



National Statement at Lake Chad Basin Regional Security Summit

Remarks

Antony J. Blinken
Deputy Secretary of State
Abuja, Nigeria
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Good afternoon. President Buhari, your Excellencies, distinguished ministers, it is an honor to join you today and express our profound appreciation to President Buhari and the people of Nigeria for hosting us.

[Introduction repeated in French]

Yesterday, I had the opportunity to meet with young Nigerian entrepreneurs and innovators who are pioneering new frontiers in science and technology. Their energy, their ingenuity—reflected in young people across the region—points the way towards a future for the Lake Chad Basin defined by growth, by opportunity, by dignity.

The fight against Boko Haram is a fight for *this* future—one that unlocks the potential of all people, the prosperity of nations, and peace for the entire region.

Today's Regional Security Summit can play a critical part in making that hope a reality.

This Summit provides a valuable forum for frank conversation and collaboration on critical shared priorities, including security cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and stabilization efforts.

As we assess the considerable progress the Lake Chad Basin countries have made in *degrading* Boko Haram, it is our hope that these discussions will set the stage for developing a comprehensive approach for how the countries of the region—with continued support from the international community and partners—can best work together to *defeat* Boko Haram.

The United States is deeply committed to supporting this fight—a fight against a group that has turned young children into suicide bombers. We are determined to defeat their campaign of murder, enslavement, and destruction.

We will continue to provide advisors, information sharing, training, logistical support, equipment, and resources to support our partners in this struggle.

As we do that, we urge that security forces carry out their operations in a way that respects human rights and strengthens the bonds between the security forces and the civilian population.

It is the right thing to do, but it is also the smart thing to do—because ignoring the human rights of citizens risks turning them to extremism and fueling the very fire that we seek to extinguish together.

Effective defector and detainee policies are needed to break Boko Haram's cohesion and provide viable exit routes for those prepared to renounce violence. It is crucial that detainees receive humane treatment in detention facilities, again, so as to not fuel extremist narratives.

We commend Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin for standing up the Multinational Joint Task Force. We support the MNJTF—which can play, and is already playing, an important role in planning and coordinating security operations, expediting the exchange of information, and ensuring that security forces uphold human rights. Since Boko Haram has no respect for international borders, strategic success requires that the governments of this region work together.

Victory on the battlefield is not enough to ensure the lasting defeat of Boko Haram.

Success will require a sustained and comprehensive approach that includes combatting Boko Haram's ideology, providing civilian security and civil administration, investigating human rights abuses and holding those responsible to account, repairing civilian-military relations, restoring stability in liberated communities, providing basic services, and promoting economic development.

There is a continuum that we have to address. We have to start by liberating communities from Boko Haram, but that is not enough. We then have to stabilize these communities so that people can come home, but still that is not enough. We then have to rebuild these communities, and even that is not enough because we have to address the economic and political drivers of division that set us on the course we are on already.

Taken together, these efforts can address the drivers of extremism that gave rise to Boko Haram in the first place. This comprehensive approach is also needed to create the conditions that would enable nearly 2.4 million internally displaced persons and 170,000 refugees to voluntarily and safely return to their homes in Nigeria.

If we fail to adopt and pursue this comprehensive approach, we may well defeat Boko Haram on the battlefield, only to be confronted by Boko Haram 2.0 that rises from its ashes.

At the same time, we must also address this region's acute humanitarian crisis—provide more life-saving humanitarian aid to those in need and education opportunities for children who have been out of school for far too long. None of us can afford a lost generation of children in this region.

The United States has been proud to provide nearly \$250 million in humanitarian assistance to the Lake Chad countries over the past two years. We have established nearly 300 non-formal learning centers for children, supported mobile health teams, set up reporting mechanisms and services for survivors of gender-based violence, and created village savings and loan associations for women and girls to generate a little more income.

We also remain absolutely committed to the efforts to find and return the Chibok girls and the many others taken by Boko Haram from their families and from their communities.

The hard challenges of this moment are matched by the promise and potential of this region. We are confident that the Lake Chad Basin countries—with support from the United States, France, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and other international partners—will win this fight and set this region on a course to realize a better future. Let us now turn our unity of vision into sustained unity of action.

Thank you very much.