

Speech: Peace Agreement in South Sudan is the first step on a long journey

Thank you very much indeed to General Lacroix and Special Envoy Nicholas Haysom to whom we say farewell and yet look forward to seeing you very soon of course; EGAD Special Envoy Ismael Waes who I know has been working on this dossier for so long and so tirelessly; and also by thanking Ms. Grace John for the valuable human perspective that you have offered this Council.

Mr President the peace agreement signed last week gives hope to all of us, none more so than to the 12 million people of South Sudan. And we welcome very much the commitment that the region has shown on this important issue of peace and security and we have been consistent in this Council in supporting EGAD and the work it has done.

And while the peace agreement signed is a significant achievement, it is the first step on a long journey. We must continue to strive for progress. The people of South Sudan will continue to suffer if peace is not achieved and sustained. That conflict has already killed thousands and forced a third of the population to flee their homes – 2.5 million of whom to neighbouring countries. Half the population is food insecure. Of the 7 million people who need humanitarian assistance, over half are children. And these children, following the years of conflict displacement and economic collapse, are less likely to receive an education than any other children in the world.

South Sudan's leaders have seemed at times indifferent to the suffering of their people, and this is not Mr. President the result of a natural disaster or an unavoidable situation. It is manmade and so must be the solution. Starting with political stability – the peace agreement must create the conditions for a lasting end to the violence. Now as I said the region has played a vital role in bringing parties to the conflict together and I commend the much needed commitment and energy that they have invested, including states around this table.

And now is the time to build on that momentum. A peace agreement on its own will not deliver and sustain peace for South Sudan. We need to see continued engagement by all parties and ensure that words are turned into meaningful and sustainable actions.

Mr President, those of us who have been saying these things have picked up some irritation and frustration at those sorts of comments. It's been said we're not being positive enough or that we are undermining a peace process. I believe that no one will be more positive than those of us around this table if the process really means an end to the violence and a determination to put the needs of the people first. And similarly, those of us around this table have a special responsibility to bring the experience and lessons that we have from other conflicts, other peace processes and indeed from our experience of the South Sudan conflict and peace process to bear. It doesn't serve the parties to the peace agreement or the people of South Sudan if we

do not use our experience and our knowledge from other peacebuilding situations, so it is vital that we adapt and use those lessons. In countries such as Libya, we've seen how political agreements can unravel and enable a relapse into violence. From our experience in Colombia, we've seen that ongoing commitment from the parties is the key factor for successful implementation of peace agreements.

We've also seen the implementation needs support from the region and sustained determined engagement from this Council. We need to draw from all of these experiences when we consider the situation in South Sudan as well as understanding why previous peace processes have not worked in that country, and therefore focus all of our efforts on successful implementation.

We must ensure this agreement does not repeat past mistakes. The continued violence even following the most recent ceasefire agreement is extremely concerning. 19 violations were reported by the Secretary-General between June and September. The increase in humanitarian access incidents and violence against humanitarian workers are gravely concerning. 13 humanitarian workers have been killed in South Sudan this year alone. Further to this, we are deeply concerned that UNMISS peacekeepers have been repeatedly denied access to the key areas to allow them to perform their mandated responsibilities. This is unacceptable and it must end. The region and the international community must closely monitor violations and ensure those responsible are held to account. I very much support Ms. John in calling for the establishment of the hybrid court.

As the international community we must not stand by and allow individuals to undermine peace. The targeted sanctions being imposed in July are an important tool. Now just as important now this agreement has been signed. They can be used to maintain pressure on all the parties to keep the promises that they have made. The arms embargo signalled that the international community will not tolerate attempts to impose military solutions. I urge the region and the wider international community to continue to support these measures.

The United Kingdom remains committed to peace in South Sudan, but in order to be convinced of the party's commitment, we need to see significant change in approach by the parties to the conflict. They must silence their guns, allow humanitarian workers to deliver lifesaving assistance, and release political prisoners. They must show a genuine commitment to effective and accountable implementation of the peace agreement and must demonstrate that they are willing to work for the benefit of all South Sudanese, including through checks on executive majority power and the transparent use of resources.

Mr President, today the peace process stands at a crossroads. To overcome the challenges ahead, we need unity amongst the international community. We urge the region to continue to drive forward constructive progress, especially on security arrangements in step with the UN and international community. Above all, we urge the leaders of South Sudan to put aside personal interests to work together for a better future for their people. Thank you Mr President.

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Press release: PM to address the National Housing Federation Summit

Housing associations have a central role to play in building the homes we need and challenging the attitudes that hold us back, Theresa May will say in central London today, as she announces new long-term funding for affordable housing.

