

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

**STATEMENT ON THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN
BORNO, NORTH-EAST NIGERIA**

25 October 2019

Over the past year, I have watched with growing concern the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Borno. Ten years of conflict and violence perpetrated by Boko Haram and other non-state armed groups have devastated communities. In my visits to Borno in September 2017 and October 2018, I met many of the ordinary people who have been the victims of this crisis. More than 7 million people currently need humanitarian assistance in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states.

Thanks to the successful efforts of the Nigerian authorities and others between 2016 and 2018 to regain control of areas previously ravaged by the insurgents, more than 2 million displaced people have been able to return home. But renewed violence, most of it perpetrated by Boko Haram insurgents, has sparked an upsurge in forced displacement in Borno, with more than 140,000 people forced to move this year alone. Many farmers have missed multiple planting seasons and more than 3 million people are food insecure.

I am clear that military and security measures against the insurgents are a necessary and legitimate part of the response led by the Nigerian authorities. Military action needs to be proportionate and avoid adding to the plight of civilians, huge numbers of whom have suffered terribly as a result of the actions of the terrorists and insurgents.

And military action on its own will not solve this problem. It is therefore extremely important that the Nigerian Government, including through institutions like the North East Development Commission, is also implementing wider measures to address the root causes of the crisis, relieve humanitarian suffering, and promote stabilisation, recovery and development. I strongly support these measures.

I am glad to have had the opportunity during my visit this week to review the situation with senior figures in the Nigerian Government, with the military and other authorities in Borno, with international, national and local NGOs, and others. With everyone I have met, I have agreed that

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NGOs - through their rich networks and capacity to reach people, and their expertise and experience in operating at the community level - have a very important role to play.

The UN and humanitarian partners have supported the humanitarian response in north-east Nigeria since the beginning of the crisis. In 2019, they have so far provided critical and life-saving assistance to more than 3.8 million people. They have been operating in the most challenging circumstances. A total of 38 UN and NGO workers, most of them Nigerian, have been killed since 2011. Ten aid workers have died as a result of violence perpetrated by Boko Haram and other non-state armed groups in the past 18 months. Six more are still missing.

All humanitarian organizations working in Nigeria which receive support from the international community operate in full compliance with international standards, including counter-terrorism related conditions, national laws, and humanitarian principles. Operating in that way is not only a matter of principle but is also required as a practical condition of funding from the major donors. And it is important to recognise that all the international NGOs working in the north-east are authorised to do so through the Government registration process and local approvals from the relevant authorities.

I have received assurances from the relevant authorities that the suspension of the activities of Mercy Corps and Action Against Hunger announced in September will be lifted in the next few days. That should allow an immediate resumption of life-saving assistance to nearly 400,000 people who have been without food and other essential help for the last month. The Government also plans in the next fortnight to bring together all the relevant stakeholders, including the UN and NGOs, to discuss the shared challenges in Borno. I greatly welcome all this. An enhanced dialogue between the Government and the international community, including international NGOs, in pursuit of the shared goals of bringing peace, promoting recovery, and assisting and protecting innocent civilians in the north-east who have been the main victims of the conflict is in everyone's interest. The UN's Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Edward Kallon, and his team based in Nigeria remain at the disposal of the Government and others in support of those goals.

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