



High-Level Conference on the Lake Chad Region

Federal Foreign Office, Berlin - Germany, 3 - 4 September 2018

#LakeChadBerlin

Speech by the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, Heiko Maas, at the opening of the High-Level Conference on the Lake Chad Region, 03.09.2018

Ministers and Governors,
Achim Steiner,
Sir Mark Lowcock,
Members of Parliament,
Distinguished participants,

Welcome to the High-Level Conference on the Lake Chad Region in Berlin! We – the Governments of Germany, Nigeria, Norway, and the United Nations – are delighted to see the great interest in this topic and conference.

The images seen all over the world in 2014 are still fresh in my mind – the images of the over 200 schoolgirls from Chibok in northeast Nigeria, who were abducted by Boko Haram terrorists, humiliated and in some cases forced to marry.

People all over the world felt great sympathy with the girls' suffering and their parents' anguish – and I think we all felt the same way.

The girls from Chibok were the human face of a conflict that had started before 2014 and unfortunately is not yet over. It has just largely disappeared from the media.

People are still suffering terribly as a result of this conflict – people like Mbokoye, a fisherman who has no boat, or Hawa, who struggles every day to ensure that her nine children have enough to eat. However, one thing has changed in the meantime. There is hope once again – hope that the downward spiral of hunger and poverty, displacement and forced migration, and radicalisation and terrorism can be halted after all.

So what was the game changer here? I think it had two components:

- First and foremost, the decision by the countries in the region to tackle transnational terror together as a Multinational Joint Task Force, thus forcing Boko Haram to retreat. Instead of a territory the size of Belgium, the terrorists now only control a fraction of parts of this area.
- The second game changer was the response of the international community, which took a different approach than it had to many other crises by supporting the region's countries and cooperation between them from the start. In early 2017, we met in Oslo and pledged 672 million dollars for humanitarian assistance and civil stabilisation. Thanks to courageous endeavours, particularly on the part of so many aid organisations, this help is reaching people. I would like to thank all those involved for this work.

However, the progress made can yet be overturned.

- Particularly in recent months, there have been more attacks on the security forces, markets, mosques and churches.
- Large areas outside the cities remain unsafe.
- And over ten million people still rely on humanitarian assistance.

“We all share responsibility for each other's security, and only by working to make each other more secure can we hope to achieve lasting security for ourselves.” Kofi Annan tweeted this on 3 July, just a few weeks before his death.

He knew that without security, there can be no development or access for humanitarian workers. And security only works if we join forces.

That is why it is so important that the message being sent from Berlin today is that we are staying the course. We stand united so the Lake Chad region, which is actually an economic hub between North and Sub-Saharan Africa, does not become a hub for terrorism, criminality and human smuggling.

- That is why we, the international community, support the Lake Chad countries' fight against terror.
- And that is why Germany has equipped the Nigerian security forces with ground-penetrating radars, mine-detection devices and a field hospital.

Regional cooperation remains crucial. The first forum of governors from the four countries surrounding Lake Chad was held in Borno State in May. Those responsible in the region for security, development and humanitarian support thus met for the first time. UNDP and Germany supported this event because we firmly believe that terrorism can only be defeated if regional cooperation works at all levels.

I would like to thank the Governor of Borno, who is here with us today, as a representative of all the governors involved.

Mr Shettima, when it comes to stabilising your region, we continue to stand with you. That is also the message we are sending here today.

Just last week, the Lake Chad countries adopted their own stabilisation strategy with the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the African Union. Discussion on this strategy will certainly play an important role here today. However, I can already say that this commitment to even closer cooperation strengthens our confidence in the region's future. And I hope that it will motivate many of us here to invest further in the region's stabilisation and development.

Our country, Germany, is certainly willing to do so. The entire 100 million euros in humanitarian assistance that we pledged in Oslo have already been allocated to projects.

- We will therefore provide a further 100 million euros by 2020 for humanitarian aid in the Lake Chad region.
- For 2018 and 2019, we are pledging a further 40 million euros for stabilisation and prevention.
- We are also actively involved in creating development prospects in the Lake Chad region and are currently carrying out projects with funding of around 220 million euros. Further projects are planned.
- And as Vice-Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission and a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council from 2019, Africa will find a sympathetic ear in Germany. We have promised to listen, particularly as regards the Lake Chad countries.

We do this because we know that security only works if we join forces and because we Europeans firmly believe that regional cooperation, as is currently developing in the Lake Chad region, deserves our full support. We also do this because people in the region – people like Mbokoye and Hawa – matter to us.

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed guests,

I think Kofi Annan would be happy if he could see us today,

- if he could see countries from his native continent pooling their strengths in order to protect their people
- and partners from all over the world offering support and deciding together and with those involved on the ground what form this support will take.

So thank you all very much for that and for coming to Berlin today. Once again, a warm welcome to you all!