

A drive-by shooting outside a popular Melbourne nightclub in Australia early Sunday left one man dead, another critically wounded and two others injured, police said.

Five years after Boko Haram kidnap, 112 Chibok girls still missing

Aisha Musa Maina digs through an old bag looking for memories of her daughter Hauwa, one of the Chibok schoolgirls kidnapped five years ago by Boko Haram terrorist group in northeastern Nigeria.

All she has left are old papers damaged by dust and humidity, a school diploma and a small photograph, AFP reported.

The kidnap had caused the family such suffering and sadness it feels as if they were all abducted, Hauwa's mother told AFP.

On April 14, 2014, gunmen stormed the Chibok girls' boarding school, kidnapping 276 pupils aged 12-17, 57 of whom managed to escape by jumping from the trucks.

Their plight moved the world and became a key election issue for President Muhammadu Buhari who was elected a year later on the promise of defeating Boko Haram and returning the girls safe and sound.

After negotiations with Boko Haram, 107 of the girls either escaped, were released in exchange for prisoners or were recovered by the army.

Living in hope

Hauwa is one of the 112 girls of whom there has been no news.

Her family wonders if their daughter is still alive or if she was killed in a Nigerian army bombing, a claim made by Boko Haram.

She might have died of hunger or disease, given the army's long-term policy of blocking the group's supplies. She might even have been converted to the group's radical beliefs.

In a propaganda video broadcast by Boko Haram in January 2018, 14 women claiming to be Chibok girls, three of whom held babies, warned their families they would not be coming home.

Thanking the leader of the group Abubakar Shekau, who "married us off" they added, "We are the Chibok girls that you cry for... (but) by the grace of Allah, we will not return to you."

News is scarce in this small, remote town where the

to their pictures hung along the railings.

Over 1,000 children kidnapped

Five years ago the "Bring back our girls" slogan - fueled by social media - became a powerful rallying cry.

Now, the girls' plight takes its place alongside the many other tragedies in this country of 190 million plagued by crime and conflict.

Boko Haram has also grown in strength over the past year, after being weakened during the first years of Buhari's presidency - he was reelected for a second term in February.

The Daesh-backed faction of Boko Haram, has increased its deadly attacks on military bases, killing several hundred Nigerian army soldiers.

Last year on the fourth anniversary of the Chibok kidnapping, the UN Children's agency said more than 1,000 other children had also been kidnapped by the group since 2013.

In 2016, Human Rights Watch put the number of young boys - some as young as five - in the hands of the group at up to 10,000.

Some of these children are believed to have been released and sent to deradicalization centers as the Nigerian army made inroads into Boko Haram territory.

Whatever their fate, and that of the Chibok girls, a decade of conflict has taken a heavy toll.

The Boko Haram insurgency has claimed 27,000 lives in Nigeria where nearly two million people still cannot return to their homes and also spilled over into neighboring countries Niger, Chad and Cameroon.



Hauwa was one of the 276 schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram on April 14, 2014.

AUDU ALI MARTE/AFP

literacy rate is very low.

Hauwa's father Musa Maina has no idea what has happened to his daughter, although he insisted he has not lost hope.

"We heard that some parents were reunited with their daughters but ours (is) still yet to come back home," he said.

"We aren't losing hope but we are appealing to government to invest more effort to bring back our girls and reunite us," he added.

Elsewhere in the country, the passage of time seems to have lowered expectations of finding the girls.

At a big traffic junction in the center of the economic capital Lagos, drivers no longer pay attention

Two more fatal falls at Grand Canyon follow dozens of others

Two recent deaths in which men plummeted in the Grand Canyon in Arizona, US, follow dozens of apparently accidental fatal falls since the national park was established 100 years ago.

Michael Obritsch, of Santa Rosa, California, died April 3 after falling from the edge of the South Rim in Grand Canyon Village, near the Yavapai Geology Museum, The Associated Press reported.

His body was found 400 feet (more than 122 meters) below the rim, according to park officials.

A tourist from Macau, China, fell to his death on March 28. The man was at least 50 years old, park officials said.

The man was trying to take a photo at Grand Canyon West's Eagle Point - close to the Skywalk located on the Hualapai Reservation outside the park - when he stumbled and fell. The Arizona Republic reported earlier this week.

The body of a Japanese tourist was found March 26 in a wooded area south of Grand Canyon Village, away from the rim.

All three deaths still were under investigation by the Investigative Services branch of the National Parks Service and the Coconino County Medical Examiner, according to park spokeswoman Vanessa Ceja-Cervantes.

No amount of signage, railings or even verbal warnings will be enough to end the falls, said Michael P. Ghiglieri, author of "Over the Edge: Death in the Grand Canyon."

Sixty-four fatal falls have been recorded in the park's history. Ghiglieri said. Forty-nine of the victims were male and 15 female. Many deaths involve someone going around a guardrail to get closer to the edge or accidentally driving off the rim.

This number does not include any death that was ruled a suicide. Park officials currently don't plan to add increased railing or signage in light of the string of deaths, Ceja-Cervantes said. Ample signage is already commonplace in highly traveled areas of the canyon.

