

Statement by Ms. Mary-Ellen McGroarty,

UN Resident Coordinator a.i.

Stabilization Conference, Opening ceremony, 2 November 2017

His Excellency, Mister Prime Minister of the Republic of Chad,
His Excellency, the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security,
Mister the Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission,
Excellences,

Dear Members of the Government,

Dear Representatives of international institutions, UN agencies and non-governmental organizations,

Distinguished Guests, Dear Participants,

It is my great pleasure and honor to be here today, among so many key stakeholders, to discuss how we can work together towards long-term solutions to the multi-faceted crisis in the Lake Chad Basin. Defining a collective and regional framework for stabilization, one that includes ongoing humanitarian emergency action and integrates that with peacebuilding and development in affected areas, is a timely and critical task. On behalf of the United Nations System, I would like to thank the African Union and the Lake Chad Basin Commission for such an initiative and reaffirm the UN's commitment to such an essential process.

The United Nations and their partners are **actively engaged alongside national and local authorities throughout the Lake Chad Basin**, striving to alleviate the suffering of 2.3 million people who have had to flee their homes, and support the solidarity of millions of people whose communities are hosting them and sharing their scarce resources. .

Throughout the four countries, 154 humanitarian organizations, including UN agencies, international and national NGOs, and the Red Cross movement, are responding to needs. Through our assistance programmes, coordination mechanisms and regular contacts with communities, we have an in-depth and up-to-date analysis of the situation, of the multi-sectoral needs and aspirations of both displaced people and host communities.

From this experience and interactions with affected populations comes one major insight: **the key to the stabilization of the region will be local development.** As low development and inexistent economic opportunities have been the underlying drivers of conflict and the current crisis, investment in local development, in education and job creation will contribute to long-term recovery and stability.

Of course, we do need a truly integrated approach to stabilization, including humanitarian, development, security and peacebuilding interventions, sequenced and implemented based on each country's situation. Security actors have a key role to play in the stabilization process. Alongside the military offensive, ensuring the protection of civilians involves strengthening civilian policing and the rule of law in both displacement and return areas. The current regional context, marked by persistent insecurity, a surge in attacks against civilian populations, and grave human rights violations, including gender-based violence (sometimes perpetrated by men in uniform), requires a strengthened attention to and a comprehensive perspective on protection issues.

While we look to the future and seek to stabilize the Lake Chad Basin, we must remember that **humanitarian needs are still very high** and likely not to decrease in the short term. For we should not forget that across the Lake Chad Basin, some 10.7 million people currently require humanitarian assistance, including 7.2 million severely food insecure people. These people fight every day for their survival, their access to food, water and essential health services. Humanitarian aid has been significantly scaled up, reaching more people with more support. But more is needed and gains are still highly fragile. Alongside development and military action, a strong, sustained humanitarian response bringing life-saving support to the most vulnerable, including in the most remote and difficult-to-reach areas, remains a priority. I speak today to instill some sense of urgency. Effective stabilization will require more action and funding for development *alongside* – not instead of – more funding for humanitarian action. To address the most urgent needs until the end of 2017, UN agencies and NGOs still require \$661M across the four countries. If we do not meet their vital needs now, some might never see the results of our stabilization efforts.

Then, to address the root causes of the crisis we need development action to be significantly stepped up. In Chad, the Humanitarian Country Team together with local authorities has developed **a short list of priorities in the Lac region**, which highlights the need to foster local development and improve existing social services, while maintaining a humanitarian response at scale. The humanitarian community urgently calls for a **strengthened engagement of development actors in the region**.

Critical to stabilization will be finding long term solutions to **displacement** issues. While displacements continue in some areas of the Lake Chad Basin, return dynamics have also been observed. As enshrined in the Kampala Convention and in the Abuja declaration, Governments have committed to **facilitating voluntary returns** and ensuring security and dignified living conditions in return areas. The latter point entails expansion of essential social services, support to rebuild livelihoods and economic activities, access to land ... – all aspects for which development actors have a key role to play alongside Governments. For displaced people who do not wish to return, it is essential to **promote their integration into host communities**.

Let us also reflect together on another key issue that requires a regional approach - the inclusion of **people formerly associated with Boko Haram**. In Chad, over 1,300 people have allegedly surrendered or declared themselves victims of Boko Haram, including a majority of women and children. Other Lake Chad Basin countries are facing a similar situation. Developing a regional mechanism and common standards for the treatment of these individuals, from assessing their profiles, identifying their potential vulnerabilities and ensuring their reintegration into society, is essential. I welcome the ongoing discussions between the United Nations and their partners to progress on this issue.

The engagement of all of us, from political authorities to humanitarian, development and security actors, is essential to achieve peace, stability and development in the Lake Chad region. In line with the commitments taken during the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, we must adopt a “**new way of working**” and work in a collaborative manner to address

vital human needs while reducing risks and vulnerabilities in the long term, and preventing future conflicts. This joined-up approach will contribute to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals in the Lake Chad Basin – a region which should be a priority for the entire international community, who committed to focusing on the most vulnerable people through the principle of “leaving no one behind”, which is at the core of the 2030 Agenda.

Today we mark a milestone. I feel privileged and look forward to working together over the next few days to define an **ambitious strategy to meet our collective goal**: create conditions for people of the Lake Chad Basin to live in dignity and prosperity.

Thank you.