



OPENING REMARKS

BY

THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF STATE FOR

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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**AT THE TWO-DAY HIGH-LEVEL RETREAT OF NIGERIAN
AMBASSADORS AND SAHEL/LAKE CHAD DIPLOMATIC
REPRESENTATIVES**

Theme:

***“Strengthening Nigeria's Engagement with the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin
Countries: Towards Peace, Security and Sustainable Regional Development”***

Maiduguri, Borno State

Saturday, 8th August 2026

Protocol

It is with great pleasure and a profound sense of responsibility that I welcome everyone to this historic High-Level Retreat on Nigeria's Engagement with the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin Countries.

2. At the very outset, permit me, on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to convey warm greetings and profound appreciation to His Excellency Professor Babagana Umara Zulum, for graciously accepting to host this strategic retreat. We are deeply grateful for the generous support, hospitality and cooperation extended by the Government and good people of Borno State. Borno State played a critical role in laying the roots of pre- colonial diplomacy with contacts with the rest of the world, including Europe. It is therefore most befitting that we are meeting to address our relations, challenges and opportunities of the Lake Chad region and the Sahel

3. Our presence here today is both significant and purposeful. The choice of Maiduguri as the venue for this retreat is deliberate, strategic and deeply symbolic. For many years, this historic city was widely perceived as the epicenter of insecurity within the Lake Chad Basin. Today, Maiduguri presents a remarkably different narrative, as one of resilience, courage, recovery and renewed hope. It stands as a compelling testimony to the transformative impact of visionary leadership, the resilience of its people, and not the least, the sacrifice and unwavering commitment of the Government to pursue sustainable development, despite daunting challenges.

4. By bringing together Nigeria's Ambassadors and distinguished colleagues from the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin here in Maiduguri, we seek not only to deliberate on the challenges confronting our region, but also to witness, first-hand, the remarkable progress made in post-conflict recovery and stabilization. In many respects, this city represents the very future we collectively seek for the entire Sahel: a future founded on peace, stability, development and shared prosperity.

5. Distinguished Participants, Nigeria's relationship with the countries of the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin is unique and enduring. It is a relationship founded not merely on diplomatic engagement or geographical proximity, but on centuries of shared history, commerce, culture, religion, language and ending family ties. While our international boundaries define our sovereignty as independent States, they do not diminish the deep historical, social and cultural bonds that unite our people. These connections and time-honoured linkages have deepened the continued strong foundation for mutual trust, cooperation and our collective commitment to peace, stability and shared prosperity across the region.

6. What happens in Niamey affects Maiduguri. What happens in N'Djamena influences Borno. Developments in Bamako, Ouagadougou, Nouakchott and Yaoundé have direct implications for Nigeria's national security, economic wellbeing and regional diplomacy. It is precisely for this reason that Nigeria has consistently taken the issues of economic cooperation, trade, commerce, peace and stability in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin as indispensable component of our own national interest.

7. As we seek to deepen our economic partnership, we need to recall one of the enduring lessons of global history. Countries that trade with one another do not fight one another. It is our firm belief that the promotion of closer commercial ties with industrial value addition, including agriculture and food security, will lay a solid base for regional peace, security, stability and development in the Lake Chad Basin countries and the Sahel.

8. Excellencies, there is no denying that the Sahel today stands at an important crossroads. The region continues to grapple with terrorism and violent extremism, transnational organised crime, irregular migration, climate change, environmental degradation, humanitarian crises and growing geopolitical competition. These are challenges that transcend national boundaries, and no single country, however formidable in military strength or economic capacity, can confront in isolation. Our

response, therefore, must go beyond national boundaries. It must be collective, coordinated and forward-looking; and, above all, it must underscore the role of diplomacy as the core of regional engagement. This also requires that we mend fences with the Alliance of Sahelian States (AES) of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger at the political and diplomatic levels. Similarly, relations with our contiguous neighbours are particularly critical to our security and economic prosperity.

