

Speech: “What I couldn’t have done was tell you their stories, the lives behind those numbers; the human cost of the fragile security situation.”

As co-lead for the Council’s visit to the Lake Chad Basin, I’d like to focus my remarks this morning on the security situation, and my colleagues, the other co-leads, will tackle the other two big themes of our visit, which is the humanitarian and the longer term and development root causes. But before I do so, I would like to thank, on behalf of all of us, the Governments of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, as well as the United Nations, for making this visit possible. And thank you to all Council members for making the most of the visit, and an ambitious programme, and for keeping up with it.

If I was talking to you about security in the Lake Chad Basin a week ago, I’d have spoken about statistics, the numbers, 20,000 people killed, 2.3 million currently displaced. What I couldn’t have done was tell you their stories, the lives behind those numbers; the human cost of the fragile security situation.

Last Friday, in Maroua, in northern Cameroon, with my colleagues I saw that cost in the eyes of a 15 year old boy whose village had been attacked by Boko Haram. He hid for days, before being interrogated and imprisoned by the authorities for two years on suspicion of being a member of Boko Haram. Most of his friends had already been killed.

I saw that cost in the eyes of a woman crying with her baby in her arms. I saw it in others who spoke of the murder of their husbands or sons, the kidnapping of their daughters, the burning of their homes. We heard from civil society how women were selling their bodies for sex just to eat.

All these people brought home the horrifying consequences of the chaos and insecurity wrought by Boko Haram. And I hope that together we brought some much needed focus to the suffering that has been neglected for too long.

And amid the horror, we also heard of the bravery and commitment of the people of the region as they try to bring stability and security back to the Lake Chad Basin.

We heard chapters from a success story on its way to completion. Stories from the Multi-National Joint Task Force of liberating twenty thousand hostages, successfully winning back territory that will act as future homes for the people of the region. But the story is not over. Security is not yet entrenched. It is fragile in too many places. Force commanders and generals outlined continued attacks; suicide bombings, IEDs are still far too common.

And Boko Haram’s tactics are getting more barbaric – mothers turned into

suicide bombers with infants strapped to them in addition to their bombs. Boko Haram are down, but they're not out. And make no mistake, their cruelty knows no bounds.

It was clear that international support remains vital for this fight. We visited Operation Barkhane Headquarters in N'djamena where we met French troops, and were joined by members of the British and American military. Together they are supporting the Multi-National Joint Task Force, as well the Nigerian military, through capacity building, training and intelligence sharing. We heard how further support was needed to enable better mobility and logistics in the fight.

Women's participation and protection was a constant theme throughout the visit, and it was clear that women must be more involved in efforts to tackle Boko Haram, and counter violent extremism, and build peace.

We also heard of the hundreds of Boko Haram defectors, including women and children. We made clear the need for compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law by all actors in tackling the scourge of Boko Haram. This is essential to prevent mistreatment, including of detainees; as well as to build confidence among communities and counter radicalisation.

Let me close with this final reflection. Only yesterday, here in New York, I met three inspirational young women from Chibok who were attending an International Women's Day event at the United Nations.

Far from being victims, far from being survivors, these women are now campaigners for education for women and girls in poverty. Despite everything that they had endured, despite being caught up in the hell unleashed by Boko Haram, they are determined to look to the future.

They showed what lies ahead. They showed a future possible when the fighting ends.

To achieve this reality, it's clear that there can be no military solution: only a comprehensive approach will bring stability and peace. And so let me reiterate that the United Kingdom will proudly stand side by side with the region, with the four governments that we visited, and with the affected people in this effort.

With that, let me now hand over to Fodé to focus on the root causes and longer term development.