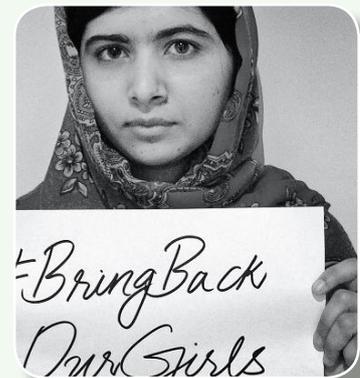
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driver, the school's head, retired Major Hussain Ali, to a violent beating. In reaction to the attack, all private schools have shut down temporarily in the district.

Another Pakistani journalist, Yousaf Ajab Baloch reports: "This terrorist outfit has issued pamphlets warnings all private schools in the district to shut

amid the growing panic over Boko Haram. Giving in to the violence is not the answer. At the same time using situations like the Boko Haram kidnapping, or the shooting of Yousafzai, or any other assault on the human rights of girls to debate Islam's deficiencies will not solve the problem. Governments should instead focus on increasing security at schools



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