9. This retreat is therefore timely. Rather than dwell exclusively on the challenges confronting our region, we have chosen to focus on opportunities: opportunities to rebuild confidence, to strengthen dialogue, to deepen political consultations, to expand economic cooperation, to reinforce regional security mechanisms, and ultimately, to redefine Nigeria's engagement with the countries of the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, for the benefit of our peoples.

10. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Nigeria remains firmly committed to the ideals of African solidarity, regional integration and peaceful coexistence. As Africa's largest economy and one of the continent's foremost diplomatic actors, Nigeria recognises that true leadership is not measured by influence alone, but by the willingness to build bridges where divisions exist, to encourage dialogue where misunderstandings persist, and to inspire cooperation where differences threaten collective progress. Our foreign policy has consistently been anchored on these principles; our objective is not to dictate regional outcomes, but to work collaboratively with our neighbours in finding practical solutions to common challenges.

11. It is in this context that the Ministry has proposed the development of a Sahel Development Compact — a practical framework that shifts the narrative from crisis management to sustainable development. The Compact envisions deeper cooperation in infrastructure, agriculture, trade, transport connectivity, energy, education, climate resilience, water resource management, humanitarian response and human capital development. It recognizes that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through military

means alone; it must be underpinned by inclusive economic growth, social justice and genuine opportunity for our youth.

12. Recharging the waters of Lake Chad is critical to the security, environment and livelihoods of our people, as recently underscored by the 5th Lake Chad Governors' Forum. We must move beyond debate over the feasibility environment impact assessment exercise to take concrete steps of raising over \$50 billion required to actualize this strategically important regional project.

13. Redoubling our commitment to the Multi-national Joint Task Force (MNTF) is equally important as we seek to intensify our joint resolve and strategies to address persistent security challenges.

14. Over the course of the next two days, we shall engage in frank and constructive dialogues on the critical issues affecting our region. Our resource persons have been carefully selected for their wealth of experience and practical knowledge, and I encourage every participant to contribute openly and candidly. The value of this retreat will not be measured by the quality of our presentations alone, but also by the richness of our discussions and the practicality of the recommendations that emerge from them.

15. We expect that, at the conclusion of this retreat, we shall adopt the Maiduguri Roadmap for Nigeria's Continued Engagement with the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin Countries — a comprehensive framework for sustained political dialogue, enhanced security cooperation, economic integration, humanitarian collaboration and people-to-people engagement. This Roadmap should also establish mechanisms for regular high-level bilateral visits between Nigeria and our neighbouring countries, institutionalise periodic political consultations, encourage Joint Commission meetings, and create sectoral working groups to ensure that the resolutions of this retreat are faithfully implemented.

16. Excellencies, permit me to emphasise that diplomacy remains our strongest instrument for preserving peace. While security cooperation remains indispensable, experience has shown that enduring peace is ultimately sustained through dialogue, mutual trust, economic opportunity and respect for shared interests. Nigeria therefore, remains committed to working closely with every country represented here to strengthen bilateral relations, promote regional stability, and consolidate our common aspirations for prosperity. We are convinced that stronger engagement today will produce greater regional stability tomorrow.

17. As diplomats, we bear a unique and solemn responsibility. We are not merely representatives of our respective governments; we are custodians of dialogue, builders of enduring partnerships, promoters of mutual understanding and, above all, architects of peace. It is incumbent upon us to approach our deliberations with open minds, mutual respect and a shared sense of purpose, guided by collective determination to produce practical forward-looking outcomes that will strengthen regional cooperation and contribute meaningfully to a peaceful, stable and prosperous future of our region.

18. As I conclude this address, permit me to again thank His Excellency, the Executive Governor of Borno State, for his exemplary leadership and for demonstrating that Maiduguri is not merely a place where history was made, but a place where the future of regional cooperation can be reimagined. To all our distinguished guests, I wish you fruitful deliberations and a most enjoyable stay in Maiduguri.

19. It is now my singular honour and privilege to welcome you to this historic retreat, and to wish us all successful deliberations.

Thank you.

God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.