

Update on women, peace and security in the Lake Chad Basin crisis January 30th 2018

The Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security met on 27 February 2017 to discuss the situation in the Lake Chad Basin crisis, with the participation of the leadership of the UN Country Team in Nigeria and representatives of UNOWAS and UNOCA. A record of the meeting was issued as [S/2017/625](#). This update summarizes **relevant developments since the IEG meeting last year**.

Security Council visit to the Lake Chad Basin

The Security Council visited Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria from 1 to 7 March. As recommended by the IEG, **the visit paid special attention to women, peace and security issues**, which received extensive coverage in the terms of reference, most of the meetings held during the five-day, four-country visit, and the visit's official report (S/2017/403). The authorities, including the relevant ministers in the four countries expressed their commitment to gender equality and connected it directly to the crisis in the Lake Chad Basin, particularly due to the demographic pressure brought about by the world's highest fertility rates. In Cameroon, where only one week before the visit 300 Nigerian women and girls had allegedly been forcibly returned, policymakers announced the signing of a tripartite agreement with Nigeria and UNHCR to mitigate the forced return of refugees. In Chad, the delegation welcomed the adoption of a requirement for a minimum of 30 percent representation of women in decision-making positions and a law against child marriage. Due to lack of capacity, over 1,000 defectors from Boko Haram, including all the women and children, had been immediately released and had returned to their communities. In Niger, more than a hundred Boko Haram members had surrendered with their wives and had been placed in detention awaiting trial, and the government had asked the UN to support them with programmes for deradicalization and reintegration of the women. In Nigeria, both the Acting President and the Governor of Borno, at the epicenter of the crisis, highlighted their commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment in their development plans, and the need for more women representation in local governance in north-eastern Nigeria.

The Security Council delegation also met in Nigeria with **women in IDP camps, female parliamentarians, and women's civil society organizations**. In IDP camps, women complained about the inadequacy of their food rations and the lack of medical care and education. Women's organizations informed the Council of the frequent reports of sexual abuse of women IDPs in the camps and highlighted the need for female security officers in these camps, as well as female teachers, special centers for single elderly women, safe spaces for adolescent girls previously associated with Boko Haram, and access to safe abortion for rape victims. Unable to compete for funds with international NGOs, local women's organizations called for earmarked funding support for their peacebuilding activities, given their stronger position to resolve conflicts between host communities and IDPs and the stigmatization and rejection of women and girls associated with Boko Haram and their children. Female parliamentarians regretted that a gender equality bill had recently been defeated in the National Assembly.

Other actions by the Security Council

On 31 March 2017, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2349, its first resolution on the Lake Chad Basin crisis. The resolution placed **special emphasis on women, peace and security issues** and

reflected many of the IEG's recommendations. It recognized the importance of **women's empowerment** in any comprehensive strategy to defeat Boko Haram and ISIL, given the role of gender inequality in the crisis and the connection between human trafficking, sexual violence, and terrorism. In that vein, it urged the governments of the region to ensure women's full and equal participation in national institutions and mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts, including in **counter-terrorism strategies** and the development, implementation, and funding of **National Action Plans** on Women, Peace and Security, and encouraged greater dialogue with **women's organizations** in the context of conflict prevention, recovery and reconstruction, and humanitarian assistance. Resolution 2349 strongly condemned all forms of **sexual and gender-based violence**, including rape, child marriage, and the increasing use of girls as suicide bombers; expressed its concern about the connection between human trafficking, sexual violence, and terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin; and requested the governments of the region and the international community to pay special attention to the **reintegration** of women formerly associated with Boko Haram to prevent stigmatization and persecution, rapid access for survivors of abduction and sexual violence to **specialised medical and psychosocial services**, and the prompt **investigation** of all allegations of sexual abuse, including through stronger cross-border judicial cooperation.

Additionally, resolution 2349 encouraged the international partners of the **Multinational Joint Task Force** to ensure that its soldiers receive adequate **training** on addressing sexual and gender-based violence and gender and its civilian component include a **gender advisor**; called on the UN to conduct and gather **gender-sensitive research and data collection** on the drivers of radicalization of women, and the impacts of counter-terrorism strategies on women's human rights and women's organizations; welcomed the **deployment of female members of the security services** to IDP camps where sexual abuse had been reported or confirmed and called on the governments in the region to increase the number of women in the security sector; encouraged **regional organizations** to ensure that gender analysis and women's participation are integrated into their assessments, planning, and operations; and called on all **humanitarian organizations** to ensure that their programming is gender-sensitive.

At the **Joint Consultative Meeting** in September in Addis Ababa between the **AU Peace and Security Council** and the **UN Security Council**, the gender dimensions of the Lake Chad Basin crisis were highlighted in the joint communiqué, and all four governments in the region were encouraged to redouble their efforts on gender equality and women's empowerment to address the root causes of the crisis.

