

**MR MARK LOWCOCK
UNITED NATIONS UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN
AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR**

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REMARKS ON UNITED NATIONS DAY – UN HOUSE HANDOVER (*as prepared*)

Abuja, 24 October 2019

His Excellency, Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR, President and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, ably represented by -----

Your excellencies the Executive Governors here present,

Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs ably represented by -----,

Honourable Minister of the FCT,

Honourable Ministers and Ministers of State here present;

Assistant-Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women Asa Regner,

Your Excellency Joy Ogwu, former Minister and Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations,

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners;

Excellencies, Heads of UN Agencies and International Organisations;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

President of FUNSAN, Friends and Colleagues UN Staff Members;

Our Partners of the Media;

Distinguished Guests;

It is an honour to be here with you today on behalf of the United Nations Secretary-General for this special occasion.

The opening of UN House is a day of celebration. But it is also a day of remembrance. It is an opportunity for all of us to reflect on and remember the barbaric and cowardly act of terrorism that was carried out here - at UN House - eight years ago.

26 August 2011 was – first and foremost – a cowardly attack on Nigeria and its people.

But it was also an attack on the values and aspirations that the United Nations seeks to uphold.

Peace, freedom, prosperity, tolerance and justice.

The then-United Nations Secretary-General described it as, “an assault on those who devote themselves to helping others”.

So, the opening of UN House today is an act of defiance in the face of such terror.

We stand together to say that we will not be cowed by violence. We will continue to support the Nigerian people fulfil their dreams of a future of prosperity and security.

On behalf of Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary-General and the whole of the United Nations, I would like to pay tribute to the memory of the 23 UN colleagues, contractors, and visitors who lost their lives that day, and the many others who were injured.

Their sacrifice will never be forgotten. My thoughts today are above all with the families and friends they left behind.

Today, I want to dedicate this official handover of UN House to all those whose lives were irreversibly changed on that fateful day in 2011.

Dayo, an OCHA driver who I spoke to yesterday, was only a few meters away from the explosion. He told me that he does not know how he survived the blast and he still has to undergo regular treatment.

Baby Fesse was not even working for the UN. As a student, she had come to do some research and to visit her mother who was working here. Her life was forever changed when she lost her leg in the explosion.

The UN House security guards who continue to devote their lives to protect others every day.

And there are many others to whom we pay tribute today.

This re-opening of UN House is one small way we can honour them.

But today is not only about the past. Today we must also look to the future.

Next year, the world will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the creation of the United Nations. In commemoration of that anniversary, the Secretary-General announced today the launch of a global conversation on the role of global cooperation in building the future we want.

The dynamic voices of Nigerians are critical to this dialogue. We need your opinions, your strategies, your ideas for us to be able to deliver better for the people of the world that we must serve.

Nigeria became a member of the United Nations in 1960, only eight days after achieving its independence.

Since then, Nigeria has been an active supporter and leading player at the UN.

The newly-elected President of the General Assembly is from Nigeria. In fact, I met with him on Monday and he sends his warmest greetings.

Nigeria has served five terms on the Security Council between 1966 and 2015.

Your brave troops have been the backbone of numerous UN peacekeeping operations, and you remain an important troop contributor today.

UN House here in Abuja is a physical symbol of the close relationship between the UN and Nigeria.

The United Nations – above all - remains a promise.

A promise to the 202 million people in Nigeria and 7.7 billion people around the world of a more prosperous, more sustainable, and more peaceful future. A future of tolerance and co-existence whatever our differences of religion, race or tribe.

The international community has made huge progress in making the world a better place. We have collectively lifted millions out of poverty, eradicated deadly diseases and, in some places, rid the world of the scourge of war.

The 2030 Agenda is our framework for continuing these efforts, and I am heartened that Nigeria places such importance on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

But in too many places we still have work to do. As the Under-Secretary-General responsible for humanitarian affairs at the UN, I know that all too well.

There are around 150 million people across the world who continue to rely on our life-saving assistance and protection.

In north-eastern Nigeria, humanitarian assistance is reaching 3.8 million people, providing life-saving food, shelter, and protection.

On average, 2.1 million people are receiving food assistance every month. Over 2.5 million people have benefitted from emergency health services since the beginning of the year.

Today's reopening of the UN House in Abuja demonstrates our collective commitment to continue addressing the complex challenges facing Nigeria, west Africa, and the whole world.

Today, we renew our pledge: working together with the Government and people of Nigeria towards a more prosperous future for all Nigerians, leaving no-one behind.

Thank you.

For further information, please contact:

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