



HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON THE LAKE CHAD REGION

23-24 JANUARY 2023

#LakeChadNiamey



Photo: WFP/Marco Frattini

Opening remarks by Joyce Msuya

Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator

[Check Against Delivery]

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to extend my deepest thanks to the Government of Niger for hosting this conference, and to the generous support we have received from Germany, Norway and Lake Chad Basin Commission as well as from our co-convenors UNDP.

Thank you also to the ministers from Niger, Cameroon, Nigeria and Chad for being here today to share your governments' perspective on the regional crisis. It is heartening to see so many UN agencies, multinational organizations, NGOs and members of civil society represented here today – a real testament to how united the world is in its desire to bring about real change in the Lake Chad region.

As we have heard, millions of people across the region are enduring appalling conditions every single day with conflict, climactic change and poverty causing unending misery.

But it wasn't always this way. At points in history, the peoples and communities that make up this region were well integrated. Goods moved freely between national borders. And trade between them flourished.



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Collaboration rather than conflict was once the norm.

But today the region is faced with a Gordian knot of problems. Extreme poverty, poor access to essential public services like health and education, a lack of trust, rising inequality, corruption, sectarian mistrust, and rapid depletion of natural resources and climate change. These are at the roots of the region's crisis.

And as a result, the traditional knowledge, spontaneous adaptation and sophisticated social systems that once allowed basin communities to cooperate and to adapt are breaking down.

Clearly, immediate humanitarian action is necessary to save lives and relieve the suffering that has resulted from this collapse.

But humanitarian action, as we have heard before, will not be enough to end the misery.

Unless we tackle the root causes of the crisis, the region's wounds will not heal.

And that's precisely where the power of this conference lies. Collectively, we have the resources, wisdom and skill to untangle the knot strangling the heart of Africa.

But if we are going to bring peace to the region in a way that allows people to prosper, then humanitarian, development, peace and stabilization efforts will need to be better integrated.

And to do this we will need to work very differently. We will need to work directly with communities. We will need to mobilize International Financial Institutions and



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the private sector, and really put the priorities of those affected by the crisis at the heart of everything we do.

I'm delighted that this conference is taking place in Africa for the first time. But with that comes tremendous responsibility, a responsibility that requires governments, partners, and communities in the region to take real ownership of the solutions, and to work together in ways that will make a real difference.

That's why the Regional Strategy for Stabilization Recovery and Resilience is so important.

It takes a whole of society approach that links regional challenges to regional solutions. It gives us a framework for regional and cross-border cooperation that ensures civil society, local communities and local governments can participate directly in solving the crisis.

This is the path that leads back to the era of collaboration and cooperation that this region once enjoyed.

For this strategy to succeed, the voices of the most vulnerable – the women and young people who have borne such a terrible cost – will need to be heard and their leaders empowered.

The millions of people displaced by the crisis will need more than just food security and protection; they will need education, training, access to health, and jobs. They will need to enjoy the same rights, the same opportunities as the people whose communities they're joining.



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And the region will need to find a common approach to re-integrating and reconciling former members of armed groups so that the cycle of violence can end and the intergenerational trauma it has caused can begin to heal.

But the strategy laid out in the Regional Strategy for Stabilization will fall flat unless it is properly funded. That's why we're urgently calling on the international community to support the region's efforts to end the crisis.

These efforts are unlikely to succeed without funding that is flexible, multi-year and designed to ensure the maximum amount of coordination among humanitarian, development, peace and stabilization actors.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Short term fixes are no longer possible. Many of the climactic changes we see today are now irreversible.

What we now need is a deep and long-term commitment to building lasting resilience to the shocks we know are coming and the dramatic changes that are already causing so much misery.

This means investing in a region whose fate affects the entire Sahel, whose future has profound implications for peace and security in Africa and beyond. Our commitment must be measured in decades, and not years.

Untangling the region's knot of complex problems will require us to cut to the very roots of the crisis. If we can tackle the social, economic and political marginalization at its heart, then we can untie the loop of endless suffering and return to a past of collaboration and prosperity.



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This is how we build resilience in a region clamouring for change – this is how we get the heart of Africa beating once again.

Thank you very much.

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