



Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau

## BOKO HARAM'S SHEKAU REAPPEARS LOOKING DEJECTED IN NEW VIDEO

**KANO, Nigeria:** Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau appeared on video for the first time in more than a year yesterday, rejecting rumours about his death but appearing to signal his time in charge of the Nigerian jihadist group may be coming to an end.

In a message that contained none of the defiant bluster, taunts and denunciation of political leaders of previous videos and will likely be interpreted as an admission of defeat, the dejected-looking Shekau declared in the Hausa language: "For me the end has come". "This is a message of greeting and joy for you to see my face," said Shekau, who in March 2015 pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group in an audio message. "This is my desire: that whoever sees this will hear nothing but greetings between me and you. Only Allah knows the rest, as you believed (and) as you submitted. For me the end has come.

"This is only the message I want to send to you for you to understand that this is certainly I. This is why I did this. "May Allah protect us so that no hypocrite stands between us. May Allah protect us from the devil so that he doesn't achieve his evil among us. "May Allah protect us and may we stand firm on the path of Allah. I thank my creator."

### 'Farewell video'?

A military source in the Borno state capital, Maiduguri, in northeast Nigeria, told AFP: "Watching Shekau in this video, the message is clear: the game is over. "For this arrogant and boastful terrorist to speak in such a meek and subdued tone shows he has been trounced beyond his imagination.

"It is farewell video. He is just telling his fighters they should forget their illusionary Islamic state and lay down their arms. "He knows that with the current advance of the Nigerian military our troops will soon reach him". Unlike messages from the Islamists at the end of 2014 and start of 2015, which were slickly edited and closely resembled those of the Islamic State group, the new video was poorly shot.

It was also posted on YouTube rather than via Twitter accounts linked to IS supporters and websites used by fellow jihadists, which had become Boko Haram's preferred medium of communication.

The bearded Shekau, who looked thin, spoke to his followers in front of a lime green background, with the Boko Haram black flag superimposed in crude graphics.

He also makes no mention of the Islamic State or Islamic State in West Africa province (ISWAP) and uses the group's original name "Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad" or "People committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad".—AFP

# IN CHAOS OF LIBYA, UNITY GOVT ADDS TO DISARRAY

## UN, WEST PUSH FOR POWER-SHARING DEAL

**TRIPOLI:** It was meant to finally bring an end to Libya's political chaos and unrest, but the creation of a new UN-backed unity government has only added to the country's disarray. Desperate to resolve years of political deadlock that has allowed jihadists to gain an important foothold on Europe's doorstep, the United Nations and Western powers have been pushing hard for the acceptance of a Libyan power-sharing deal announced in December.

Under the agreement, Libya's rival administrations—one supported by the internationally recognized parliament in the east and the other backed by an Islamist-backed militia in Tripoli—are supposed to cede power to a new Government of National Accord (GNA) under prime minister-designate Fayeze al-Sarraj. But so far the only thing the two sides seem able to agree on is their mutual disdain for the new authority. "The birth of this government in this way has done nothing but worsen the political crisis... create new conflicts and further destabilize" the country, said Mohamed Eljarh, a Libya analyst at the Washington-based Atlantic Council.

The extent of the crisis was hammered home on Wednesday when UN envoy Martin Kobler was prevented from travelling to Tripoli to work on installing the GNA. "Again had to cancel flight to Tripoli... UN must have the right to fly (to) Tripoli," he wrote on Twitter, without specifying what had blocked

the mission. The GNA has not been formally endorsed by either parliament but it announced earlier this month it was taking office on the basis of a petition signed by a narrow majority of Libya's elected lawmakers.

The United States and its European allies have called on the government to swiftly move to Tripoli and take up power, threatening sanctions against those who undermine the political process. But neither of Libya's rival administrations has so far shown any willingness to cooperate. "Unless the international community can give the GNA control over Libyan finances, a powerful national army, and somehow make it legitimate in the eyes of the Libyan people, the GNA is poised to become the weakest of Libya's three competing national authorities," said Michael Nayebi-Oskoui, a US-based Middle East and North Africa analyst.

### 'A long way' from stability

Libya collapsed into lawlessness following the 2011 NATO-backed ouster of longtime strongman Muammar Gaddafi. Heavily armed groups rushed to fill the power vacuum and in mid-2014 a militia alliance including Islamists overran Tripoli, forcing a recognized government that had struggled to function to flee to eastern Libya. Eljarh said there was no hope of the GNA taking power in Tripoli "as long as the main armed groups are not ready to pledge alle-

giance" to the new authority. "The international community would need to be ready to provide it with military protection if needed," he said.

And any attempt to force the government on Tripoli would be "a major security risk likely to cause clashes between armed groups". The stakes are high. Just across the Mediterranean from Europe, Libya has become the latest stronghold of the jihadist Islamic State group. IS has seized control of Gaddafi's coastal hometown of Sirte and launched a wave of attacks, both against rival Libyan forces and across the border in Tunisia. The group claimed responsibility last year for two attacks in Tunisia—on the Bardo national museum and at a beach resort near Sousse—that killed a total of 59 tourists.

The lawlessness has also seen Libya become a favored jumping-off point for smugglers bringing migrants on dangerous sea journeys to Europe. Around 330,000 migrants have landed in Italy from Libya since the start of 2014, as Europe already struggles to cope with the influx of those fleeing five years of war in Syria. Despite the international pressure, Nayebi-Oskoui said Libya is in such a shambles that it is unlikely the GNA will make a difference soon. "Libya's fractured social and tribal structures require a strong and legitimate central government," he said. "Unfortunately we seem to be a long way from realizing that objective."—AFP



**JERUSALEM:** Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Fouad Twal (right) washes a clergymen's feet during the Washing of the Feet ceremony at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, traditionally believed by many to be the site of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus Christ, in Jerusalem's Old City, yesterday.—AP