

Lake Chad Basin: Areas reclaimed from Boko Haram must be stabilized, Security Council told

Amina Mohammed said recent joint efforts by the four of the region's affected countries – Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria – have resulted in “considerable progress” in the fight against the extremists, including the liberation of hostages as well as territorial gains.

However, she reported that the group has stepped up the use of women and girls as suicide bombings, while children were deployed in 135 such attacks in 2017: a five-fold increase over the previous year.

“It is now key to stabilize the areas that have been reclaimed, and that we seize the opportunity to really promote sustainable development,” said the UN deputy chief, [speaking](#) via videoconference from Liberia where she is participating in celebrations to mark the end of the UN peacekeeping mission in that country, known as [UNMIL](#).

Ms. Mohamed was joined by Mohammed Bila, a representative of the Lake Chad Basin Commission based in the Chadian capital, N'Djamena, and Senior Conflict Advisor at Adelphi, Chitra Nagarajan, in painting a picture of the factors behind people's suffering in the Lake Chad Basin and driving some to terrorism one year after the Council [adopted](#) its first resolution on the activities of Boko Haram in the strife-torn region.

Boko Haram, an Islamist militant organization based in north-east Nigeria, has carried out raids, suicide bombings and kidnappings across the Lake Chad region over the past decade.

Their operations have led to displacement, insecurity, destruction of infrastructure and what Ms. Mohammed described as a “complex and dire” humanitarian situation, with nearly 11 million people requiring assistance.

The group gained international notoriety in 2014 after abducting more than 270 girls from a Government school in Chibok, Nigeria.

It is believed to be behind the kidnapping last month of 110 schoolgirls from the Nigerian town of Dapchi, most of whom were safely returned this week.

Overall, Boko Haram has abducted more than 4,000 women and girls, according to the UN deputy chief, who added that those who return to their communities are often stigmatized.

As the violation of human rights continues to fuel insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin region, Ms. Mohammed said investing in community justice mechanisms will be essential for reconciliation, as well as for ensuring accountability and promoting peace.

She stressed the need to incorporate human rights and gender dimensions into activities aimed at countering terrorism or preventing violent extremism.

For example, she said the increase in Boko Haram's use of women and girls as suicide bombers could be due to a lack of women security officers who can search other women at checkpoints.

And she called for more international action to support children affected by the upheaval in the region.

Chitra Nagarajan, a Senior Conflict Advisor with the think tank Adelphi, who is based in north-east Nigeria, also used her briefing to touch on the gender-related aspects of the crisis and also its impact on persons with disabilities.

In addition to the threats outlined by Ms. Mohammed, she spoke of how women and girls are pushed into early marriage with combatants, for example, or they fall victim to sexual abuse and exploitation, including at the hands of people who are supposed to protect them.

"Men and older boys are often the first to flee insecure areas," she said, speaking via videoconference from the city of Maiduguri.

"They are deliberately targeted, killed and forcibly recruited by armed groups. They're viewed suspiciously, arrested, and detained by security agencies, and they are involved in fighting, leaving women of all ages, as well as girls, younger boys and older men struggling to cope."

The Security Council meeting took place as the United Nations marked [World Water Day](#), which focusses attention on the importance of managing freshwater resources.

Mohammed Bila, a Remote Sensing Expert with the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), a decades-old initiative to regulate and control the use of water and other natural resources in the region, spoke of how climate change has had an impact on water governance.

He said the shrinking of Lake Chad has affected communities which depended on its shoreline to grow crops, leading to increased competition for water, accusations of river diversion, loss of livelihoods and social tensions.

He told the Council that the environmental monitoring network there is "inadequate, sparse, poorly funded and operated," with only one water level measurement station for the entire lake.

"The environmental challenges facing the Lake Chad basin are interconnected to the challenges of climate change faced by the region of the Sahel of Africa," he said.

"The Sahel is increasingly facing extreme variability of climate resulting in frequent droughts, short-duration high-intensity rainfall, desertification, water scarcity, land degradation, and ultimately food insecurity. Consequently, addressing the climatic root causes of local challenges through

risk assessment and management will require a similar solution at the Sahel regional level.”

