



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR MARK LOWCOCK****Opening remarks on Lake Chad Basin for the noon briefing – 28.09.17**

Good afternoon and thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to brief you on the Lake Chad Basin.

I went to Niger and Nigeria this month on my first mission as Emergency Relief Coordinator. I wanted to see for myself the humanitarian situation and response, and, most importantly, to listen to people who are affected by this crisis to try to bring their stories back to the General Assembly – which I did last week as part of my role as an advocate.

At the end of last year in the previous job I was doing, I thought there was really credible risk of a famine in the Lake Chad Basin area. There are nearly 11 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in parts of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria around the borders of the lake. Seven million people are severely food insecure and more than 2 million of them are still displaced.

The crisis of course has been fuelled by the eight-year Boko Haram insurgency.

In both Niger and Nigeria, I met with national and local authorities, with UN agencies, with NGOs and the diplomatic community. I was incredibly impressed with the work of courageous aid workers. There are thousands of aid workers supporting the relief efforts in the region, often under difficult and dangerous circumstances and they are reaching millions of people with life-saving aid.

The scale-up of assistance this year, which has been led by the governments in each of the countries and supported by international community, has averted what I think could have been a famine in north-east Nigeria, but there are still millions of people who have suffered a lot and continue to suffer, many of them just a step away from starvation.

In field visits to N’Gagam in Diffa in Niger (Niger the poorest country in the world and Diffa the poorest region of the poorest country in the world) and then in Maidugari, in Pulka, in Gwoza, all in Borno State in Nigeria, I met extremely vulnerable people displaced by the conflict who told me about the atrocities they had been subjected to that led them to flee their homes and told me about the fears that they still harbour.

Those people want to go home. They want a chance to rebuild their lives. But they want to do that when it’s safe to do so. I was pleased to have the opportunity to tell their stories to the leaders of the General Assembly last week, both in the “four famines” event that the Secretary-General and President Kim of the World Bank did and in the side event that we had just on the Lake Chad Basin itself.

Almost all of the displaced people I sat with – under awnings and trees -- in the region talked about as a priority their children’s need for education. And here in New York, the representatives of all four of the



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affected countries and donors agreed that education is critical to countering groups like Boko Haram. I would reiterate what the Deputy-Secretary-General said at the event: no child is born a terrorist.

Of course the crisis in the Lake Chad Basin is complex as countries grapple with insecurity, climatic shocks, extreme poverty, the legacy of inadequate governance across vast parts of the region.

But the way forward is also clear. Led by the host governments, we first need to sustain the effective humanitarian response, backing up the generosity and the solidarity, it is important to say, of the host communities.

Second, we absolutely need to see better protection for people. Access has improved in many towns, but there's also been a recent upsurge in horrific attacks on civilians in all four countries. In Niger, hostage-taking has increased, while in Nigeria children have been used as "human bombs."

And then, thirdly, we need to see progress on peacebuilding and development – those are the only long run solutions to the problems of the region.

Humanitarian funding is still urgently required so that we can continue providing life's most basic necessities for millions of people. I was encouraged by the announcements made last week of \$120 million in new support across the region, including \$100 million for the World Food Programme from the U.S. Government which we believe secures the food pipeline together with the commitments that the Nigerian authorities have made into 2018 in north-east Nigeria.

But we still need to find resources for the remaining requirements for interventions which we have prioritized quite tightly in all four countries for the rest of the year. Then we are going to need sustained humanitarian support into next year. The crucial thing is we don't let the gains we have made to be reversed, putting millions of lives put at risk, by failing to continue the effective response that we have had.

So that is one of the things that I am going to be talking a lot about to the Governments – the donors that generously finance us.

One thing that is going to stay in my mind for a long time is something said to me by a guy named Boulama. He is a leader in Wege camp in N'Gagam. He just said five words to me and they should ring in everybody's ears. "The international community can help". That's true. We can, we are and we should go on doing so.

I would be happy to take your questions.
