

Interview with Abdoulaye Kaka

**General of the Police and Head of
the Central Counterterrorism
Agency in Niger***

The Review has chosen to open this edition with an interview with General Abdoulaye Kaka as a representative of State practice in counterterrorism detention. The journal chose to focus on Niger as a State that is affected by an ongoing armed conflict and which arrests, detains and tries suspected members of a non-State armed group under its domestic legal system.

General Abdoulaye Kaka has been working as Head of Niger's Central Counterterrorism Agency (Service Central de Lutte Contre le Terrorisme) since 2014. He previously worked for the judicial police in Niger as head of the anti-gang section before opening the first office of the judicial police in Zinder. General Kaka worked for the United Nations (UN) police forces in Ivory Coast between 2006 and 2012, when he became the Commander-in-Chief of the Niger UN police forces.

In his current role as Head of the Central Counterterrorism Agency, General Kaka oversees detention operations throughout the country, many of which involve suspected members of the group that calls itself Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP), also known as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad or, as it is most widely known under its former name, Boko Haram.

Niger has suffered the effects of the ongoing conflict between ISWAP and State forces in the Lake Chad region, resulting in casualties, arrests and repeated displacement among civilians. The government of Niger contributes troops to the Multinational Joint Task Force, which conducts operations against the group. At the same time, the government arrests and detains suspected members of ISWAP as part of its counterterrorism efforts. These detention operations are coordinated by the Central

* This interview was conducted on 29 June 2016 by Vincent Bernard, Editor-in-Chief of the *Review*, and Ellen Policinski, Managing Editor of the *Review*.

Counterterrorism Agency. Established in 2011, the Central Counterterrorism Agency, successor to the counterterrorism section of the judicial police, is made up of representatives from the three primary law enforcement organizations in the country – the national police, the national guard and the gendarmerie – and is principally responsible for counterterrorism investigations in Niger.

In Niger, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) helps people affected by conflict in the south-east or fleeing fighting in north-east Nigeria. With the Niger Red Cross, the ICRC delivers aid, treats the wounded, provides water and supports farmers. The ICRC also monitors compliance with international humanitarian law, visits detainees and helps them to maintain contact with their families.

The ICRC visits people held by the authorities in at least five places of detention in Niger. After the visits, the ICRC shares its findings on the treatment and living conditions of the detainees confidentially with the authorities and urges them to take steps to address concerns. The ICRC also helps bolster prison management capacities and health services for detainees through technical and material support, and round-table discussions on these topics. The ICRC helps detainees, particularly minors, maintain contact with their families. At the request of foreign detainees, the ICRC informs their families or consular representatives of their detention. Lastly, the ICRC covers transportation costs for security detainees returning home after their release.

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Can you tell us about your agency, its mission and your own role as its head?

My agency's job is to coordinate all the entities involved in counterterrorism operations, including the police, the paramilitary police, the national guard, the intelligence services, various non-governmental organizations and foreign partners – including French and American troops present in Niger. My role is that of facilitator, providing the necessary resources and instructions to the teams I work with. I also act as the face of the agency, such as in this interview, and attend talks and conferences on counterterrorism. Last but not least, I see myself as a problem solver.

Could you tell us a little about the situation in Niger and describe the counterterrorism measures taken by the government?

Prior to February 2015, Boko Haram had never set foot in Niger. They had attacked targets along the border with Nigeria and in Benin. We knew they were recruiting in

Niger and we even had a list of people – village by village – who had left their homes to join its ranks. But the recruits tended to stay in Nigeria, and Boko Haram did not come here. This was in part because many of the group's members had family in Niger. An attack on home soil would be tantamount to attacking their own families.

However, when Niger declared war on Boko Haram in 2015, everything changed. Suicide attacks were launched in the town of Diffa, along the road network and in the area around Bosso. From that point on, terrorism became a far more serious problem.