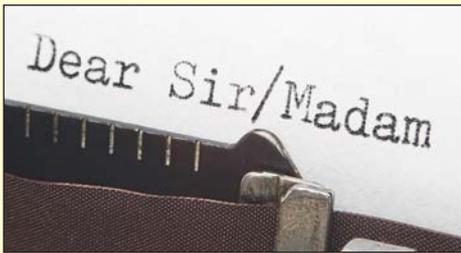
Only one person fell to his death in the park in 2018. Andrey Privin of Illinois died in July after he climbed over the railing at Mather Point, a popular viewpoint at the South Rim. Some visitors said they saw Privin throw his backpack over the railing and onto an intended landing spot before jumping. He fell 500 feet (152 meters) to his death.

About 12 people die each year within the park, Ceja-Cervantes said. The deaths can be attributed to everything from accidental falls, to heat-related deaths and drownings during rafting trips on the Colorado River.



ROSS D. FRANKLIN/AP

'Dear Sir' dropped from UK Ministry of Justice letters after woman complains



sky.com

"Dear Sir" has been dropped by the United Kingdom's Ministry of Justice's automated response to legal aid claimants following a complaint.

All correspondence sent out by the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) - part of the Ministry of Justice - will now begin with: "To whom it may concern", Sky News reported.

According to the Law Gazette, a female complainant wrote, "Historically, women would never receive official correspondence, so it made sense to use a generic mail salutation.

"These days women outnumber men."

The LAA is reported to have addressed the unnamed woman as "Ms." and responded, "A change is being implemented to tackle this particular issue and update the salutation."

The Department for Work and Pensions said it would usually know the name of the person they were writing to but if their name was not known it used "Dear Sir/Madam" or "To whom it may concern".

The Home Office and the Department of Health and Social Care said they used "Dear

Sir/Madam" where the person's name was not known.

Maxine Benson MBE, cofounder of Everywoman Ltd, an organization that campaigns to advance women in business, said, "The LAA does have a 50/50 board - so I am hopeful that there is an awareness that the voice, experience and insight of women needs to be included in the future of the LAA."

An LAA spokesman said, "We address people by their name when it is known and only use 'To whom it may concern' when it is not."

A weekly newspaper recently decided to drop "Dear Sir" from its letters page after a reader complained it was sexist.

But the Henley Standard in Oxfordshire was forced into a U-turn after it was readers bombarded the paper saying it was traditional and not sexist.

A number of national newspapers still use the salutation on their letters pages, including The Times, Telegraph, Spectator and Private Eye.

British teachers have reported worsening signs of child poverty in their classrooms with pupils coming to school tired, hungry, angry and confused.

Many children are wearing dirty and ill-fitting uniforms and suffering from anxiety and behavior issues that affect their learning, the Guardian reported.

This alarming picture is revealed in a survey, by the UK's National Education Union (NEU), of 8,600 school leaders, teachers and support staff. Nine out of 10 who took part agreed that poverty and low income were having a detrimental effect on their pupils' education. Half felt that the situation had worsened over the last three years, particularly in primary schools.

The picture is even more depressing if independent education providers are discounted, with 97 percent of respondents in maintained schools, academies, free schools and further education colleges reporting concern that poverty affected their students' learning. Over half (52 percent) said that the effect was large.

"The poverty gap has clearly got bigger," said one respondent. "The number of students displaying difficult behaviors has increased and poverty is most certainly a factor."

The survey was conducted by the NEU among its members, before the union's annual general conference in Liverpool.

Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the union, said a decade of austerity had resulted in more children in poverty, while the support structures for poor families were being destroyed. "The government must stop blaming schools for the impact of its austerity policies upon the most vulnerable in our society, and take

action to alleviate the suffering of the increasing numbers who are living in poverty," she said.

School staff who contributed to the UK-wide survey described their efforts to support their neediest students. Many provided food and personal hygiene products; others did washing and paid for uniform items.

Many said that the funding cri-

ments about their clothes.

"Dress-up days can be a very sad day," said one respondent. "The rich children show off and those struggling with finances are really struggling with the other children, so they may decide not to attend school that day."

Asked to identify the effects of poverty on learning, three out of four respondents said they saw

cause their parents had zero-hours contracts and could not afford to lose pay. Respondents worried about "latchkey" children whose parents were holding down multiple jobs. "Some students have mentioned that they have not had any food for two days, some come without having breakfast and with no dinner money but are not on free school meals," said one respondent. "I try to teach my phonics group as I am giving others cereal to eat," said another.

The survey also highlighted the shame suffered by poor children and their parents. "Some children will try and avoid coming in for packed lunch by hiding in the toilet because they feel awkward about their meal. Parents feel inadequate because they can't feed their own children, but they work so they get no additional help."

Other respondents described the effect of overcrowding at home, no space to do homework and poor sleep patterns, which left pupils struggling to concentrate and falling asleep in lessons. Children were anxious about their parents and suffered mental health problems. "They struggle to fit in and be a part of school life," said another respondent.

Nadhim Zahawi, minister for children and families, said that tackling disadvantage was a priority for the government: "Employment is at a record high and wages are outstripping inflation, but we know some families need more help."

"While all infant children can benefit from our universal infant free-school-meals program, we are making sure that more than a million of the most disadvantaged children are also accessing free school meals throughout their education - saving families around £400 per year."



GETTY IMAGES

Tired, hungry, shamed: Pupil poverty 'stops learning'

Children suffering from fatigue (78 percent), poor concentration (76 percent) or poor behavior (75 percent); more than half said their students had experienced hunger (57 percent) or ill-health (50 percent) as a result of poverty, and more than a third (35 percent) said students had been bullied.

Many of the affected children had parents in low-paid jobs who were unable to afford food and basic equipment. Children who were unwell were brought to school be-