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BUREAU DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST

SECURITY COUNCIL BRIEFING ON BOKO HARAM

Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the Office for West Africa (UNOWA) Mohamed Ibn Chambas briefed the Security Council briefing on Boko Haram, on 30 March 2015.

Mr. President,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief the Council on Boko Haram.

As Council members are aware, over the last few years, the violence and brutality of Boko Haram attacks in north-eastern Nigeria, as well as in neighbouring countries, has intensified. Today, as we meet, though weakened, the group continues to commit horrendous acts against civilians, including against women and children. We have received reports that children in particular have been abducted, abused, recruited, maimed and killed. Schools in north-east Nigeria are no longer safe places of learning, as many of them continue to be attacked, looted, and destroyed. Several schools in the areas targeted by Boko Haram in Cameroon and Niger also remain closed. In 2014, the group also commenced using young girls as suicide bombers for attacks in populated urban areas. We have also observed an alarming trend of children being used by the group as human shields. Boko Haram's recent allegiance to the Islamic State for Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), whether for publicity reasons or to tap into ISIL's support, is also of concern as it gives a clear signal that Boko Haram's agenda goes well beyond Nigeria.

Mr. President,

The impact of Boko Haram attacks has been manifold. Overlapping with the regional impact of other crises, notably the one in the Central African Republic, countries such as Cameroon, Chad and Niger are now facing serious humanitarian and human rights consequences as a result of the group's activities. Significant numbers of refugees and internally displaced people are adding pressure on host communities which are already food insecure. I will defer to the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs who will delve further into the impact of Boko Haram activities on the humanitarian situation across the Lake Chad Basin region and the challenges therein. However, allow me to raise a number of human rights concerns.

A recent OHCHR evaluation mission to the Far North Region of Cameroon confirmed that Boko Haram has committed numerous human rights abuses, including indiscriminate and targeted killings,

Bureau de la Communication et de l'Information Publique

Kouider Zerrouk, Chef de bureau – (+221) 33-869-8560 / 77- 3324928 – zerrouk@un.org

Vicky Delore Ndjeuga, Chargé de communication – (+221) 33-869-8544 / 77- 3339414 – ndjeuga@un.org



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abductions of women and girls, use of children in military operations, widespread destruction of property and systematic shooting or slaughtering of captured men who refuse to join their ranks.

In Niger, a similar human rights evaluation was conducted to assess the situation in the Diffa region, following a Boko Haram attack in February. The mission reported that Boko Haram had indiscriminately targeted the civilian population - either killing or forcibly turning captured civilians into combatants. Children had also been recruited either for combat roles or as suicide bombers. Since the attack in February, schools in the Diffa region have remained closed, depriving children of the right to be educated. The local economy in the Diffa region is also being negatively affected by a continuing State of Emergency. In response to these and other concerns, the United Nations is in the process of scaling up its presence and operations in Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon. In this regard, we appeal to the international community to support humanitarian efforts in the Lake Chad Basin region.

Mr. President,

The response of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) countries to the threat of Boko Haram has been commendable. The joint regional offensive involving Nigerian, Chadian, Cameroonian and Nigerien troops, has led to the recapture of several key towns in northeast Nigeria. At the beginning of the year, Boko Haram controlled some 20 local governmental districts in the three north-eastern states in Nigeria. Today, Boko Haram holds only a few areas in Borno State. Moreover, according to reports by the Nigerian Army, on 27 March, Boko Haram's headquarters in Gwoza was captured.

The United Nations is supportive of national and regional efforts to prevent and combat terrorism, and to ensure that the perpetrators of terrorism are brought to justice. However, in view of alleged human rights violations related to the on-going counter-insurgency operations against Boko Haram, we would like to stress that counter-terrorist operations that are perceived by the affected populations to be disproportionate and brutal violates the very norms that we seek to defend. It is therefore essential that the Multi-National Joint Task Force – the MNJTF - and other counter-insurgency operations uphold the rule of law and abide by international human rights standards. This is not only an absolutely vital principle, but also an effective strategy, as communities which believe that their Government seeks to protect them are far more likely to cooperate with the authorities, and far less likely to support insurgent groups. In this regard, we welcome the commitment made by the LCBC countries that their operations will be in full compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. We are also urging that adequate procedures be put in place to ensure that children, being used by

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Boko Haram, are treated as victims and dealt with in accordance with international standards for juvenile justice.

We welcome the decision of leaders of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) to better coordinate efforts in the fight against Boko Haram and to hold a joint Summit with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to adopt a common strategy. We also salute the sacrifices that the countries of the region have made and the solidarity they have shown by uniting to stop the advance of Boko Haram.

We welcome the efforts of the LCBC and the African Union towards the operationalisation of the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF). While we acknowledge that this force is already engaging Boko Haram, we are ready to support regional efforts as necessary in line with the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy.

Mr. President,

I would like to reiterate the Secretary-General's message that a military approach alone will not suffice to contain the Boko Haram threat.

The international community can and should play an important role in helping the countries of the region address the social, economic and political challenges associated with Boko Haram. In doing so, we have a responsibility to look at the problem and its consequences in a way that puts respect for human life and dignity first. It will therefore be critical to follow the current military operations carried out by the LCBC countries with stabilization measures and restoration of state authority. During this phase, attention would be focused on creating conducive conditions for the provision of needs-based and principled humanitarian assistance to the displaced populations and returnees.

As the Lake Chad Basin countries come together to address the menace of Boko Haram, the international community must also support them to eliminate not only the threat, but also the conditions that allow for Boko Haram to thrive. In this regard, it will be important for the United Nations to reiterate its commitment to working with regional countries to bring an end to the ongoing violence and to alleviate the suffering of civilians. The Special Representatives for West and Central Africa are both already fully engaged in this regard. We are also working on deploying more resources to the sub-regions to help provide a hands-on approach to assisting the affected governments.

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Mr. President,

I cannot conclude without referring to an important development in West Africa, namely the recent general elections in Nigeria that took place over the weekend. In the preliminary statement of its election observation mission, ECOWAS noted that, despite pockets of incidents and logistical challenges, the general elections of 28 March meet the criteria of being free and transparent. The mission commended the enthusiasm, maturity, patience and sense of civic responsibility demonstrated by the electorate and expressed hope that the same spirit of respect for order and discipline will characterize the rest of the electoral process.

On 29 March, for the 2nd day of elections, voting took place in 330 polling stations. There were reports of Boko Haram activity outside Bauchi, but just as the day before, they did not have any impact of the voting process. (TBU)

The legitimacy of the next government will be an important prerequisite to ensuring global support for an effective response against the insurgency and for Nigeria's long-term stability and prosperity. It is our sincere hope that the next Government will remain committed to the sub-regional fight against Boko Haram.

Thank you

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