

Ambassadorial-Level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on the impact of COVID-19 in the Lake Chad Basin
9 September 2020
Chair's Summary

1. On 9 September, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) held a virtual Ambassadorial-level meeting on the impact of COVID-19 in the Lake Chad Basin. The meeting was convened by H.E. Mr. Bob Rae, Chair of the PBC. In his opening remarks, the Chair informed that the objectives of the meeting were to focus attention on the peacebuilding priorities in the Lake Chad Basin; obtain a situational awareness of COVID-19 pandemic and its socioeconomic consequences; and identify the support the international community will be required to provide to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on peacebuilding gains and sustaining peace. The PBC Chair noted that the meeting can inform the remarks that the Chair wishes to submit, under rule 39, to the Security Council open debate on 'Humanitarian effects of environmental degradation and peace and security' scheduled for 17 September.

2. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), Mr. François Louncény Fall, informed that the health crisis has important socioeconomic and political costs in the Lake Chad Basin. Economic activities have been curtailed, affecting mostly those who rely on small businesses and the informal sector for their livelihoods. SRSG Fall recommended that the Lake Chad basin countries consider developing a regional response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with support from international partners. He suggested that the regional response should place emphasis on areas not covered by other plans and ensure complementarity with relevant national and regional strategies, including the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region (RSS). He recognized the important role and contributions of the PBC and Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) in support of peacebuilding efforts of the countries of the Lake Chad Basin and encouraged further international support for the effective implementation of the regional stabilisation strategy.

3. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, pointed out that the impact of COVID-19 had been multidimensional, characterized by declining revenue streams, increasing budget deficits, limited capacity to deliver essential services, and disruptions to governance processes, particularly in Boko Haram affected areas. He expressed disappointment about the ongoing attacks by insurgents against civilians and security forces, despite the call for ceasefire by the Secretary-General. He informed that the pandemic had negative reverberations on bilateral and multilateral engagements essential for coordination, advocacy and the implementation of strategic

interventions in the Lake Chad Basin. For instance, the Forum of Governors from the respective affected regions (a key coordination and consultative platform) has been delayed. Likewise, some key joint activities of UNOCA and UNOWAS aimed at enhancing engagement with the LCBC Secretariat, were also delayed. He also informed that, despite these challenges, UNOCA and UNOWAS have been leveraging their political mandates to support peacebuilding initiatives in the Lake Chad Basin, including in partnership with the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). The SRSB expressed recognition for the support provided by the PBF and the Trust Fund for Human Security to an inter-agency initiative led by UNCT Nigeria, which aims to address the herders-farmers conflict in the Middle Belt and surrounding states, a crisis which has direct linkages with climate change and environmental degradation in the Lake Chad Basin.

4. The Executive Secretary of LCBC, Ambassador Mamman Nuhu, informed that the Commission's operational budget had decreased by 50% due to the economic difficulties afflicting the Lake Chad Basin countries. This had impacted the LCBC's capacity to implement its emergency programmes for women and youth. The Executive Secretary stressed that it was crucial for the international community to support the implementation of the RSS through the provision of funding to the Regional Stabilization Facility (RSF). Meanwhile, he informed that, despite challenge posed by COVID-19, the LCBC has undertaken a number of peacebuilding initiatives, including the disbursement of US\$32,000 for the vocational training of 61 students in Chad; implementation of a cash for work initiative for 216 skilled and unskilled workers in Nigeria; and training of 71 judicial officers in governance, rule of law and dialogue in Cameroon.
5. The European Union Special Representative for the Sahel, H.E. Mr. Ángel Losada Fernández, noted that the complex crisis required an integrated approach that encompasses security, humanitarian and development initiatives. He stated that the EU and the UN have developed a strong partnership, reinforced by joint visits to Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria in 2019. These assessed that short-term humanitarian and security actions are important to ensure peace and to cover immediate needs, but they need to be complemented with long-term development measures which address the root causes of the situation. Noting that the COVID-19 pandemic is adding new challenges to the current crisis, he informed that the EU has mobilized 200 million euros in the four riparian countries and that, to complement the United Nations Global Humanitarian Response Plan, an EU humanitarian air bridge was set up in Chad and Nigeria. In Nigeria, the EU has mobilized 50 million euros to support the UN Development Program's "One UN basket fund" and close to 10 million euros to support a response to COVID-19. In Chad, the EU has pledged 34.42 million euros to counter the effects of the pandemic. In Cameroon, 10.8 million euros will address both the health response and the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19. In Niger, the EU is supporting the emergency health services

response with 8 million euros, which are to be added to the 87 million euros destined to respond to the macro-economic impact of the pandemic, mainly through budget support.

