

Opening statement by Minister of State Katja Keul at the high-level conference on the lake chad region in Niamey (23.01.2023)

It is an honour to open the Third High-Level Conference on the Lake Chad Region here in Niamey.

I would like to thank our host, the Government of Niger, for its hospitality.

And I would like to thank our partners from Norway and the United Nations for the excellent cooperation in organising this conference.

My big thanks also go to the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the African Union for their partnership and leadership.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

last month, I travelled to Nigeria with Foreign Minister Baerbock.

We visited Ngarannam, a village destroyed by Boko Haram in 2015.

This village used to be a place of desperation. Now, it is a place of hope.

With the support of our international stabilization engagement the village has been rebuilt.

We spoke to a mother of six children.

She told us her family finally feels safe again.

Her children can go to school.

They have a house, food and cattle – simply: they have their lives back.

I also spoke to teachers doing all their best to help traumatized children to start a new life.

And I also spoke to former fighters, often very young men, who sometimes spend years in the bushes.

Now, they are trying to reintegrate in their communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Lake Chad region was once an economically vibrant and interconnected region.

For more than a decade, people have had to deal with terrorism, the violence of armed groups, organized crime and forced displacement.

Around 11 million people are in need of assistance.

Vulnerable groups, women and girls suffer the most.

This terrible situation was the reason why we convened the first two Lake Chad conferences: 2017 in Oslo and 2018 in Berlin.

In the aftermath, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the African Union endorsed a Regional Strategy.

Since the first conference in Oslo we have seen some positive results – for example in Ngarranam.

The Lake Chad region is still one of the world's most protracted conflict.

But the appeal of Boko Haram is weakening.

We see a mass exit of former fighters.

Also, many internally displaced people return to their home regions.

These are very positive developments.

But they also bring along new challenges.

Former fighters have to be reintegrated.

Internally displaced people need support to rebuild their lives.

We also have to put even more emphasis on gender equality and women's rights.

There is a direct link between gender equality and stability.

Women must have full participation in society, politics and peace negotiations.

And finally, we have to step up our support for climate change adaptation.

Because: drought and heat aggravate the food security and livelihood of millions of people in the region even further.

Over the last 60 years Lake Chad has lost 90% of its water because of climate change.

This directly affects the security and stability of the region.

Climate change has become one of the strongest drivers of instability worldwide.

And it will be even more so in the future.

Limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees is therefore essential.

We all need to step up our efforts in this regard.

To master all these challenges, we have to continue our support for the region.

This is why we are here today.

In the pledging session of the conference tomorrow afternoon, we will announce our future contribution in more detail.

At this point, I can announce that we plan to spend a 100 million euro for the region for 2023.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Complex problems require integrated solutions.

The region faces great challenges.

They can hardly be handled by one government alone.

This conference therefore brings together partners from governments or non-governmental organizations;

national, regional and international partners;

humanitarian, stabilization, development and military actors.

We see that many of the successes reached so far are mainly the result of this cross regional cooperation.

We should further strengthen this approach.

If we do so, the Lake Chad initiative can become a model for stabilization word-wide.

This in no end in itself.

It is about fighting the root causes of terrorism and extremism.

It is about making sure children can safely attend their school.

It is about people living in safety and dignity.

Thank you!