

Opening statement by Fatima Shehu

(Director, Nescob – Network of Civil Society Organisations in Borno State)

I am here representing not only the civil society organizations in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region, but millions of affected population whose voices will otherwise not be heard.

I have been in Nigeria ,particularly Maiduguri one of the most hit by the conflict, with my family, have always been there, before the conflict, during the conflict and have not left, not for a single day and in Shaa Allah will be there post conflict.

The conflict in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region is one of the most overlooked and neglected in the world. Neglected in terms of attention, neglected in terms of funding, in terms of quality and quantity of intervention .In the words of the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahei, Mr Toby Lanser, yesterday, He said it is not business as usual, It should not be business as usual. There is the need to bridge the gap between humanitarian and development with more focus on integrating implementation plans with civil society organizations.

That brings to my mind the issue of capacity, most often civil society are termed as not having capacity to respond and it is important to state here that the magnitude of the crises is something that has overwhelmed us all together, we have never experienced anything like this before. If we are talking of capacity in terms of technical expertise or funds, then I agree we do not have capacity, but I know that the civil society have an understanding of the context, they have the passion and the commitment, and that I believe is the greatest capacity.

I would also call on Governments who are key stakeholders in this aspect to align with civil society organization. I am also pleased to announce here that after the civil society engagement yesterday a regional network of civil society was established.

The former UN Secretary general Mr Ban-ki Moon on localization said it is important that humanitarian intervention be as local as possible and only as international as necessary.

I would like to see today who the biggest donor or where the highest pledge will come from. I would like to pose this question “Who is the greatest donor”? I can answer by saying that the people are the greatest donors, who despite their limited resources their disposals have opened their arms to embrace the community and I believe we need to stand by them. That brings to my mind the story of my aunt who herself is a widow, but who because of this insurgency has to take in her son who was displaced from Bama, his wife and their four children despite the limited resources at her disposal. However this scenario is not unique to my aunt but that is the position of many of the people in the host communities in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region.

I would like to say that governments and donors need to be there for us not only in the short term but also in the long term. And I would like to end by saying that in ten years I would be there, My family will be there, The affected communities will be there, Civil Society Organizations in the region will be there **but** the question is **will you be there?**

Thank you.