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**STATEMENT FOLLOWING CONDOLENCES VISIT TO ZABARMARI, BORNO**

*Maiduguri, 2 December 2020*

There is no word to describe how I feel after my visit to Zabarmari communities yesterday. It is with great sadness, but also indignation, that I met the families of the victims of Saturday's violent attack and their communities to extend my most sincere condolences, on behalf of the United Nations and humanitarian partners, and to commiserate with them on these atrocious circumstances.

Farmers and villagers I have met have retold accounts of unspeakable cruelty. Innocent civilians - men and women - were ruthlessly killed. Details on losses are still coming in and the search for missing people is still ongoing. More bodies are being recovered. Farmers have also reported some of the missing women may have been abducted. I call for these innocent women and girls to be immediately released and for their safe return to their communities.

With more slain civilians recovered almost every day since the attack, it is clear that this was an act of sheer inhumanity and abject cruelty. The perpetrators of this heinous and senseless act should be brought to justice.

I met His Excellency Prof Babagana Umara Zulum, Governor of Borno State, as well as their Excellencies the Governors of Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Taraba states and the Deputy Governor of Yobe State. We all agree that stabilizing and developing the north-east is not only important for the people living in these states but also crucial for the whole country and key to the sub-region.

Farmers and families I met yesterday in Zabarmari are in shock. Idris Ahmad, one of the farmers I spoke with yesterday, told me his pain and grief, the trauma farmers are going through as their sons, brothers, cousins were killed in atrocious conditions and many had their throat slit by assailants armed with machetes. They now fear for their life and that of their children. They have not yet gone back to harvest the farms. They have no other resources and dread that everything they worked for is now lost.

I reiterate our commitment to do our utmost to support the people of Borno State and particularly the most vulnerable, many of whom live in such remote areas and are taking inconsiderable risks every day to be able to have some food on their plate. If provided with the necessary resources and access, we are committed to do more to provide urgent assistance to those most in need in the north-east.

This attack on Saturday is unfortunately one of too many such attacks targeting farmers, fishermen and families who are trying to recover some livelihood opportunity after over a decade of conflict. Such direct assaults against innocent civilians jeopardize the ability for the most vulnerable people to survive the adversity there are facing, and which we are striving to alleviate. Saturday's incident is especially heart wrenching as we are recording this year some of the highest levels of food insecurity in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states. In these three states, the most recent official data indicate that 4.3 million people are currently critically food insecure and the number could reach up to 5.1 million over the lean season, between

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June and August next year. Rural communities in Borno State are facing untold hardships. Helping them to farm land and rebuild livelihoods are amongst our priorities and the only way to avoid the looming food crisis in Borno State. They and all other civilians need to be protected and provided greater assistance to survive the coming months.

The situation in the north-east is that of a complex crisis, with a humanitarian emergency and, for the past few months, unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences on the economy and social fabric.

The actions to be taken go beyond a security response. Nigeria is not the only country at grip with violent non-state armed groups in the Sahel. As we are seeing across the sub-region, a security response alone will not be enough to bring peace and security in a state like Borno, which has been facing over a decade of violence. All actors, including the international community, have to join forces and step up support to the people of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states. It is only by working together, saving lives, rebuilding communities, providing new opportunities, increasing peacebuilding efforts, developing the infrastructure, fostering education, that we will be able to address the root causes of the crisis, reduce insecurity and stop the violence.

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