



# HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON THE LAKE CHAD REGION

23-24 JANUARY 2023

#LakeChadNiamey



Photo: WFP/Marco Frattini

## **Opening Statement by Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa UNDP Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Africa**

*[Check Against Delivery]*

Our host, Your Excellency Mr. Hassoumi Massoudou Foreign Minister of Niger;

Your Excellency Ms. Katja Keul, Deputy Minister at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany;

Your Excellency Mr. Erling Rimestad, Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway;

Your Excellency, Amb Mamman Nuhu, Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission;

Your Excellencies, the Governors of Lac Region and Hadjer-Lamis province in Chad; and the Governors of Tillaberi, Diffa and Tahua in Niger;

Your Excellency, Mr. Michael Köhler, Director General for European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO);

My sister, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya;

Honourable Ambassadors, Ministers and other Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All protocols observed,



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I am pleased to join my fellow co-conveners, Germany, Norway and UNOCHA, and our partner, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, in welcoming you all to the third High-Level Conference on the Lake Chad Basin region.

Let me start by thanking our hosts, the Government of Niger, for the warm Sahelian welcome and hospitality afforded to us.

This is the third Lake Chad Basin High-Level conference, and as a Sahelian, I am immensely proud that for the first time, this conference is convened in Africa, in the Sahel and in the Lake Chad Basin – where it belongs. This is significant, as we collectively prioritize the agency of the Sahelian people as they lead their respective journeys to peace, prosperity and development.

We gather today to join national, regional, and international efforts to spark a development transformation in the Lake Chad Basin. We are here to do our part to rescue the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). And we are here to ignite the Regeneration of the Sahel, including through the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Resilience and Recovery of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and endorsed by the African Union.

In this age of uncertainty, of pandemics, wars and climate stresses, we have cause for deep concern. The UNDP 2022 Human Development Report confirms that we are back to the 2016 poverty levels. In the Lake Chad Basin, tens of millions of people are impacted. The recent rise in food insecurity, flooding, drought, and the cost-of-living crises have aggravated an already dire situation; characterized by protracted under-development and violent extremism.

Ladies and gentlemen,



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What is clear is that our siloed approaches have failed the people and will perpetuate need.

The UN is doing its part to muster our collective force and step-up action on the humanitarian, development and peace nexus. The United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and its Support plan provide the ideal framework for our efforts. But this is beyond.

Excellencies,

I believe the elements of success are inherent in the people of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. I have travelled across the region and have seen first-hand people reclaim their agency, lives and dignity. Ngarannam in North-East Nigeria was destroyed by Boko Haram in 2015. Today, following a stabilization intervention, it is a thriving village with more than 500 houses, new schools, health facilities and markets. This is a tangible product of a partnership between the Borno State Government and UNDP, with support from the European Union.

This conviction I get from observing what our work with the Lake Chad Basin Commission has yielded – on stabilization. The first-ever Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region has yielded results.

In less than 18 months, the lives and livelihoods of over 2.5 million people have been positively impacted, including over one million people returning to their homes after being displaced for years. More children are in school, streets are lit, and businesses have reopened. We have witnessed local authorities build courts and restore police stations bringing back the tools to keep society safe and forging new



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state–citizen partnerships. Women and young people are now building new skills and improving their incomes. Our perception surveys confirm that people feel more secure in their own communities.

This tells us that it is possible to bring concrete expression and meaning to the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus. To get even stronger results:

We anchor our work in regional, national and local ownership; with the voices of the people, including women and youth, guiding us.

We must link stabilization with early recovery, peacebuilding, and development.

We need to undertake more systematic joint planning, implementation and monitoring. We must fight the temptation to edge each other out by the lure of financial resources, and to our donors and partners, please support the HDP in words and deeds.

UNDP is proposing the establishment of a flexible, pooled funding mechanism in the form of a Special Multi-partner Delivery Fund for the LCB to promote multi-partner action and harness commitments from the UN, governments, donor partners, civil society, and private sector stakeholders contributing to the implementation of the RS-SRR. It will leverage the operational structures and mechanisms of the RSF.

We must continue to invest in creating the conditions that give young people hope and a future. They should be able to imagine a life of prosperity – here in the Lake Chad Basin region.

Colleagues and Friends,



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There are immense opportunities for the people of this region, let's seize them!

In youth entrepreneurship, in sustainable energy, in trade under the African Continental Free Trade Area, and, in context – relevant governance models that are anchored on renewed social contracts.

Let us work for the Lake Chad Basin's full economic and social transformation. A life of peace and prosperity - free of fear and need for all its citizens.

Let us work to rescue the SDGs.

I know we can do it if we shift our gaze closer onto the SDGs – and firmly onto what is acceptable for human dignity.

I thank you.

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