In the September briefing to the Council, a Nigerian representative of women's civil society organizations, Ms. Fatima Shehu Imam, reiterated local NGOs difficulties to help the population in need due to difficulties accessing funds from the international community and security escorts, and warned that neither the security situation nor the humanitarian crisis had improved significantly in previous months, in spite of the advances made by the Nigerian Armed Forces and the MNJTF. A Secretary-General's report noted that of the 156 suspected Boko Haram attacks carried out in July, August, and September, 100 took place in Nigeria, and the number of fatalities in those months exceeded those of the first six months of the year.

Other updates: February 2017 – January 2018

- The overall situation remains dire. Although famine in northern Nigeria was averted, the number of people severely food-insecure rose by half a million in 2017. Apart from dealing with Boko Haram, the region saw the escalation of secessionist agitation in Biafra (Nigeria) and the Anglophone region of Cameroon in the last quarter of the year, and outbreaks of cholera in northern Nigeria and Hepatitis E in Niger. For refugees in neighboring countries, the situation is not considered safe for returns yet, and military operations have disrupted economic activity and livelihoods in vast areas of the region. In recent months, the security situation has improved only in the Diffa region in Niger, in spite of the departure of Chadian troops. In December, the Nigerian armed forces arrested hundreds of people associated with Boko Haram in the islands of Lake Chad,

including 67 women. In October, the government of Nigeria opened a mass trial for more than 1,700 suspected Boko Haram members. So far, approximately 45 have been sentenced and close to 500 are undergoing a deradicalization programme. A judicial commission has been established by the Nigerian government to review its armed forces' compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law in the fight against extremism. Last week, Boko Haram released yet another video that purports to show some of the Chibok girls, vowing to stay with their captors and never return home. Approximately 100 of them are still missing.

- In 2017, an estimated 2.9 million people have been identified to be in need of GBV prevention and response across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States in Nigeria. Adolescent girls are most at risk of GBV, particularly sexual violence. Compared to 2016, there has been a significant increase in reported incidents. In conflict affected North-East Nigeria, from January to September 2017, 997 cases of sexual violence were reported compared to 644 cases reported for the same period in 2016. A total of 1,112 incidents of GBV were reported between January and April 2017.
- From 19th to 21st July, the **UN Deputy Secretary-General**, accompanied by **UN Women's Executive Director**, the **SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict**, and the **AU's Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security**, led a first-of-its-kind high-level visit to Nigeria focused on the empowerment and protection of women. In Abuja and Maiduguri, they met with some of the women who were abducted in Chibok three years ago, women and girls from the IDP camps, as well as with policymakers, diplomats, civil society, and the UN Country Team. Survivors of sexual violence and other key stakeholders all called for educational opportunities, access to justice, reparations, measures to combat social stigma and economic support to help them rebuild their lives and livelihoods. The visit consequently highlighted the need for: accountability and adequate training by the security forces; expanding the support provided to the Chibok girls to many other victims of Boko Haram, including counseling and socioeconomic reintegration for sexual violence survivors; addressing the rise of early marriages and sexual exploitation of IDPs; supporting women's participation in local and national politics; and greater allocations from the national budget for all these programmes. It also brought to light that some counter-terrorism measures have infringed women's rights and freedoms, such as the practice of detaining those released from the captivity of Boko Haram as potential affiliates or intelligence assets, rather than supporting them as victims and referring them to humanitarian actors. Such measures need to be addressed as they can signal to communities that such women and girls are complicit in the violence and should therefore be shunned, along with their children. **The DSG briefed the Security Council on the findings and outcomes of this visit on 10th August.**
- A study of the **434 suicide bombings** perpetrated by Boko Haram from 2011 to 2017 revealed that **a majority (56 percent) have been carried out by women and girls, including two-thirds of all suicide attacks in 2017.** Nearly all recent suicide attacks in the Far North region of Cameroon have been carried out by young women and girls, and this has reportedly led to the harassment of girls by local vigilante groups. Among children, Boko Haram has used four times as many young girls as young boys.
- In May, **82 Chibok girls** -though by now women aged 19-22- were **released** to the Government of Nigeria in exchange for some Boko Haram fighters, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, with the support of UN Women and UNFPA, is providing them with similar rehabilitation support to the one received by the 24 girls released in a previous negotiation. All 106 of them enrolled this September in a 3-year pre-university foundation programme specifically designed for them by the American University of Nigeria. The rehabilitation programme has consisted of extensive trauma counseling, medical care, educational support, allowances for personal upkeep, family visits, and child care support. The **Counterterrorism Implementation Task Force** is collaborating with UN Women and the Victims Working Group of the Office on Counter-terrorism in Nigeria to study this rehabilitation programme and design a wider programme for Boko Haram victims. Although weakened, Boko Haram is still kidnapping women and girls.

