

## **Human Trafficking in Nigeria: 20,000 Missing Girls found as Sex Slaves in Mali**

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Nigeria's anti-human trafficking agency says it has found around 20,000 Nigerian girls who have been forced into prostitution in neighbouring Mali. According to the agency, NAPTIP, there are between 20,000 and 45,000 kidnapped Nigerian women in Mali.

General Julie Okah-Donli, NAPTIP Director, said the women mostly came from rural areas of six different states in Nigeria. "There are over one million Nigerian residents in Mali, out of which about 20,000 are trapped into forced prostitution. The conditions are horrible. They are kept in the thick of the forest where they cannot escape and with the 'madames' watching over them."

The girls are reportedly lured with employment opportunities in various countries abroad such as Malaysia or Europe and then find themselves sold into prostitution in Mali. Some of the girls had even been sold as sex slaves in gold mining camps in northern parts of Mali.

The agency head said the department is working with Malian authorities, the International Organization for Migration and National Emergency Management Agency to send the girls back to Nigeria.

"We brought back 104 girls just from three ramshackle brothels, and those were the ones that were even willing to come. They were mostly between the age of 13 and 25, and they had been trapped in the country for many years," NAPTIP's Arinze Osakwe said.

"Since then, we have been working with local authorities and receiving reports from the Nigerian embassy in Bamako that the number of Nigerian girls trafficked to Mali has spiked tremendously," he said.

According to a US State Department report on human trafficking in 2018, Nigeria is a hotbed of illegal human trade. Nigerian victims of human trafficking were found in at least 40 different countries, according to the report. The report gave another shocking statistic that "80 percent of all female Nigerian migrants in Italy are or will become sex trafficking victims".

Nigeria's inability to protect its girl children was highlighted when the terrorist group Boko Haram abducted 276 girls from their schools in Chibok. The girls were then married off to Boko Haram fighters. After two years some 100 girls managed to come back to their families.

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