



**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, STEPHEN O'BRIEN**

**Statement to the Security Council on the
Humanitarian Situation in the Lake Chad Basin**

New York, 12 January 2017

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Mr. President,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad Basin.

The humanitarian crisis across North-East Nigeria and parts of Cameroon, Chad and Niger, triggered by the horrendous, violent and inhuman campaign of Boko Haram, is deepening. Although Boko Haram has lost much of the territory that it once controlled – but by no means all – raids and suicide bombings targeting civilians continue to cause widespread death and destruction, fear, psychological and physical trauma, prevent people from accessing essential services, and wipe out livelihoods and vital infrastructure.

In July 2016, when I last briefed this Council on the Lake Chad Basin, some nine million people were in need of humanitarian assistance. Since then, the crisis has grown further, and there are today 10.7 million people in need of assistance, including 8.5 million in North-East Nigeria and another 1.6 million in the Far North of Cameroon.

Some 2.4 million people are currently displaced; the vast majority of them - over 1.5 million - are children. While many families would undoubtedly prefer to return to their areas of origin, continued severe insecurity, limited livelihood opportunities and lack of essential services still make this difficult, if not impossible, despite considerable encouragement, if not pressure, from local authorities. You will recall my last report when I evidenced how many internally displaced people like Mustafa – who I met at Konduga camp near Maiduguri – had been forced from their homes in Bama in Lake Chad Basin in mid-2015. When your home has been torched, there is no home to return to.



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As I witnessed during my last mission to Nigeria and Niger, about 80 per cent of the displaced are staying with host communities, who are themselves among the world's poorest. But they have nevertheless generously opened their homes to the displaced.

The protection needs that I highlighted during my briefing in July remain dire. Civilians face violations of humanitarian and human rights law, every day, including death, injuries, sexual and gender-based violence, arbitrary detention, disappearances, forced displacement, and forced recruitment. In North-East Nigeria alone, over 7,000 women and girls have been subjected to Boko Haram-related sexual violence, including forced marriage, rape, abduction and slavery. Upon their release, many of the survivors continue to be treated by their own communities as suspected Boko Haram sympathizers, and face deep stigma preventing them from reintegrating effectively into society. In response, the United Nations and its partners have provided care and support to 5,900 women and children formerly associated with, or captured by Boko Haram who have been victims of sexual and gender-based violence. However, these and other protection activities must be scaled up to ensure that the survivors receive the necessary medical care, psychosocial support and livelihoods support. We also need to work even more closely with the government and the communities to prevent stigmatization of these women.

Mr. President,

What started as a protection crisis has become also a major food and nutrition crisis – today one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world. One year ago, there were three million severely food insecure people in need of assistance across the Lake Chad Basin; despite the UN's and partners' mobilizing response, today there are 7.1 million. As the Nigerian Government's security offensive ratcheted up over the last 6 months, it has regained land and released people and communities trapped and captured at the tyrannous hands of Boko Haram, thus peeling back the visibility of the numbers of oppressed, hungry, abused people at a rapid pace, often more rapidly than the humanitarian response could accelerate, or for us to raise more funds from you, the international community, to keep up. Hence the staggering increase in these numbers of very vulnerable people. Equally the Multi-National Joint Task Force has driven many Boko Haram terrorists and agents back out of Cameroon, Chad and Niger, so concentrating more challenges and needs in Northeast Nigeria. For these reasons, food and nutritional insecurity have reached extreme levels especially in parts of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states in Nigeria, with 5.1 million people food insecure at crisis and emergency levels. In the worst affected and least accessible areas, severe forms of hunger have been reported. In spite of all the assistance going in today, it is clear from the range of forecasts that this situation may get even worse and the numbers in need still climb; these are the right planning assumptions. And this is all in addition to, and aside from, the chronic severe and moderate acute malnourishment across the wider Sahel



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region (to the West and North of the Lake Chad Basin) affecting millions of people, mainly children, women, elderly, the sick and those living with disabilities.

Children, in North Eastern Nigeria and in the Lake Chad Basin are particularly vulnerable in this situation, and reports indicate under-five mortality rates in individual IDP locations up to four times the emergency threshold. In July last year, I briefed the Council that 244,000 children in Nigeria's Borno State were severely acutely malnourished. Today, that number has grown to 300,000 children – and up to 450,000 children when include the two states of Adamawa and Yobe, as we must.

Despite these worrying trends, there is hope that 2017 will yet prove to be a turning point for the people affected by this crisis. As the nature of the conflict is changing, and more and more areas are coming under government control, now is the time to act decisively to expand humanitarian assistance and protection as well as basic services, and thus lay the groundwork for early recovery and reconstruction, to prevent this from becoming a protracted crisis. Over the past six months, together with each of the governments of the Lake Chad Basin region, we have taken significant steps forward in scaling up the humanitarian response. For example, the United Nations, with new leadership in Abuja and in Maiduguri, and its partners in Nigeria are reaching over 2.1 million people with food assistance, over four million with emergency primary health care, and over 1.7 million with water and sanitation, despite a difficult and indeed high-risk environment for aid workers. Since the beginning of 2016, UNICEF has provided the following support to children in crisis-affected areas:

- 160,000 children under five have been reached with life-saving treatment for Severe Acute Malnutrition;
- More than 4 million people have had access to primary health care services through Government-run health centres and clinics set up in both IDP camps and host communities;
- Nearly three quarters of a million people continue to have access to safe water, and more than a million people have access to sanitation facilities meeting international standards;
- More than 100,000 children have access to safe temporary learning spaces; and,
- Nearly 200,000 traumatised children have been provided with psychosocial support.