Some of the areas along Niger's northern border are controlled by Daesh. Fortunately, the zone south of Sabha, Libya, is home to the Toubou people, who are not terrorist sympathizers. In general, terrorists tend to be recruited from the Tuareg and Arab communities, who live a little farther north, towards Misrata. Members of these communities in Niger have joined the ranks of Daesh. They travel to Libya and return home with weapons. In fact, all three fronts in Niger are supplied with weapons from Libya. Even if the weapons are not destined for Niger itself, the terrorists who carry them must cross the country to reach Mali, Chad and Sudan. We know that, in such cases, arms and ammunition will certainly be brought into Niger. For that reason, we are particularly keen to set up a base in Agadez, a little to the north. Every day, people from Niger travel to Libya and return with weapons. It appears that they are trying to sell them. We are concerned that if this arms trade continues, and stocks of weapons increase, it will become a threat to public security – as it has in Mali – and could destabilize the region.

The western border with Mali is another front in the battle against terrorism. Several groups are active in Mali, with the Fulani and Tuareg groups being our main concern. A number of Fulani people have joined the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa to fight in Mali. Along the border, the villages are located very close to one another. There are clashes between the Daoussak (a Tuareg ethnic group) and Fulani communities. With the communities on either side of the border so close together, it is easy for the border to become permeable. Incursions into our territory take place on a daily basis. People cross the border to steal cattle and perpetrate killings, and then return to Mali. People also cross from Niger to Mali to launch attacks, and then come back. These cross-border crimes create a whole host of problems for us, meaning we have to closely monitor this front, too.

Consequently, our battle against terror is fought on three main fronts, not including the city of Niamey. There, suicide attacks have been reported on a regular basis – especially after the attacks in Ouagadougou. We have taken special precautions to protect the major hotels hosting Westerners or important guests. We have even had to take special measures to protect the city itself, which requires us to remain on constant alert.

How has your role changed since the conflict between Niger and Boko Haram began in February 2015? What new challenges are you facing?

My job as coordinator is to ensure that everyone involved in counterterrorism operations works together well. In the past, this was not a problem. However, since February 2015, when Niger declared war on Boko Haram, our problems have multiplied exponentially. We face greater challenges on all fronts, whether we are arresting suspects or managing human or financial resources. However, additional resources have not been forthcoming. In fact, my operating budget has been drastically cut, while my troubles have only multiplied. Our partners, including the European Union and the United States, had pledged to support Niger's battle against terrorism. Up to now, they have mainly sent us troops, but the promised financial resources have yet to materialize. The reason for this is both simple and unfortunate. As general elections were due to take place in Niger, most partners decided to suspend their donations until the new administration was formed the following year. Our problems, however, cannot wait. This situation has caused a great deal of friction and made it difficult to fund counterterrorism operations at all levels. But we have had to make do.

We face a range of challenges in our counterterrorism operations. First, we are fighting terrorism on three fronts: in the north, along the border with Libya; in the west, along the border with Mali; and in the east, along the border with Nigeria. Given that jihadist groups are active in all of these areas, we have to monitor all three fronts.

The second challenge concerns our relationship with our partners. The intelligence services, for example, tend to be very secretive. They may take a while to share information that the Central Counterterrorism Agency needs in real time. In practice, however, we do not usually make the initial arrest. In the north of the country, for example, it tends to be French, Nigerian or US forces. Occasionally the intelligence services also receive information that leads to an arrest. The law stipulates that a person may be detained or held in police custody for up to seven days following their arrest. If the team making the initial arrest holds the suspect for a week before granting me access, the statutory detention limit will have been exceeded before I can even begin my investigation.

Relations with policy-makers, who are my superiors, can also be problematic. Their decisions are sometimes at odds with the law. For example, a judge may decide to release a suspect because of a lack of evidence against them. But my superiors do not want to allow people who have been accused of posing a threat to return to a conflict zone, because they think it will heighten tensions and make the situation impossible to manage. In such cases, I have to explain that in a country which respects the rule of law, the political leadership needs to make it clear to the general public that when someone is released, it means that they have been cleared and should be treated as such.

Can you tell us how you go about capturing, arresting and transferring suspected members of Boko Haram?

We used to capture between two and five suspects at a time. However, from the moment we declared war on Boko Haram, we began arresting between fifty and 150 suspects at once, and sometimes as many as 200. In Diffa, I have a small unit, with only six investigating officers. Given the time it takes to interrogate suspects, perform searches and make neighbourhood enquiries, my small team cannot handle all this on their own. So, if we arrest fifty or 100 people in the Diffa area, in eastern Niger, we have to transfer them to our interrogation centre in Niamey – some 1,300 kilometres away. This poses a range of difficulties. For one, the Niamey team do not always know why a suspect was apprehended or who made the arrest. This often ends up in self-incrimination, as the suspect is the only source of information available to the investigating team.

