NEW YORK, US, September 14 (Infosplusgabon) - While the efforts of the Governments in Africa's Lake Chad Basin have diminished Boko Haram's combat capacity in the region, the terrorist group has changed its tactics, increasing the use of suicide attacks, the top United Nations political official reported to the Security Council on Wednesday in New York.

UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman said the coordinated efforts among the region's Governments, including through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) had “without question” yielded encouraging progress in the fight against Boko Haram, a UN statement said.

“Unfortunately, the fight is far from over,” he said, noting that the group had shifted its tactics in the wake of these efforts, and some 130 attacks attributed to Boko Haram in the four affected countries – Nigeria, followed by Cameroon, Niger and Chad - in June and July resulted in 284 civilian fatalities, a significant increase compared to 146 attacks and 107 civilian fatalities in April and May.

At the political level, he said that the UN Special Representatives for Central and West Africa and the Sahel proposed a regional strategy to address the root causes of the Lake Chad Basin crisis, which would be based on ownership by the countries and subregional organizations concerned: the Economic Community for Central African States (ECOWAS) and the Lake Chad Basin Commission.

On the development front, Mr. Feltman noted that the current crisis has “wreaked havoc” on basic infrastructure, as well as government resources and services. Indeed, insecurity has sparked large-scale unemployment and left one million school-age children deprived of education. The substantial economic impact of the crisis has reached nearly US$9 billion across north-east Nigeria alone.

“Poverty, weak state authority, insecurity and climate change explain this situation, with women and girls being the first victims,” he said, also noting that conflicts along with all this displacement has eroded, or even broken, intercommunity and intra-community ties. And without robust efforts in peacebuilding, the reintegration of ex-combatants, including Boko Haram and vigilante groups, could create additional tensions.

Meanwhile, humanitarian needs are “staggering,” with 10.7 million people in the region requiring assistance, Mr. Feltman stated, noting that the bulk of burden is in Nigeria's north-east. Yet, funding continues to be insufficient, as the appeal for the region, US$1.5 billion in 2017, is only funded at 40 per cent.

He went on to raise concerns about the human rights situation, noting the continued violations by Boko Haram, including killings, forceful use of children as suicide bombers and sexual and gender-based violence against women and children. Perpetrators must be brought to justice.

“The UN has also received numerous allegations of serious human rights violations committed in the context of counter-terrorism operations,” he said, stressing that the Organization continues to advocate strongly with the MNJTF to put forward a clear strategy to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, including by recruiting a dedicated gender adviser within its civilian component.

While the efforts of the Joint Multinational Force remain essential in resolving the crises, Mr. Feltman said the financial investment of the Joint Multinational Force was a major burden on national budgets for development. That is why support from the UN and its Member States is needed more than ever.

“The complex and increasingly protracted nature of the Lake Chad Basin crisis calls for innovative and integrated solutions that bridge traditional divides between humanitarian and development strategies,” he said, noting that a special event scheduled for 21 September in the margins of the UN General Assembly's annual general debate would be an opportunity for the international community to reaffirm its support for the region.

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