[World cannot take water for granted, say UN officials at launch of global decade for action](#)

The United Nations on Thursday launched a decade for action on water that seeks to forge new partnerships, improve cooperation and strengthen capacity to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Most directly linked to [Sustainable Development Goal 6](#), safe water and adequate sanitation are indispensable for healthy ecosystems, reducing poverty, and achieving inclusive growth, social well-being and sustainable livelihoods – the targets for many of the 17 Goals.

However, growing demands, poor management and climate change have increased water stresses and scarcity of water is a major problem in many parts of the world.

Furthermore, more than two billion people worldwide lack access to safe water and over 4.5 billion to adequate sanitation services, warned UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#).

“By 2050 at least one in four people will live in a country where the lack of fresh water will be chronic or recurrent,” he said, speaking at the [launch](#) of the *International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028*.

“[Quite simply, water is a matter of life and death](#). Our bodies, [...] our cities, our industries and our agriculture all depend on it.”

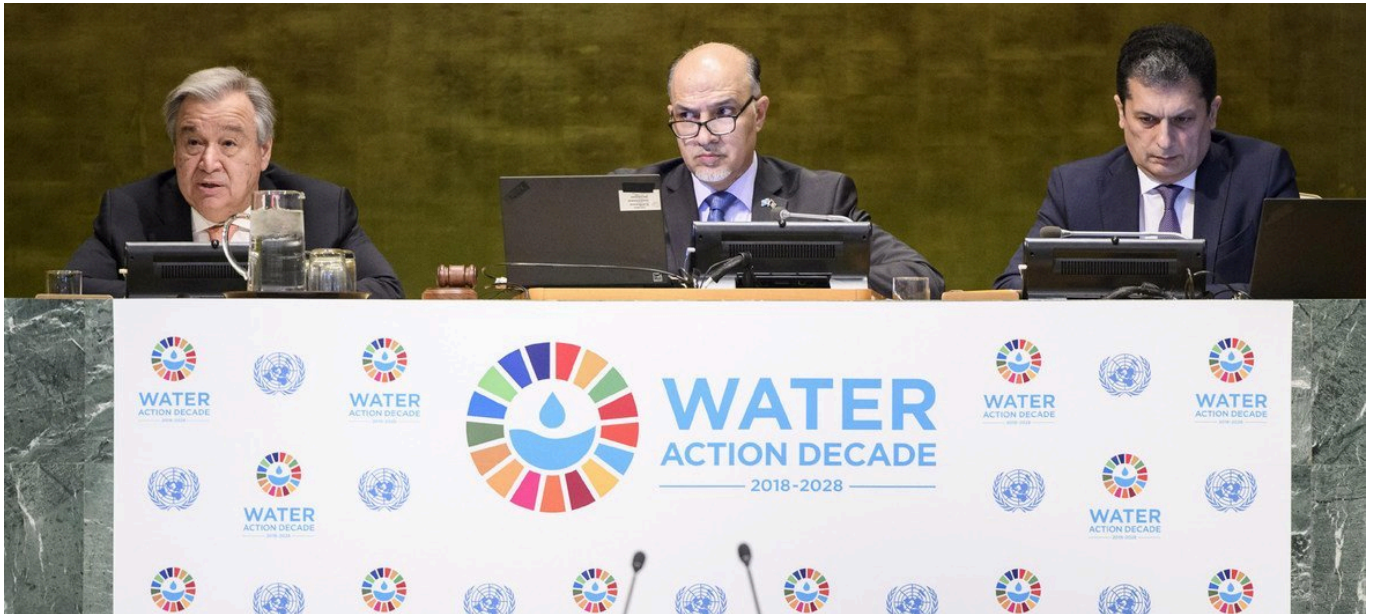
Stressing that water cannot be taken for granted, the UN chief said that while solutions and technologies to improve water management exist, these are often not accessible to all. In many cases, end up perpetrating inequity within and among countries.

