



WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE PERMANENT SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AT THE HIGH-LEVEL RETREAT OF NIGERIAN AMBASSADORS AND SAHEL DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVES

Venue: Maiduguri, Borno State

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

Protocols

Executive Governor of Borno State;

Honourable Minister of State for Foreign Affairs

Distinguished Nigerian Ambassadors and Heads of Mission;

Distinguished Ambassadors and Representatives of Sahel Countries;

Representatives of the ECOWAS Commission, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF);

Senior Government Officials and Representatives of the Armed Forces and Security Agencies;

Representatives of Academia, Development Partners, Humanitarian Organisations and the Private Sector;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with great pleasure and a deep sense of honour that I welcome you all to Maiduguri, Borno State, for this High-Level Retreat of Nigerian Ambassadors and Sahel Diplomatic Representatives, convened under the theme: **“Strengthening Nigeria's Engagement with the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin Countries: Towards Peace, Security, and Sustainable Regional Development.”**

Permit me to express my sincere appreciation to the Government and people of Borno State for accepting to host this event, their warm hospitality and unwavering commitment to supporting initiatives that promote peace, security, and regional cooperation.

The choice of Maiduguri as the venue for this important retreat is both deliberate and symbolic. Once regarded primarily through the lens of conflict, Maiduguri today stands as a compelling testament to resilience, determination, recovery and renewal. Its remarkable transformation underscores the enduring strength of the human spirit and demonstrates what can be achieved through visionary leadership, effective partnerships and sustained commitment. As the gateway to Nigeria's engagement with the Lake Chad Basin and the wider Sahel, the city provides an appropriate setting for our deliberations on the future of regional cooperation.

Distinguished participants,

The Sahel occupies a place of immense strategic importance to Nigeria and the African continent. Beyond our shared borders, the region is bound together by centuries of historical interaction, cultural affinity, trade, migration and social exchange. Consequently, developments within the Sahel have profound implications for Nigeria's national security, economic prosperity and foreign policy.

Today, our region is confronted by a complex interplay of challenges, including terrorism and violent extremism, transnational organised crime, climate change, irregular migration, humanitarian crises, food insecurity, amongst others. Evolving geopolitical realities, including the emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) and changing democratic dynamics within the West and Central African region, call for renewed diplomatic engagement, strategic dialogue and innovative approaches to regional cooperation and collaboration.

These developments should not be considered solely as challenges, but as opportunities to review our engagement with the Sahel and Lake Chad regions through constructive dialogue, mutual respect and practical cooperation. Nigeria remains firmly committed to promoting regional peace, stability and development while fostering stronger partnerships with all countries of the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin.

During the course of this retreat, participants will examine practical strategies for advancing a proposed Sahel Development Compact, a comprehensive framework aimed at strengthening collaboration in critical areas such as:

- a) Regional peace, security and intelligence cooperation;
- (b) Trade facilitation, infrastructure development and transport connectivity;
- (c) Agriculture, food security and climate resilience;
- (d) Humanitarian response, youth empowerment and sustainable development; and
- (e) Diplomatic engagement and confidence-building among regional stakeholders.

It is expected that these deliberations will provide a veritable platform for deepening understanding among regional actors, strengthening diplomatic coordination, and generating practical policy recommendations capable of advancing collective peace, security and prosperity across the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin.

Ultimately, it is hoped that this retreat will culminate in a strategic roadmap for enhanced regional collaboration and reaffirm our shared commitment to a peaceful, secure and prosperous neighbourhood.

I wish to commend the Planning, Research and Statistics Department and African Affairs Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government of Borno State, and all partner institutions whose dedication and hard work have made this retreat possible.

I encourage all participants to engage actively, exchange ideas candidly, and approach our discussions with a spirit of partnership, innovation and shared responsibility. The quality of our deliberations over the coming days will shape the policy directions that strengthen Nigeria's engagement with the Sahel and contribute to lasting regional stability and sustainable development.

Once again, on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I warmly welcome you all to Maiduguri and wish you fruitful deliberations and a pleasant stay.