

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

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*Remarks to the press at the Oslo Humanitarian Conference  
on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region  
Oslo, 24 February 2017*

We have a humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad Region which is truly massive: a staggering 10.7 million people need immediate humanitarian assistance – that is twice the population of Norway as a whole – and who urgently need life-saving relief and protection tonight. And 8.5 million of that 10.7 million are in north-eastern Nigeria around the epicenter of Maiduguri.

With our international community's increased support, beginning today, affected families and communities - and that includes these very important first responders and host communities who often have very little for themselves but are the ones who step up first and support people who have had to flee through no fault of their own - if we don't step up, they will all face a life of hunger, even famine in some areas of north-east Nigeria, as announced on Tuesday at the United Nations – so disease, gender-based violence and continued displacement accompany all that. Children will face a bleak future of illiteracy, malnutrition, risk of forced recruitment into armed groups and premature death.

Today, I have launched the Nigeria Humanitarian Fund to support life-saving operations in the North-East. This fund will enable donors to pool their contributions to deliver a more effective, collective and immediate response and I have encouraged all donors to support this initiative. I am deeply grateful to those who have already so committed. What lies behind this is that catastrophes such as a famine can be averted now if we step up in a timely, sufficiently advanced manner.

We are sending a very clear message today: as the international community is stepping up, and is supporting a scale-up, supporting the governments of the region, we can stop and reverse a further descent into an ever-deepening crisis with unimaginable consequences for millions of people and an entire generation of children and youth. With [the affected] governments, in concert with those governments, and the leadership in-country – and local governments – we, the international community representing all the people behind the governments of those who donate, the UN agencies, the ICRC, the local and international NGOs, we can bring hope.

The UN and our partners in Nigeria have already been reaching 2.1 million people with food assistance, over four million with emergency care and over 1.7 million with water and sanitation, despite the high-risk environment of reaching people with access. We already have a track record of success behind which the donors can generously get behind and back us as we now see the compound factors leading to the need for scale-up.

Particular for this region, the humanitarian appeal is for US\$1.5 billion for the Lake Chad Basin region in 2017. And in one morning, we have raised a third of that. That is genuine success for 2017. We have other [donors] who will be able to come in in the course of the coming months as their transition of budgetary cycles allow, and that will help us aim for our target which will help the neighbours meet all the needs as we have seen them. So I am deeply grateful for the support. We have the ability therefore to deliver on a plan, and to step up. We are ready, we need the finance, and I am delighted that as finances are coming in, we can save lives.