Indeed, in the past, many arrests have not complied with legal standards. In order to arrest a terrorist suspect, it is necessary to gather conclusive evidence of terrorist activity, for example by following the suspect and monitoring their activities. In other words, we must be absolutely sure that the suspect is a terrorist before arresting them. These days, when an attack is carried out, especially by Boko Haram, there is a tendency to arrest anyone who raises suspicion or is found at the scene. A wide range of people and groups may make these arrests, including members of the military, the paramilitary police, the national guard, the fire brigade and any other forces in the area. However, these people are not investigating officers and in some cases, they are not aware of the legal procedures, or the need for evidence.

As a result, our investigating team often lacked the necessary evidence to move the case to trial. Detainees would be taken to Diffa, where they would subsequently be released by a judge because there was insufficient evidence against them. The public did not understand why this was happening. They would say, “These people are arrested, taken to the police station, and two days later they are free. The judges are not doing their job. They are letting terrorists go unchecked.” Some people fail to understand that a person cannot simply be detained on the basis of a suspicion, that judges need evidence.

To help shift the debate, I sent a radio message to everyone arresting terror suspects, stating that the following information must be provided to the investigating officers: the place and grounds for the arrest, the people present at the scene and the identities of the person or persons making the arrest. That is the essential information which the investigating officer must have to begin their investigation, given that they were not present at the time of the arrest. We have done our best to reconcile, together with the judges, the need to protect victims in the war zone around Diffa with the need to respect the rule of law.

The Central Counterterrorism Agency’s biggest problem is that we appear to be the only ones upholding minimum standards. People have even said to me, “Why not just kill these terrorists and put an end to it?” No. Even if we wanted

to execute these people, procedures must still be followed. Terrorist suspects still have rights. You can do anything to cannibals except eat them, or else you stoop to their level. We must not fall into that trap. I have to repeat this day in, day out, sometimes even to my superiors.

So is there a temptation to apply a form of summary justice, then?

Yes, absolutely. Here in the Diffa area, there's a tradition called *mettre le Coran* ["setting the Qur'an"]. Once the Qur'an has been set in a village, it is believed that, in the name of the Qur'an, anyone who withholds information from the authorities will be condemned to hell. This belief is deeply rooted in the Diffa region. The political authorities decided to set the Qur'an to encourage people to report terrorists. However, it quickly became excessive. Some denunciations were anonymous, so it was impossible to know the motives behind them. Allegations were bandied about that were impossible to verify, and many people ended up in custody. We had the unfortunate task of sifting through the suspects once they had been handed over to us. In view of the circumstances, we had to bring them before a judge as quickly as possible, so that they could be released.

That has not been our only problem. In order for a suspect to stand trial, the court has to have a judge. There are currently 1,255 suspected members of Boko Haram in custody, but only two judges on the special court established to deal with terrorism cases. Given that suspects cannot be held in pretrial detention for more than four years, we must find a way to expedite these cases. When the first case was brought to court, the judge ruled that there was insufficient evidence, and requested that an investigative commission be established and sent into the field to ask neighbours, acquaintances and colleagues for information on the suspect. As the area is a war zone, it was not easy to gain access. Our first attempt did not satisfy the judge. On our second attempt, we stopped at a location and send people to neighbouring villages to ask the village leaders to come and make a statement. The judge once again decided that the evidence was insufficient: the village leaders called to testify might have been involved in a dispute with the suspect. Thus, there was a possibility that instead of providing helpful evidence, the leaders were trying to get the suspect deeper into trouble. It is essential for investigating officers to ensure that the people interviewed are impartial and able to provide credible information. This lack of evidence bogs down the judicial process. In the meantime, the prisons are bursting at the seams.

Prison overcrowding and the backlog of cases are our main concerns at the moment. The committee we set up to discuss possible solutions with the public prosecutor recommended recruiting more judges. Each judge currently has more than 600 case files on their desk. This is far more than any one person can handle, especially given that cases relating to terrorism offences take a considerable amount of time to process. Although the court has at last begun processing its first batch of cases, progress is much too slow. To date, just over a

dozen of the 12,500 suspects held in custody have appeared before the court. That is nowhere near enough.