6. Dr. Fatima Akilu, the Executive Director of Neem Foundation, a non-governmental Organization that is committed to improving the lives of those affected by violent extremism in Nigeria, informed that violence in the Lake Chad Basin has had a disproportionate effect on women and girls, who are victims of gender-based violence, discrimination and various forms of abuses. A large majority of girls in conflict affected regions, she explained, are no longer able to access education services, while an increasing number of single mother households do not have access to livelihood opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on Neem's programming, including on the provision of psychosocial support as well as support for women's early warning networks. She called for: (i) Protection of women's rights, which are systematically and routinely violated by state and non-state actors; (ii) investments in the areas of governance and rule of law and adoption of pro-poor policies; (iii) investments in evidence-based approaches that are locally anchored and promote the rights and voices of women; (iv) promotion of women's equal access to education, health care, and decent work, and strengthening of their role in sustainable development; and (v) ensuring their full, effective and meaningful participation in the pandemic response as well as in political and decision-making processes.
7. The UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa, Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa, informed participants that UNDP's experience with the Lake Chad Basin Stabilization Facility shows that stabilization works and requires more consistent financial support. Addressing the root causes of instability in the Lake Chad Basin area requires strong investments to lay the foundation for recovery in conflict-prone communities. She stressed that it is important to ensure that efforts to rebuild communities are owned and led locally. She also informed that UNDP is empowering local leaders to design and deliver infrastructure and basic services, therefore strengthening social cohesion. Involving local communities in rehabilitating their infrastructure and basic services results in the creation of jobs and boosts local economies, in addition to enhancing inclusivity, Ms. Eziakonwa explained. She highlighted that maintaining peacebuilding gains requires consistent financing, particularly in view of COVID-19. She stated that PBF has been making robust investments, which has assisted UN programming to maintain a cross-border lens.
8. The UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Mr. Oscar Fernández-Taranco, noted that the briefings painted a vivid picture of the impact of COVID-19 across the region and the efforts of national governments, regional partners and donors to step up their efforts under increasingly difficult circumstances. The need for integrated approaches that bring together humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors in regions such as the Lake Chad Basin cannot be overstressed, the ASG said. Echoing the remarks of SRSGs Chambas and Fall, he pointed out that the pandemic requires better coordination between the concerned countries so as to prevent excessive stress on limited public infrastructure and manage safe movement of

people across borders. He highlighted the importance of coordinated efforts by Member States, international, regional and sub-regional organizations, international financial institutions, civil society and the private sector for the effective implementation of the AU/LCBC strategy for the stabilization, recovery and resilience of the Boko Haram affected areas. He added that the PBC serves a unique role with its ability to convene a wide array of actors and partners, to help sustain the political engagement and a common approach in the sub-region. He stressed the importance of considering Dr. Akilu's recommendations and noted that the meeting on Lake Chad Basin coincides with the review of the PBC gender strategy, adopted by the Commission in September 2016, which emphasizes the role of the Commission as a convening platform that can help to amplify the voices of women peacebuilders in the field. The ASG informed that the PBF has made catalytic investments in the Lake Chad Basin (USD\$ 137 million in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, representing around 25% of 2017-2019 resources), including in support of cross-border projects.

9. Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:

- Efforts to address the multidimensional challenges facing the Lake Chad Basin region, particularly regarding security, humanitarian and development issues, are further complicated by environmental change and degradation, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The complex challenges in the Lake Chad Basin are particularly affecting women and girls. In the absence of access to fundamental social protection, such as basic health and education services, environmental degradation could hinder women's livelihoods and exacerbate their vulnerability, a situation that is now further complicated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The dangerous challenges facing women and girls in the sub-region, where they are over-represented in the informal sector and less likely to benefit from COVID-19 recovery programmes, should not be underestimated.
- Initiatives in the Lake Chad Basin that aim to support national and local actors to improve management of cross-border transhumance by building resilience to climate change and environmental degradation and strengthening community engagement remain critical to overall efforts to implement the Regional Stabilization Strategy and require continuous support.
- Unfortunately, the pandemic has widened budget deficits of countries in the region, constraining their capacity to implement national development priorities, and increased inequalities and unemployment, causing further negative impact on the livelihoods of the population in the region.
- A holistic, whole-of-society approach, which is evidence driven and locally anchored is required to build resilience and ensure more inclusive, equitable and peaceful societies in the Lake Chad Basin. In that regard, institutional building at the local level is essential for

strengthening governance, particularly in border areas, and increasing the capacity of local authorities to enhance peacebuilding and sustaining peace efforts.

- It is important for the European Union and the United Nations to continue to work closely together in support not only of short-term humanitarian and security interventions but also long-term development measures to mitigate the root causes of instability in the Lake Chad Basin. Working together to enhance risk assessments and risk management strategies on the ground is equally important.
- UNDP, UNOCA and UNOWAS provide crucial support for the Lake Chad Basin Commission's stabilization efforts, in collaboration with the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and other partners.
- They took note of Dr. Akilu's recommendations listed above, welcomed the review of the Peacebuilding Commission's Gender Strategy and encouraged PBSO to continue to bring gender perspectives from the field in PBC deliberations.
- They stressed the need for debt relief and predictable funding in support of development and peacebuilding priorities of the countries of the region. They also acknowledged the role of the Peacebuilding Fund in helping to prevent violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin, including by empowering women and youth, strengthening local governance, and promoting social cohesion.