“As with most development challenges, women and girls suffer disproportionately. For example, women and girls in low-income countries spend some 40 billion hours a year collecting water,” he stressed.

Addressing these and other challenges needs a comprehensive approach to water supply, sanitation, water management and disaster risk reduction, said the UN chief, highlighting that aligning existing water and sanitation programmes

and projects with the 2030 Agenda will also be vital.

Also crucial is the political will for strengthened cooperation and partnerships, he added.



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Secretary-General António Guterres (left) makes remarks during the high-level event to launch the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development 2018–2028”.

Two realities – one where no one goes thirsty; other where billions don’t have water to drink

Alongside the Secretary-General, Mahmoud Saikal, the Vice-President of the General Assembly (speaking on behalf of Assembly President Miroslav Lajčák) said that while many in the world have adequate safe drinking water and sanitation facilities, billions on the same planet lack even a basic toilet and are forced to drink water that can make them ill.

[“This is the reality we all have to face. It is not pretty.](#) But, it should not come as a surprise. We have known about it for a while,” he said.

“Luckily, we still have enough time to do something about it,” added Mr. Saikal, calling on for action on everyone’s part to capitalize on the opportunities offered by the International Decade.

■ Learn more about the International Decade here:

<http://www.wateractiondecade.org/>

Water problems? The answer is in nature

The launch of the International Decade coincides with the [World Water Day](#), marked annually on 22 March, to focus attention to importance of and challenges facing freshwater availability.

Commemorated this year with the theme, *Nature for Water*, the Day [urges](#) people to explore nature-based solutions to contemporary water problems.

Some of these could include planting trees and increasing forest cover, reconnecting rivers to floodplains, and restoring wetlands to rebalance the water cycle.

[Heatwaves, hurricanes, floods: 2017 costliest year ever for extreme weather and climate events, says UN](#)

Hurricanes, monsoon floods and continuing severe drought made 2017 the costliest year ever for severe weather and climate events, according to a new report by the United Nations weather agency launched on the eve of [World Meteorological Day](#).

“The start of 2018 has continued where 2017 left off – with extreme weather claiming lives and destroying livelihoods,” said Petteri Taalas, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization ([WMO](#)) said Thursday.

Now in its 25th year, the [WMO Statement on the State of the Global Climate in 2017](#) drew attention to the high impact that extreme weather had on economic development, food security, health and migration, pointing to estimates showing disaster losses from weather and climate-related events at \$320 billion – the largest annual total on record.

The statement confirmed that last year was one of the three warmest on record, and the warmest not influenced by an El Niño event. It also examined other long-term indicators of climate change, such as increasing carbon dioxide concentrations, sea level rise, shrinking sea ice and ocean heat.

“The Arctic experienced unusually high temperatures, whilst densely populated areas in the northern hemisphere were gripped by bitter cold and damaging winter storms. Australia and Argentina suffered extreme heatwaves, whilst drought continued in Kenya and Somalia, and the South African city of Cape Town struggled with acute water shortages,” Mr. Taalas reflected on 2017.

According to the report, the North Atlantic hurricane season was not only the costliest ever for the United States, but it also eradicated decades of small Caribbean islands’ development gains.

“Since the inaugural Statement on the State of the Global Climate, in 1993, scientific understanding of our complex climate system has progressed rapidly,” Mr. Taalas stated.

“This includes our ability to document the occurrence of extreme weather and climate events, the degree to which they can be attributed to human influences, and the correlation of climate change with epidemics and vector-borne diseases,” he continued.

Compiled by WMO with input from national meteorological services and UN partners, the statement details that 2017 global mean temperatures were about 1.1 °C above pre-industrial temperatures.

The report also provided detailed information to support the international agenda on disaster risk reduction, sustainable development and climate change.



Source: WMO

State of the Global Climate in 2017

“In the past quarter of a century, atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide have risen from 360 parts per million to more than 400 ppm. They will remain above that level for generations to come, committing our planet to a warmer future, with more weather, climate and water extremes,” Mr. Taalas asserted.