In support of the scale-up, since July 2015, within a month of my taking up this post, I have released over \$91 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund – the CERF – for life-



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saving humanitarian assistance to three million people affected by the crisis in the Lake Chad Basin. I would like to thank all those Member States that supported this vital work through their contributions to the CERF, and I would urge each and every one of you to join the three Security Council Members who have already made pledges for the CERF for 2017. Last December, during the CERF pledging conference for 2017, the President of Niger himself, H.E. Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou, described the CERF as a central and indispensable funding mechanism in support of humanitarian action to relieve the suffering of so many people across the Lake Chad Basin.

Mr. President,

I am pleased to report that we have a close cooperation with the governments of the affected countries, and that they are taking a fast increasing lead in the humanitarian response. The Nigerian Government, for example, appointed a Chief Humanitarian Coordinator in October 2016 and in the last few weeks has set up platforms both at the capital and the state level for close coordination between the Government and the humanitarian community. And just in the last week, Nigeria's Presidential Committee on Northeast Initiatives has now adopted a three-phase reconstruction and rehabilitation plan, with an immediate focus on comprehensive relief efforts, social stabilization and early recovery to address the needs of seven million people over the next twelve months. I welcome this and other initiatives taken by the governments of the four affected countries to provide immediate assistance to the people in need.

At the same time, several of the governments in the Lake Chad Basin are experiencing fiscal constraints as they face economic recession and are also involved in a costly military operation against Boko Haram. Their means to respond to the humanitarian crisis are thus limited and vastly surpassed by the scale of the needs. In September 2016, in the margins of the General Assembly, my office organized a high-level event where the Presidents of Chad, Niger and Nigeria, and a senior Minister from Cameroon all joined me in calling for humanitarian assistance for the Lake Chad Basin, which was followed by new pledges of \$163 million by donors at the same event. Thank you – good result, but insufficient.

Mr. President,

The regional humanitarian crisis that has significantly deepened and broadened with the despicable actions of Boko Haram takes place in an extremely fragile and rapidly changing part



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of the world, and one that contains many of the elements – poverty, unemployment and the absence of prospects and opportunities for youth – conducive to both violent extremism and protracted humanitarian need. There is a clear need for continued action and attention from the international community and indeed this Security Council.

In addition to the urgent provision of lifesaving assistance to those in need, we must also address the root causes of the crisis, particularly at the community level. Poverty, underdevelopment, and environmental degradation need to be addressed through longer-term assistance, supporting the sustained efforts of the governments of the affected countries. As humanitarians, we are ready to continue to scale up and to work closely with development partners, in line with the outcomes of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. I would like to call on Member States to ensure that development and political actors strengthen longer-term investments to address the root causes of the conflict.

This is the time to stand in solidarity with the people of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

This crisis is urgent. Without our action, our political engagement, and sustained humanitarian and development assistance, we will not be able to prevent this from becoming an even more protracted crisis. For example, supporting agriculture will be key to allowing people to re-establish their livelihoods, and to avoid creating dependency on aid. In North-East Nigeria, many farmers have missed three planting seasons in a row. It is vital to support them immediately, as doing so now would allow them to prepare their land and planting their crops ahead of the next rainy season in June.

As you are aware, initially, 19 months ago, it was extremely difficult, despite repeated events and statements, to get the global community's attention focused on the humanitarian issues of the people in Lake Chad Basin – it was even as though I was shouting into an empty room.

Today, the situation is different, as there is growing global attention and focus on the Lake Chad Basin, and a clear recognition – including by the governments of the affected countries - that this is a major humanitarian crisis and not just a security situation. In Nigeria, the epicenter of the crisis, the UN has a new and strong leadership in place, and a close coordination with the Government, as I briefed you earlier, and mechanisms to iron out tensions as and when they arise. And I am very heartened to learn of this Council's proposed visit to the area in the coming period, subject to arrangements being finalized.

Donors have demonstrated increasing commitment to the crisis in the Lake Chad Basin, contributing over \$238 million for the humanitarian response in the Lake Chad Basin in the second half of 2016, thus tripling their contributions compared to the first six months of the year.



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This led the appeal for the Lake Chad Basin in 2016 to be 49 per cent funded. But it is that – 49% – so we can only do less than half of what we know is needed. Despite this acceleration of contributions, which I commend, we need donors to dig even deeper. We also need more donors to come on board. And, as you will appreciate from all that, I have just set out, the 2017 humanitarian response plan and appeal for the Lake Chad Basin has doubled relative to the one in 2016 and reflecting the deteriorating situation in the region, to \$1.5 billion. Together, we simply must do more, and from here it is funding that is key.

In addition, I call on this Council to maintain and enhance its:

- Support to the national and regional action (that is security, political as well as humanitarian);
- Support to the conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin being organized in Norway on 24 February;
- Support to the development strategies to help sustain recovery and peace; and,
- Support to the engagement of local organisations, NGOs as well as international NGOs.

Mr. President,

Over the past twelve months, this crisis has not only persisted, but grown in dramatic fashion. Serious protection concerns remain and the food security situation is critical. In the face of this reality, we have made progress in scaling up the response, but it is still not enough. We now need to redouble our collective efforts to meet the growing needs. During my many travels to the Lake Chad Basin over the decades, I have been struck by the tremendous resilience and generosity of the people. Their ability to cope with severe hardship and shocks is second to none. My hope is that today's discussion will take us further – and further towards a collective response that is commensurate with the desperate plight, and the almost unique resilience, of the people in the Lake Chad Basin.

Thank you.