

UN AID CHIEF: HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE SAVES LIVES IN NIGERIA'S NORTH-EAST, CIVILIAN SAFETY MUST BE PRIORITIZED

(Abuja, 12 September 2017): At the end of a two-day mission to Nigeria, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, said that the Government and humanitarians had made important progress in delivering life-saving relief to millions of people in north-east Nigeria. However, the complex Lake Chad Basin crisis will require sustained international support over the coming years.

“The Government’s leadership and coordination of the humanitarian effort is commendable. I welcome the Vice President’s assurance to me that the Government’s own food aid programme will be extended into the future,” Mr. Lowcock said. “The international system has rapidly scaled up and saved millions of lives. We reach 2 million people with food assistance every month and have provided hundreds of thousands of children with life-saving nutritional support.”

But the humanitarian situation remains precarious. “We have averted famine, but millions of people are still at risk if more international help is not forthcoming,” he said.

Mr. Lowcock is also advocating for the safety of civilians in the north-east of Nigeria. Violence has led to widespread forced displacement and systematic violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

“Since the beginning of the conflict more than 20,000 people have been killed, and thousands of women and children abducted,” Mr. Lowcock said, while visiting Gwoza, a town that Boko Haram had declared capital of its territory in 2015 before Government forces took it back the same year. The town’s population has tripled with the influx of 69,000 displaced people.

“Nine-year-old Fatima fled with her family to Gwoza four years ago. She told me they have been trapped there since and she just wants to go home. She hopes that day is coming soon, but even if many towns are relatively safe, there is more to do to make the rural areas safer. In the meantime, Fatima and millions of others like her will rely on humanitarian assistance.”

“At next week’s General Assembly in New York, I will urge world leaders to maintain their financial and political support for the Lake Chad Basin crisis, and to work with the Nigerian authorities to bring stability to the north-east and the region so that one day Fatima can feel safe enough to go home,” Mr Lowcock said.

Mr. Lowcock also visited Wege camp in Pulka in Borno state. “I met a woman named Rufkatu, who trekked for days to escape over the border to Cameroon when her village was occupied

by Boko Haram. She said she was receiving aid to survive, but really wanted just to go home – a two hour walk from Pulka, but into land where she may be at risk from the insurgents.”

Background

Some 17 million people require humanitarian assistance in the Lake Chad Basin, including 8.5 million in Nigeria’s north-east.

Mr. Lowcock travelled to Niger and Nigeria from 9-12 September, shortly after beginning his roles as Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator on 1 September 2017.

In addition to meeting Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo, Mr. Lowcock held meetings with Foreign Minister Geoffrey Onyama and other Nigerian officials, United Nations humanitarian agencies, international non-governmental organizations, and the diplomatic community.

For further information, please contact:

Russell Geekie, OCHA New York (on mission)
Samantha Newport, OCHA Nigeria

geekie@un.org / +1 917 331 0393
newports@un.org / +234 906 227 7205

OCHA press releases are available at unocha.org or reliefweb.int