We also face another serious problem. Fifteen people have been released by the courts and are due to be sent back to Diffa, but the local population in Diffa seem unwilling to accept their return because they see them as terrorists. It is also uncertain how the former suspects might feel about those who reported them to the authorities. People need to be given explanations so that they can learn to accept one another and coexist in peace. It is important to brief everyone concerned: the detainees, the local population and the authorities.

Just imagine you are a soldier who has lost a comrade or witnessed atrocities. If you are told a suspect has been released, it might be difficult for you to accept that this person is now free to get on with their life. Instead, you might seek revenge, even if no evidence has been found to warrant that person's arrest. One solution would be for people released by the courts to remain in administrative detention, as sending them straight back to Diffa might prove extremely complicated. The locals never want to set eyes on these people again, yet the court has ruled to release them as there is no evidence against them. And I end up caught in the middle.

How have you handled the sudden influx of detainees in the detention centres that you manage? What problems have arisen?

The influx of detainees has indeed been a problem. Our detention facilities are equipped to hold between twenty and forty people, but from the outset, we have had to accommodate over 150 detainees at a time. This has had an impact on hygiene, management, food and accommodation. For example, the septic tanks had not been emptied for four years, and recently overflowed into the cells. We were obliged to empty the tanks, expand them and install new equipment. The scope of the work required is vast.

The national counterterrorism centre is located in Niamey, as is the special court set up to handle terrorism-related trials. All terrorist suspects must therefore be transferred to Niamey, first to the Central Counterterrorism Agency and then to the judiciary. We have units elsewhere in the country, but they merely serve as transit zones. This is why detainees have ended up in the Niamey area.

Initially, suspected members of Boko Haram were transported by the army to Niamey in trucks without any seating. The detainees had to stand throughout the 1,300-kilometre journey from Diffa to Niamey. There were serious problems caused by dehydration or as a result of overcrowding. Following these incidents, we changed our protocols. Now, only agency staff who have received the proper training and know how to handle detainees are allowed to be in contact with them. We have also ensured that detainees have access to water from jerry cans and have arranged several stopovers along the journey, to allow them to take a break, drink something and relieve themselves.

What specific measures have you taken to ensure proper detention conditions, apply judicial and procedural safeguards and prevent ill treatment? What internal obstacles have you faced?

Having learned from our initial experiences, we have taken measures to improve detention and transport conditions. First, we introduced medical certificates. We realized that the detainees who had serious health problems on the journey to Niamey had already been frail – either injured, elderly or sick. We have therefore appointed a nurse in Diffa to look after detainees and allocated a specific budget for health care. The nurse assesses whether detainees are fit to travel. If they are deemed unfit, they stay behind. The nurse now also travels with the detainees to provide medical care in case one of them falls ill on the journey.

A medical team covers detainees' day-to-day health-care needs. For example, it treats detainees with malaria or any injuries that might require medical attention. We have a pharmacy and all the equipment required to provide medical treatment to detainees.

We have improved the food we serve to detainees. Early on, we simply bought food from external suppliers. However, because of the influx of detainees, we were forced to set up our own catering service. Now, our in-house catering team prepares healthy food, such as beans and rice or millet porridge, to allow prisoners to regain a little of their strength. All prisoners are served at least three nutritionally balanced meals a day. We receive advice on what food to prepare from the ICRC delegates, who concur that the food we currently provide meets minimum dietary standards.

We have also improved how we manage our detention centres. Since our cells were not built to hold so many detainees, we have had to remodel and build new facilities. We emptied and repurposed our storage areas to accommodate more people and improve detention conditions. We have also tried to separate men and women, and to separate children from adults. Because we had no quarters designed for that purpose, we moved some of the detainees outside; for example, the women remain in the shade of the trees during the day, and return to the hall at night.

When interrogating suspects, your approach is to use investigative methods that comply with the law. How would you describe that approach and what are the advantages of the methods you use?

Our approach allows us to win the detainee's trust, so that they are willing to cooperate with us. First of all, we do not employ any extreme techniques – for example, we do not deprive suspects of sleep or food. On the contrary, we adapt

to their needs, for example with regard to their dietary requirements, or if they wish to have their hair cut or read a book.