The report revealed that the overall risk of heat-related illness or death has climbed steadily since 1980, with around 30 per cent of the world’s

population now living in climatic conditions that deliver potentially deadly temperatures at least 20 days a year.

Additionally, from November 2016 to December 2017, 892,000 drought-related displacements were recorded.

“Now more than ever, we need to be weather-ready, climate-smart and water-wise,” concluded Mr. Taalas.

[Drought and conflict leave millions more hungry in 2017 – UN-backed report](#)

Driven largely by climate disasters and conflict, levels of acute hunger surged in 2017, leaving some 124 million people across 51 countries facing hunger crises –11 million more than the previous year, according to a new United Nations report.

“Reports such as this give us the vital data and analysis to better understand the challenge. It is now up to us to take action to meet the needs of those facing the daily [scourge of hunger](#) and to tackle its root causes,” said [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) in a video message on the report.

Presented by the UN [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the European Union at a [briefing](#) Thursday, the [Global Report on Food Crises](#) finds that food emergencies are increasingly determined by complex causes such as conflict, extreme climatic shocks and high prices of staple food – often acting at the same time.

“We must acknowledge and address the link between hunger and conflict if we are to achieve zero hunger,” said José Graziano da Silva, FAO Director-General.

The report points out that conflict continued to be the main driver of acute food insecurity in 18 countries – 15 in Africa or the Middle East – accounting for 60 per cent of the global total.

The increase is largely attributable to new or intensified conflict and insecurity in Myanmar, north-east Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Yemen.

“The fighting must stop now and the world must come together to avert these crises often happening right in front of our eyes,” underscored David Beasley, WFP Executive Director.

Mr. da Silva stated: “Investing in food security and livelihood in conflict situations saves lives, strengthens resilience and can also contribute to

sustaining peace.”

The report finds that food crises are increasingly determined by other complex causes as well, such as extreme climatic shocks and high prices of staple food – often acting at the same time.

For instance, prolonged drought conditions resulted in consecutive poor harvests in countries already facing high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition in eastern and southern Africa.

“The consequences of conflict and climate change are stark: millions of more people severely, even desperately, hungry,” maintained Mr. Beasley.

The report also flags that entire communities and more children and women are in need of nutritional support compared to last year, indicating the need for long-lasting solutions to revert the trend.

Moreover, it highlights the urgent need for simultaneous action to save lives, livelihoods and to address the root causes of food crises.

The report, which brings together regional and national data and analysis from multiple sources, demonstrates that in addition to critically needed humanitarian aid, development action needs to engage much earlier so as to tackle the root causes of extreme vulnerability, therefore, building resilience.

“This Global Report on Food Crises shows the magnitude of today’s crises but also shows us that if we bring together political will and today’s technology, we can have a world that’s more peaceful, more stable and where hunger becomes a thing of the past,” Mr. Beasley concluded.

Maps with interactive data from the report can be found [here](#).

Hailing African free trade agreement, Guterres says UN ready to support continent’s ‘leap into history’

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has welcomed the signing of a continental free trade agreement in Africa that has created one of the world’s largest trading blocs with over 50 countries.

“I congratulate African leaders for taking the leap into history by signing the African Continental Free Trade Area,” said Mr. Guterres in a [statement](#) on Thursday.

“This is an important step towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and delivering on the African agenda of peace and prosperity.”

In the statement, Secretary-General Guterres also underscored that the entire UN system stands ready to support the continent as it moves towards the entry into force of the Free Trade Area in the coming months.

He also applauded the leadership of President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, President Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, who led the process for the agreement.

[According](#) to the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Organization’s development arm in the region, the agreement has the potential both to boost intra-African trade by 52.3 per cent by eliminating import duties, and to double this trade if non-tariff barriers are also reduced.

It is expected that the key beneficiaries from the Free Trade Area will be Africa’s small and medium sized enterprises, which account for 80 per cent of the region’s businesses; women, who represent 70 per cent of the informal cross-border traders; and the youth, who will be able to find new employment opportunities.