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COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF DEFENCE OF THE LAKE CHAD BASIN COMMISSION
MEMBER COUNTRIES AND THE REPUBLIC OF BENIN

24 FEBRUARY 2017

ABUJA, NIGERIA

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR SMAIL CHERGUI

AFRICAN UNION COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

AT THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF DEFENCE OF THE LAKE

CHAD BASIN COMMISSION MEMBER COUNTRIES AND THE REPUBLIC BENIN

His Excellency, the Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and Head of Mission of the Multinational Joint Task Force

- Honourable Ministers of Defence of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and Benin Republic
- Commander, Multinational Joint Task Force
- Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I would like to express my profound gratitude to the Executive Secretary of Lake Chad Basin Commission and Head of Mission of Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram, for extending the invitation to the African Union (AU) to attend the meeting of the Ministers of Defence of the Lake Chad Basin Commission Member Countries and Benin Republic and to make this address. Indeed it is a great pleasure to be here with you here in Abuja to further express my sincere appreciation to the Federal Government of Nigeria for hosting the event and for her usual hospitality. The people of Lake Chad Basin sub-region, Africa and the International Community owe you credit and respect for your continued determination and resolute actions in combating Boko Haram Terrorist group with the evident gains recorded to-date.

2. Your Excellency and Honourable Ministers, you would recall that, the AU Peace and Security Council at its 484th meeting of 28 January 2015 authorized the deployment of the Multinational Joint Task Force and decided to support the efforts of the Lake Chad Basin Commission Member States and the Republic of Benin. You would further recall that, at its 489th meeting, held on 3 March 2015, the AU PSC endorsed the Concept of Operations agreed upon at the Yaoundé meeting of experts and increased the MNJTF strength to an appropriate level with a view to facilitating the effective implementation of the MNJTF mandate and tasks. It is worthy to note that following the PSC decisions, the United Nations Security Council, on 28 July 2015, issued a Presidential

Statement, which called upon the International Community and Donors to support the MNJTF operations in the fight against Boko Haram.

3. In light of the threat posed by Boko Haram and the need to pursue our collective effort, the AU Peace and Security Council at its 639th meeting on 29 November 2016 renewed the Mandate of the MNJTF for another 12 months up to 30 January 2018.

4. I would like to seize this opportunity to commend the determination and engagement of the LCBC Member States and Benin Republic in combating the Boko Haram terrorist group. This Regional Initiative is a true reflection of our collective effort for attaining sustainable Peace and Stability on the continent, using African resources as the primary means for intervention. This collective effort by the Lake Chad Basin Commission and Benin Republic, the African Union and the international community was instrumental to the operationalization of the Multinational Joint Task Force. As a result, significant progress has been made towards enabling it to effectively carry out offensive operations against the Boko Haram terrorist group. Further to this success the group has been disorganized and has lost the ability to hold territory.

5. I wish to indicate that the African Union and the International Partners recognize the efforts made by the LCBC and Benin Republic towards strengthening their relationship and their collective effort to combat Boko Haram terrorist group. The Federal Government of Nigeria, in particular has made huge financial contributions towards the operationalization and operations of the MNJTF; this has enabled several key activities take place to-date, including the establishment of the MNJTF Headquarters at its temporal site and Sector Headquarters including the sustenance of its forces.

6. Of concern however, is that Boko Haram sporadically, carries out isolated attacks in the Lake Chad Basin area and continues to hide in isolated rural areas and in the Lake Chad Islands.

7. I am equally pleased commend the increased cooperation and collaboration between the MNJTF and the National Forces within and around MNJTF Area of Operations which needs to be sustained. In effect, I may I therefore reiterate the Commission's commitment to mobilize additional resources in coordination with the International Community to support the regional efforts of the LCBC Member States and Benin Republic to rid the region of Boko

8. The AU and the LCBC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the mobilization of additional support to the MNJTF on 16 October 2015, while the Support Implementation Agreement (SIA) was signed on 29 January 2016. The implementation of these framework documents is key and therefore both the AU and the LCBC need to continue to work hand in hand to ensure compliance and applicability. The AU and the LCBC will be renewing these framework documents today. It is however critical to note that the exemplary model of primary financing for the operation against Boko Haram serves as a good model for future Peace Support Operations which regional organizations must emulate.

9. I would like to use this opportunity to appreciate the support being provided by our International Partners. They have been supportive to the AU efforts in the provision of additional support to the MNJTF operations. In August 2016, 31.67 million Euros was made available to the AU out of the pledged 50 million Euros. European Union funds. The United Kingdom has also provided 5 (Five) Million Pounds bulk of which is being used to execute various

aspects of support to the MNJTF. The funds have enabled the AU procure and delivered vehicles, motorcycles, electrical generators and IT equipment, internet services and disbursements for Operating Costs and Salaries for both International and Local staff supporting the MNJTF Headquarters.

10. The above notwithstanding, it is worthwhile to take stock of the steps taken by the AU to, directly or based on the Partners' pledges, extend additional support to the MNJTF operations against the Boko Haram. The AU provided strategic and operational Tactical Communication and Information Technology equipment from its liquidated MISCA Operation in Bangui, Central Africa Republic (CAR), and 33 Vehicles from the AU Support to Ebola Outbreak in West Africa Mission in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia as well as VSAT Communication equipment from the 2015 Field Training Exercise AMANI AFRICA II in Lohatla, South Africa.

11. I am happy to inform you that just last week I was in Ndjamena to hand over some of these equipment to the MNJTF Commander. The utilization of the EU Funds are gradually coming on board. I must recognize both partners and the AU are working on modalities to expedite the procurement process. AU will also take over the payment of the Mission Subsistence Allowance to the staff officers starting from end of this month.

12. I am delighted to inform you that an AU strategic partner had made a donation of equipment of various types to support AU Peace Support Operations. The MNJTF is allocated a large portion of the equipment. This will enhance MNJTF capability for current and future operations. Furthermore, it gives me great pleasure to inform you that once the AU Continental Logistics Base in Douala, Cameroun, is fully operational, it will also serve as logistic support to MNJTF or similar regional initiative if required.

• Your Excellency, Honourable Ministers

· Ladies and Gentlemen

13. It is essential to quickly bring Boko Haram terrorist activities to an end particularly as this has negatively impacted the Humanitarian Situation within the region. Current statistics of people displaced are staggering within in the affected areas of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroun and Niger.

14. It should be noted that security efforts should create the conditions for the affected countries to continue stabilization and development bearing in mind that other multifaceted measures will not be enough to confront the current security challenges created by the Boko Haram. The LCBC collective effort reflected in the spirit of this meeting should also incorporate various multifaceted and often intertwined measures to deal with radicalism. There is also the need to accelerate efforts aimed at preparing the ground for Post Conflict Stabilization and Rehabilitation of the areas affected by the Boko Haram terrorism including the handling of the surrendering Boko Haram Militants and their families. While recognising the huge successes and progress that have been achieved on the military front, the AU welcomes the increased global attention to the humanitarian challenges in the affected areas. These challenges would require the same synergy used in attaining the military gains to move into the next phase of stabilization and rehabilitation.

15. In view of the continued danger posed by Boko Haram and other armed groups within the region, the call for a collective approach with a unified and harmonized effort as well as common understanding is now. Hence, this and such meetings are timely. I wish to, therefore, thank the Secretariat of the LCBC and the Federal Republic of Nigeria for hosting this important meeting and the Ministers of Defence of the LCBC and Benin for your sustained collective efforts to bring an end to the Boko Haram menace.

I thank you, Your Excellency and Honourable Ministers.