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August 15, 2013
Abuja, Nigeria

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate publication

**REMARKS FOR UNDER SECRETARY SHERMAN AT THE
UNITED STATES-NIGERIA BINATIONAL COMMISSION
REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION WORKING GROUP
OPENING SESSION**

I am pleased to be here today for the ninth working group session of the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission. This forum reflects the strong partnership of our two nations, a partnership that is one of our most important in Africa and for good reason. Your nation is a leader for regional stability and a key driver of economic growth on the continent and beyond. Nigeria is poised to become Africa's largest economy. Nigeria's prosperity and stability reverberate in the region and across Africa. And it is Nigerian businesspeople and traders who make up the most influential populations of non-citizens in most West African countries. This nation's leadership has helped resolve major political and security crises in West Africa – from the Liberian and Sierra Leone crises in the 1990s to the more recent political problems in Guinea, Niger, Cote d'Ivoire, and Mali – and your vital contribution to peacekeeping operations worldwide has served as a model and an anchor in a region that will face critical challenges in the years ahead.

The United States and Nigeria have ties to each other at every level. At some \$5 billion dollars, Nigeria is the second largest destination for U.S. private investment in Africa. However, one of our strongest connections is even more personal. More than 1.5 million Nigerians and Nigerian-Americans live in the United States, and an estimated 31,000 U.S. citizens live in Nigeria.

Strong partnerships endure the test of time between governments and between people. We are both democracies that continue to evolve to meet the needs of our citizens and respond to the multifaceted and ever-changing dynamics of the international community. The United States remains committed to working with Nigeria toward securing a future for your country that ensures stability and civilian security and provides for the well-being of all of Nigeria's people.

The United States – Nigeria Binational Commission has been a successful forum to advance our mutual goals. The June 2012 BNC in Washington was an historic event, marking the first time four working groups met at the same time over the course of two days. Since the BNC was established in 2010 we have engaged on some of the most important and challenging issues and have expanded our collaboration in each of the five working group areas. Our previous BNC forums have given us the opportunity to make important strides in many areas, including strengthening Nigeria’s Independent National Electoral Commission so that it could successfully implement Nigeria’s most successful election to date, supporting the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission to combat corruption, promoting trade and investment in Nigeria, and advancing peace and stability in the Niger Delta. It is critical that we continue our progress with candor and mutual commitment to addressing our shared objectives.

Nigeria’s success is important to us, and we will continue to invest in Nigeria’s institutions, people, and businesses to both countries’ mutual benefit. We also recognize that success cannot be achieved unless Nigeria surmounts the challenges that frustrate progress. It is in this spirit that the United States engages today in this working group on Regional Security Cooperation.

Nigeria faces several challenges to national and regional stability. The largest of these challenges is, of course, a Boko Haram-led insurgency operating in the country’s northeast that has created widespread insecurity across northern Nigeria, increased tensions between various ethnic communities, interrupted development activities, frightened off investors, and generated concerns among Nigeria’s northern neighbors. **Nigeria cannot fully achieve its potential as a stable regional leader until Nigeria successfully overcomes the challenge of Boko Haram and secures peace and protection for all its citizens in all regions.**

We know that Boko Haram offers no practical solutions to northern Nigeria’s problems. Instead, it capitalizes on popular frustrations, religious differences, and economic and social difficulties, seeking to undermine the government and exploit religious differences in order to create chaos and make Nigeria ungovernable. The United States knows from experience the immense difficulty in confronting an enemy that respects no boundaries and kills civilians indiscriminately. Today, I hope that our teams can identify specific areas in the context of regional security where we can deepen our partnership and chart concrete steps forward on those topics on which we are already working together.

Security efforts are necessary to protect innocent Nigerians, to prevent Boko Haram's acts of violence, and to capture and prosecute its leaders. The Nigerian government and military must also win over the hearts and minds of northern populations by protecting them and providing timely and commensurate justice to both insurgents and the victims of this unfortunate conflict. Though no easy task, a comprehensive approach that addresses socio-economic problems, articulates clear rules of engagement, and commits to accountability for those who perpetrate violence, both Boko Haram and security forces, will demonstrate to every Nigerian that their future is brighter in a more secure Nigeria.

This may require a new social compact with Nigerian citizens that encompasses an economic recovery strategy as a complement to the government's security strategy. This approach will be successful to the extent that it can garner the support of northern governors and local officials, traditional and religious leaders, civil society organizations, and a generation of young Nigerians who are connected to their government, locally and federally.

Achieving success will not be easy, but we are ready to work with you as one of your strongest and most faithful friends and partners, to discuss new ways of help. We stand ready to work together to develop a multi-faceted strategy to counter the threat posed by Boko Haram that also demonstrates to civilians that they will be protected. Nigeria's diverse people, land, and spirit have already established a foundation for long-term national and regional stability; however, with today's insurgent challenges, strong nations must deepen our commitment to respect human life and dignity, build peace, and prevent future atrocities, even in the midst of a protracted conflict with a violent enemy. We look forward to hearing Nigeria's unique accounts of what steps you are taking to ensure transparency, accountability and justice, including access for civil society organizations and journalists to the north and what steps have been taken to bring to justice those accused of human rights violations.

The United States remains your partner in helping to address this threat that our two nations share. We have designated three individuals as Specially Designated Global Terrorists, demonstrating our resolve in working with you to diminish the capacity of Boko Haram to execute violent attacks. We have provided assistance focused on identifying areas for information-sharing, enhancing security force professionalism and developing tactics to increase public confidence in Nigeria's security response, and improving Nigerian forensics and investigative capacity.

The United States has also been working with Nigerian peacekeepers that deploy to missions across Africa to make sure they have the training and equipment necessary for global peace and security missions. In fact, since 2004, we have trained over 800 staff officers and more than 41,000 troops through the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program.

But the United States partnership with Nigeria is not in the security sector alone. In 2012, the United States provided Nigeria \$647 million in bilateral foreign assistance including over \$480 million to the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, demonstrating how important we consider Nigeria to be in the worldwide fight against HIV and AIDS. Nigeria's own leadership and shared responsibility was highlighted at the recent Abuja+12 Summit. Our bilateral assistance also supports economic growth, education assistance, the strengthening of democratic institutions, and, particularly critically to our conversation at this forum, efforts to help Nigeria address emerging threats.

Stability, security, and prosperity are long-term goals with no easy fixes for any country, but together we can go further than we can alone. A visible commitment and demonstrated actions to protect civil liberties and ensure civilian security can go a long way toward rebuilding the trust between a government and its people-- upon whom our shared well-being depends.

When government commits itself to progress and meaningful reforms, the people benefit and extremists become marginalized. By working together, we can contribute to economic growth, democratic progress, and lasting peace. These objectives are important to the United States, to Nigeria, and to the global community, and I hope that this forum will continue to further our partnership.

Thank you for welcoming me here today.

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Relevant information about U.S. policies and programs in Nigeria can be found on our website: <http://nigeria.usembassy.gov>, and www.usaid.gov/ng

