

Briefing to the Security Council on the impact of climate change and desertification on peace and security

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Mr. President,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief the Council on challenges to peace, security and stability in West Africa, particularly in the Sahel region. I speak to you from Niamey, in Niger, where I have travelled as part of a tour of five Sahelian countries who are on the front line of humanity's struggle with climate change. I will be travelling to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, right after this briefing, and will be sure to brief my hosts on the Council's concern for the impact of climate change on peace and security in this region.

West Africa and the Sahel have for some time now been faced with multifaceted challenges. From Dakar to Djibouti, climate change is one of the most important of these challenges as it directly affects, through its impact on societies and their livelihoods, security, development and stability. In this context, climate change becomes a fundamental threat to human security. In the maritime domain, natural resources are under-regulated and over-exploited, and criminal activities and piracy are threatening security and economic activities. Erosion and rising sea levels constitute another serious threat.

Both regions experience various unresolved conflicts ranging from the renewed insurgency in the Niger Delta, deadly clashes between farmers and herders over scarce, and dwindling, agricultural resources, to terrorist activities in Northern Mali and North East of Nigeria, which have spilled over to neighboring countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger. These threats come hand in hand with organized crime, trafficking and violent extremism, and are exacerbated by recurring droughts that climate change, by all accounts, has rendered more frequent and hazardous. The landlocked character of the area and poor transport links is yet another strain, preventing regional trade that could provide employment and stimulate economies.

On the positive side, the fight against terrorist activities is beginning to yield tangible and encouraging results, owing to a strengthened cooperation between the concerned countries and significant support by partners. In the short run, however, more effort is still needed to back the military campaign against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin area in terms of financial and operational support to the Multi National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), as well as to provide assistance to meet the immediate humanitarian needs of displaced persons and refugees, facilitating their return to safe areas and assisting them to rebuild their livelihoods. Further West, strengthened regional cooperation and sustained international support is also required to help the countries of the Sahel address the threat of terrorism which continues to spread beyond northern Mali and into West Africa and the Sahel. The United Nations remains committed to playing its part, within the parameters of its mandates, to help the region face these security challenges.

In the long run, there is a growing awareness of the need to address the underlying causes of the crisis, which are under development, poor governance, and attendant poverty – all of which are, at least in part, linked to climate change. The theme of the 2nd regional Summit on security

held in Abuja on May 14, “consolidating collective efforts for regional peace and development”, testified to the willingness of stakeholders to focus on the economic potential of the Lake Chad to alleviate poverty and bring development to the region. In the Sahel region, the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel guides the UN System’s multidimensional engagement to address the root causes of instability in the region. Mitigating the impact of climate change, which features prominently under the resilience pillar of the strategy, is a major objective of the strategy. This is being achieved in close partnership with actors like the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), which supports environmental monitoring and governance of natural resources.

Mr. President,

The Boko Haram onslaught has galvanized attention on the devastating effects of climate change affecting the Lake Chad Basin area: To mention just one, in the last 50 years, the surface area of Lake Chad has shrunk from 22,000 km² in 1960, to 1,700 km² in 1985. Since then, it has rebounded to about 8,000 km², showing the unpredictability of external shocks severely straining people’s coping mechanisms. The Lake Chad, despite its vulnerability, is blessed with a rich biodiversity that offers opportunities for fishing, agriculture and livestock farming.

It directly provides livelihood to about 2 million people while at the same time constituting a food-exporting hub that supplies nearly 13 million people, including inhabitants of the Chadian Capital N’Djamena and the capital of Borno state in Nigeria, Maiduguri.

The economic opportunities of the Lake led to significant migration movements in the past, the consequence of which prove challenging today. As of 2015, the Lake Chad Basin is home to up to 50 million people, whereas its resources have decreased sharply. It is anticipated that the population would again double by 2030. The importance and urgency to restore the productive capacity of the Lake Chad in order to prevent crises in the future cannot be overemphasized.

Another important area of note is the Niger River Basin Area. It is an enormous resource for sustaining and improving livelihoods as well as economic growth in the Sahel but now quickly dwindling as a result of the impact of extreme climate change and rainfall variability of the Niger River, the mainstay of Niger River Basin. The Basin covers nine countries, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Nigeria. Seven out of these nine countries are amongst the twenty poorest countries in the World. Up to 70% of the 130 Million people in the Basin area live in rural communities amidst food insecurity, a situation that can only get worse as the population is expected to double between now and 2050.

Without real concerted and tangible efforts by these countries with international development support to address the acute challenges confronting the inhabitants of the basin, the consequences in the emerging future could be horrific when the river Niger along its 4,200 km course begins to dry up as can be visible in some sections already.

I would also like to mention the “Great Green Wall Initiative” to combat desertification, conceived in 2005 by the former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, adopted by the African Union in 2007, and signed by participating countries in Ndjama in 2010. The Great Green Wall is another example of long- term approach attacking the root causes of poverty and marginalization. In fact, the ongoing security deterioration due to deadly confrontations between farmers and cattle breeders in some regions of Nigeria is just another reminder of the devastating effects of desertification.

Mr. President,

Faced with these challenges, West African and the Sahel countries are at a crossroads. While the responsibility for the implementation of these plans rests with the concerned governments, national budgets are already put under additional strain for higher security spending. External factors like insecurity in Libya and northern Africa, 'jihadists' returning from the Middle East,

and environmental degradation are challenges beyond the scope of individual governments, and require international collective action. Thankfully, support starts to be forthcoming.

The EU has already announced that 120 million euro from the Trust Fund for Africa have been earmarked for security.

However, humanitarian needs in the Lake Chad Basin area continue to grow, with some 9.2 million people in need of assistance. Over 2.4 million people have been driven out of their homes due to terrorist activities, of these, 1.5 million are children. Up to 90 per cent of the displaced have found refuge with host communities, placing a heavy strain on their resources and weakening their ability to withstand shocks. Despite this dire humanitarian situation, of the US \$535 million requested for humanitarian assistance in the region, only 10 per cent has been received.

Mr. President,

Two days ago, world leaders gathered around the Secretary General in Istanbul to consider ways and means to jointly make the world hospitable for all. Amongst the five cores defined by the SG in his report “One humanity: shared responsibility”, I would like to highlight particularly the responsibility number one, “global leadership to prevent and end conflicts” and number 4: “change people’s lives – From delivering aid to ending need”, which very much apply to the situation in the Lake Chad Basin area and the Sahel.

Mr. President,

To conclude, I would like to stress that the issues cited above have been thoroughly reviewed over the years. Problems are identified, so are the set of actions to be taken to address those problems.

A number of sound initiatives exist and yet, there is a feeling of frustration because results are not as tangible as one would have wished them to be. Pulling efforts together to rationalize the implementation of the existing plans would go a long way in achieving our common goal.

I thank you for your attention.

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