

Ms. Coleman (United States of America):

I thank you, Mr. Minister, for your leadership in focusing the attention of the Security Council on the important linkages between water and international peace and security. I also thank our briefers for so eloquently framing the issues this morning.

As we have heard, conflict over water is increasingly a serious global issue. In discussing water, peace and security today, I would like to focus my remarks on two points: first, the example of the Lake Chad basin as an area struggling with water and security and, secondly, the role that the international community can play in helping to prevent water disputes from becoming armed conflicts.

The Lake Chad basin, which spans the border region of Chad, the Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon, is an example of what happens when water scarcities contribute to conflict. Overuse, poor management practices and expanding desertification have caused the lake to recede by approximately 90 per cent. The disappearance of that critical resource, which is the basis of survival for millions of people, has led to territorial disputes and helped nurture the rise of Boko Haram. Boko Haram uses the drying lake as a recruiting base, easily exploiting the tens of thousands of displaced people who are searching for a means of livelihood. Boko Haram deploys brutal tactics of abduction, sexual slavery, killing and looting to terrorize the population, and the resulting armed conflict has left over 9 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.

However, there is a glimmer of hope in that otherwise dark reality. The Lake Chad Basin Commission was established by Governments of the region and civil society to try to peacefully resolve disputes over the lake. The Commission also formed the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to fight Boko Haram — a powerful testament to the role regional cooperation can play in combating issues that result from water scarcity. It is urgent that the international community bolster its support to the MNJTF to assist in its efforts to counter Boko Haram. In particular, the main challenge for the MNJTF is a severe lack of funding, and therefore we all must recommit to contributing to the Force. Greater international support would be a strong sign of solidarity with the people of the four countries that are bearing the brunt of a terrorist threat that mocks the value of human life. Support to local Governments to help build capacity for rehabilitation and reconstruction would also go a long way in helping to ensure lasting peace and stability.

Conflict over water is not exclusive to the Lake Chad basin, of course. In Syria, poor drought management resulted in the loss of livelihood for thousands of farmers, leading to mass migration to urban areas and fanning the flames of what was already a deep-rooted discontent with respect to Government policies. In Iraq, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant has manipulated strategic dams on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers as a

key component of its strategy.

I doubt that there is a single country represented in this Chamber that is immune to water challenges. I know that the United States is not. With 50 states that share 21 large rivers and more than 20,000 watersheds, we have had to learn to cooperate. For more than 100 years, the United States has had close relationships on water management with both our neighbours, and all three countries have benefited. For example, our 2012 bilateral agreement with Mexico permits Mexico to store water in the United States for drought protection, but it also allows United States entities to invest in water conservation projects in Mexico and then share in the water that is saved. That model has proved to be successful in strengthening water security for both countries and in encouraging investments in water conservation and sound resource management. Drawing from that partnership and others, I would like to share some thoughts on best practices we have learned in helping to keep water disputes from erupting into conflict.

First, the international community should support regional resolution of water disputes by building the capacity of States and stakeholders. Countries require the ability to negotiate, resolve disputes and implement agreements relating to their water resources. That includes the technical skills needed to understand emerging challenges and opportunities, as well as the means to address them. One model of capacity-building is the programme funded by the United States Agency for International Development in the Kadamjay region of Kyrgyzstan, which provided technical assistance and resources to better manage water inefficiencies. The programme enabled the construction of a permanent diversion dam, which benefited nearly 2,000 farmers and residents.

Secondly, institutions and processes can help lock-in progress. The establishment of regional organizations, bilateral agreements and information-sharing platforms can all play a role in institutionalizing and maintaining cooperation. The United States has been working with several other donors to develop the Shared Waters Partnership, which supports cooperative efforts on transboundary waters in regions where water is or may become a source of conflict. The programme is a resource to any country looking for support to resolve water issues.

Finally, sound data and impartial analysis are essential to developing a common view of the challenges and opportunities that face us, and they help provide a foundation for decision-making. A project in the Okavango River basin, which is shared by Angola, Namibia and Botswana, effectively used data to give early warning of locations at risk of resource conflict, thereby allowing the parties involved to proactively resolve potential issues before they could develop.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate our support for developing creative, win-win

solutions to transboundary water challenges. I thank you, Mr. President, for calling our attention to this very important issue.