We try to show terrorist suspects that we are not as bad as they might imagine – that we are, in fact, trying to uphold the law. I think that a lot of detainees, especially those who have already passed through the hands of the intelligence services before arriving on our doorstep, do notice a difference in the way that they are treated. They trust us more. This relationship of trust continues once the person goes to prison, as we continue to visit them. We bring detainees cigarettes and other small items, as this allows us to build trust. Sometimes we engage them in debate, for example on theology. We at least try to persuade them that no religion has ever commanded people to kill each other. We even engage in ideological debate because that is where the real struggle takes place: these people must be made to understand that they are on the wrong path.

For example, we asked a young Nigerian detainee about his role in Boko Haram. He told us that his job had been to guard prisoners waiting to have their throats slit. He could not sleep at night because he could still hear the screams of the victims. So we asked why he had joined Boko Haram in the first place. He said that he was promised money, a woman and a motorbike. In the end, he said, he got nothing. We told him, “You see? Boko Haram did nothing but lie to you. You have been left with nothing. You do not have the woman you were promised, the money you wanted or the bike of your dreams. Your hands are empty.” We worked with him to show him that he had wound up on a dead-end road, in order to encourage him to feel remorse and perhaps even turn his life around.

Much of our officers’ work is psychological and sociological. Indeed, one of the recommendations we recently made to the government was that detainees should be tried more quickly, as we believe that a significant number of them are essentially innocent, and merely happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Innocent people need to appear before a judge as quickly as possible, so that they can return home. If we are not careful, terrorism will become an even bigger problem within a decade or two. Just imagine that you have been arrested even though you have done nothing wrong. You then spend a decade in prison. On your release, you are likely to hold a serious grudge against society and to seek revenge. What is more, after spending time in prison with real terrorists, you are likely to become even more extreme in your views, more radicalized and more difficult to deter next time around. Combating the radicalization of detainees is one of our concerns. We are also discussing ways of regenerating the economy in the region around Diffa. We were forced to ban all trade in the area, and poverty levels have soared since then.

Is there any cross-border cooperation?

Yes – we are working with Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria and Benin. More than 420 Nigerian nationals are detained in Niger, including women and children. Since

our prisons are overcrowded, we are working with our Nigerian colleagues to repatriate some of them. The Nigerian authorities have come to Niger to count the detainees and take down basic information: the suspects' place of origin and the allegations against them. The preparations have been made to return these detainees to Nigeria. However, there are certain difficulties. For example, people from settlements along the border often find that the towns to which they are meant to return have been abandoned, and their inhabitants, who frequently include the detainee's family members, have taken refuge in Niger. Thus, it can be difficult to relocate refugees, especially those from border regions.

There are also various other minor problems. For example, the courts in Niger have begun to examine the case files of some of the Nigerian detainees. These people would prefer to stand trial in Niger rather than be sent back to Nigeria. However, we have to follow the procedures and send them back to Nigeria. Because the authorities in Niger are responsible for ensuring that detainees have access to a fair trial, we have obtained guarantees from the Nigerian minister of justice.

***What have been your greatest achievements and failures?
What lessons have you learned?***

I am pleased that, in spite of everything, we have managed to shift the focus of the debate. I have argued and discussed the issues with everyone involved in counterterrorism operations and, ultimately, I feel like my voice has been heard. For example, because I wrote three letters to the minister of justice to ask for the release of people held in detention after they had been cleared by the court, he finally ordered for them to be sent back to their families. I then personally organized their return to their villages.

Another one of our successes is that our partners – the armed forces and others – are starting to see that we are capable of enforcing the law. If we are uncompromising in our efforts, we will eventually convince them that our approach is best. I think we have been more or less successful in our endeavours, and that has increased my credibility not only with my superiors, but also with the general public. People now have confidence in our judgement. If we state, at the end of our investigation, that a suspect has no links to terrorism, he or she is released. No objections are raised, and everyone supports our decision. This is only possible because we do our work properly and stick to the rules. People may say whatever they like about us, but we remain level-headed and conduct our investigations by the book – before we make an arrest, we conduct a thorough search for evidence.