- During the **Oslo Humanitarian Conference** for Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region in February, where countries pledged 672 million dollars, participants highlighted the importance of a gender perspective for the effectiveness and sustainability of humanitarian assistance, but no specifics were offered. Instead, the GBV sector continues to be significantly under-funded. Work has begun to roll out the IASC GBV guidelines in humanitarian action and implement a two-year strategy with international partners in the three most affected states in Nigeria under the framework of the Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies, and the Office of the Vice-President has plans for a similar national programme. For example, in Chad, during the first three quarters of 2017, at least 1366 GBV incidents were reported. Additionally, the First Ladies of Niger and Nigeria are trying to raise awareness and resources for the needs of refugee women and girls, in particular food, education, health, water, sanitation, and hygiene.
- Two of the countries affected by the Lake Chad Basin crisis, **Niger and Chad, are also part of the Group of Five for the Sahel**. In June, the Security Council welcomed the establishment of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. Resolution 2359 welcomes the inclusion of a gender perspective in the Force's strategic concept of operations, and requests the Secretary-General to report on ways to mitigate any adverse impact of its military operations on the civilian population, including on women and children.
- In May, **the government of Nigeria launched its second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security**, and a national conference on 1325 took place in September. The new plan is much more tailored to the current context, and focuses on terrorism, violent extremism, crisis management and early recovery, and post-conflict reconstruction. A federal steering committee, made up of relevant government ministries, such as national defense, justice, humanitarian affairs, and security agencies, drives implementation of this plan. Eight different states, including Borno and Yobe, have developed state-level action plans. Furthermore, **the government of Cameroon launched its first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in November**.
- The UN continues to advocate for the development of a regional plan to address the root causes of the crisis in the Lake Chad Basin that could help in finding sustainable solutions. UNOCA and UN Women continue their joint capacity building efforts to integrate gender indicators into early warning in sub regional organizations. In November, the AU and the Lake Chad Basin Commission convened a regional stabilization conference in N'Djamena for the development of a regional stabilization strategy for areas affected by Boko Haram, focused on the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of its fighters and people associated with the group.
- NGOs continue to report **sexual abuse in IDP camps in northern Nigeria, including by the security forces**, but some aid groups and the police report that the number of complaints has declined after President Buhari called for an investigation, security officers received more training, and more female officers were deployed to the camps. In November, the government of Nigeria denied reports that it was going to suspend the admission of female cadets for combatant roles in the Nigerian Armed Forces.

Recommendations for the Security Council

The recommendations proposed last year are still relevant, from requesting the Council's subsidiary bodies on sanctions and counterterrorism to provide information on the integration of a gender perspective in their visits, assessments, technical support, and listings of individuals, to consideration of a regional strategy to engage women's civil society organizations and facilitate their interaction with regional bodies such as the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) or the Lake Chad Basin Commission, including through the establishment of a women's situation room for the whole region and the deployment of gender advisory expertise to the MNJTF. The need for justice and services for survivors of sexual violence and accountability remains and has been highlighted in every high-level visit, conference, UN and NGO report,

and government statement, but the response on the ground is still inadequate. **In addition to the recommendations outlined last year:**

- The IEG could request the UN in the four countries to map out the gender expertise, representation of women, and resources dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment by the regional and national institutions leading the response, from ECOWAS, ECCAS, the MNJTF, and the Lake Chad Basin Commission to the relevant national ministries and institutions, such as the Ministry of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement, the National and State Emergency Management Agency, the Presidential Committee on North-East Initiatives, or the Victims Support Fund in Nigeria, and similar institutions in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, such as the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace for the Crisis in the Diffa region.
- Council Members may stress to the governments of the region the need for proper consultation with women and women's organizations on all matters related to IDP camp closures and IDP and refugee returns.
- Council Members may welcome the recent establishment of a Judicial Commission in Nigeria investigating alleged violations of human rights by Nigerian security agencies, and urge the relevant authorities to include sexual and gender-based violence within the Commission's work.
- During Council briefings, Council members could follow up on the proposal to establish monitoring, analysis, and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence. In that regard, Council Members should encourage the deployment of a dedicated expertise on conflict-related sexual violence to the North East, to ensure a coordinated response to CRSV and implementation of resolution 2331, given the relevance of the connection between sexual violence, human trafficking and terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin.
- Council Members are urged to continue to call for strengthened efforts to hold perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence accountable -including through the support of the Team of Experts on Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict- and additional funding for interventions to address conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence in the context of the Nigeria Humanitarian Fund.
- In his report from September 2017, the Secretary-General notes that the UN continues to advocate for the MNJTF to put forward a strategy to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, including by recruiting a dedicated gender adviser within its civilian component. The IEG co-chairs could write to the MNJTF to inquire about implementation of this proposal, and offer support as needed.