My team always upholds human rights. In fact, this approach has earned me visits from the foreign ministers of Germany and France. I was the only other official they visited, apart from the president of Niger. They did not even stop by the minister of justice's office! They had heard about us and saw how hard we

work. I think that they left feeling satisfied with the work we are doing to combat terrorism, even with the scant resources at our disposal.

The fact that we have a central agency to coordinate counterterrorism operations is in itself a mark of success. When I attend conferences and seminars, I am often surprised to hear that other countries do not necessarily have an equivalent agency. As soon as a response to terrorist activity is required, everyone runs around without really knowing who should be doing what. This lack of structure becomes a major problem. In Niger, on the other hand, everyone knows that they need to turn to me in all terrorism-related cases. I am the one who issues instructions on what action must be taken, who should take it and why.

I have put into action a range of projects that have helped protect human rights and combat terrorism. There are people who believe that it is acceptable to break the law in order to combat terrorism. In fact, if you violate the law, you encourage terrorists to think that rules do not matter. The point that I always try to hammer home is that we need to hold the moral high ground. If we fail to do so, we have nothing left to say.

Rather than failures, I would prefer to talk about “struggles”. For me, the biggest problem is that I sometimes feel quite isolated. I am somewhat marginalized. To put it bluntly, there are people who treat me as if I were a terrorist. However, I am aware that these people do not understand me. I know that some people want quick, but ultimately unsustainable, solutions. I constantly have to explain that these solutions would not work in the long term, but some remain unconvinced. Thus, I often feel isolated.

What has been your experience of working with the ICRC?

I usually compare our relationship to that of sparring cousins, based on well-intentioned criticism. I do not know whether the concept of *cousinage à plaisanterie*¹ is popular in Europe, but where I come from it is very common. I like to be challenged. I do not get upset with the person making comments about me, and do not take them the wrong way. If someone challenges me, it is because they want me to improve my behaviour. It is a way of showing affection.

As far as we are concerned, our relations with ICRC staff are similar to the friendly tension between cousins. They challenge me, so that I can do better. They ask me questions such as: what do you feed the detainees? These people are not properly dressed – why is that? There are too many people in here – what are the legal provisions relating to detention conditions? Sometimes, the ICRC provides me with information about ill treatment in detention centres, and I take action to correct the problem. Thanks to the ICRC’s questioning, I have been able to

1 Editor’s note: *cousinage à plaisanterie* is a common expression in West Africa signifying a social relationship that allows members of certain groups, often ethnic groups, to speak and joke with one another in a familial way, saying things that might otherwise be considered insulting but are socially acceptable because of the relationship between the two groups.

address certain issues. The ICRC is a good partner because it is impossible to have eyes everywhere, and the ICRC's delegates sometimes help me detect problems.

On occasion, they even help me solve problems. For example, they once informed me that detainees had nowhere to sit. I replied, "Look, I have done my best, but I am running out of resources. As you are there on the ground, you too could do something to help." The ICRC's delegates then provided me with detergent to clean the cells and plastic mats so detainees would not have to sit on the bare floor. The ICRC also brought insecticide to improve hygiene conditions in overcrowded cells.

The partnership we have with the ICRC is based on honesty. What we really appreciate about our cooperation is that the ICRC's reports are not made public. They are for our eyes only, so we know that they are truthful.

Do you have any other message that you would like to share with the Review's readers?

To conclude, I would like to stress that the real problems we face here in Niger are actually malnutrition, disease and poverty. However, at the moment, the focus is exclusively on combating terrorism, to the exclusion of all other issues. This is where we need to take a look at the role of developed countries such as France and the United States. Their policies have contributed to the current situation, much like they contributed to the problem of climate change. These countries' failure to respect industrial production standards has led to global warming.

In the meantime, we in Africa are the ones who suffer the consequences. We might have all clambered into the same boat, but we are not the ones steering the vessel. Neither have we been invited to contribute to resolving major global issues. Unfortunately, in order to tackle certain problems, you need to turn to the people who have caused them in the first place.

Another reason why it is difficult for us to deal with the problems we currently face is that the battle against terrorism should never have become our priority. I would have liked to have been a teacher, helping children learn to walk, grow crops and catch fish. Instead, I am trying to work out how to stop bandits and protect hotels. Recent history has been extremely cruel to us. Events have diverted our attention away from our real priorities. We never asked for this to happen. What have we done to history to merit such a fate?