As part of the Government's commitment to transform housebuilding, the Prime Minister will announce £2 billion in new funding to give housing associations the long-term certainty they need to deliver tens of thousands of new affordable and social homes.

As the first Prime Minister to address the National Housing Federation Summit, she will pledge this morning to work in partnership with the associations to get more people on the housing ladder and make sure those who can't afford their own place also have somewhere they're proud to call home.

Setting out the steps government has already taken to respond to the asks of the sector – including providing long-term certainty on rents and agreeing not to extend the local housing allowance cap to the social sector – Theresa May is expected to announce new long-term funding for housing associations. She will say:

You said that if you were going to take a serious role in not just managing but building the homes this country needs, you had to have the stability provided by long-term funding deals. Well, eight housing associations have already been given such deals, worth almost £600 million and paving the way for almost 15,000 new affordable homes.

And today, I can announce that new longer-term partnerships will be opened up to the most ambitious housing associations through a ground-breaking £2 billion initiative. Under the scheme, associations will be able to apply for funding stretching as far ahead as 2028/29 – the first time any government has offered housing associations such long-term certainty.

Doing so will give you the stability you need to get tens of thousands of affordable and social homes built where they are needed most, and make it easier for you to leverage the private finance you need to build many more.

In return, the Prime Minister will call on housing associations to use their unique combination of qualities – from their close ties with local

communities to their expertise as property managers and their ability to ride out the business cycle and carry on building – “to achieve things neither private developers nor local authorities are capable of doing”. She is expected to say:

Today, I’m asking housing associations to use the tools we have given you. Not just to build more homes, though of course more homes are needed. But to take the lead in transforming the very way in which we think about and deliver housing in this country.

Rather than simply acquiring a proportion of the properties commercial developers build, I want to see housing associations taking on and leading major developments themselves. Because creating the kind of large-scale, high-quality developments this country needs requires a special kind of leadership – leadership you are uniquely well-placed to provide.

...Given the right tools and the right support, you can act as the strategic, long-term investors in the kind of high-quality places this country needs. To put it simply, you get homes built. And I want to work with you to transform the way we do so.

The Prime Minister will also urge housing associations to use their “unique status, rich history and social mission” to change the way tenants and society as a whole view social housing. She will say:

For many people, a certain stigma still clings to social housing. Some residents feel marginalised and overlooked, and are ashamed to share the fact that their home belongs to a housing association or local authority.

And on the outside, many people in society – including too many politicians – continue to look down on social housing and, by extension, the people who call it their home.

...We should never see social housing as something that need simply be “good enough”, nor think that the people who live in it should be grateful for their safety net and expect no better.

Whether it is owned and managed by local authorities, TMOs or housing associations, I want to see social housing that is so good people are proud to call it their home... Our friends and neighbours who live in social housing are not second-rate citizens.

The Prime Minister has made it her personal mission to get more people onto the housing ladder. The government has committed over £40 billion to get more homes built – creating the infrastructure to unlock sites where they’re needed most and removing unnecessary barriers to homebuilding, while making it harder for developers to dodge their obligations on affordable homes.

Press release: Minister for Europe visits Macedonia to kick off visit to Western Balkans



The UK's Minister for Europe, Sir Alan Duncan, has travelled to Macedonia at the start of a two-day visit to the Western Balkans, underlining the UK's commitment to playing an active and supportive role in the Western Balkans.

In Skopje, Sir Alan reaffirmed the UK's commitment to the region by holding meetings with Prime Minister Zaev and Foreign Minister Dimitrov to discuss the importance of a Name Agreement for Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic path. As part of his visit, the Minister also visited Matka Canyon to launch UK assistance to Macedonia's energy strategy.

The Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan said:

The United Kingdom remains strongly committed to progress, peace, and prosperity in the Western Balkans.

This is an auspicious time for our friends in Macedonia. We have long worked with Macedonia to help them implement reforms that would strengthen the country and move towards it meeting its strategic objective to become part of the Euro-Atlantic family.

The historic agreement Macedonia concluded with Greece on the long-running Name Issue is an important step towards that objective.

The implementation of the Prespa Agreement would help the country finalise its Euro-Atlantic path and the UK stands ready to support Macedonia in achieving this.

Speech: Ending the Syrian Conflict

Thank you very much Mr President, and welcome back to New York.

Thank you to our two briefers, the Special Representative and the Under Secretary-General. And can I repeat the thanks of colleagues for everything your teams do on the ground to help the people of Syria. They need you more than ever, but we are very conscious that this is a very difficult job for them to do.

The conflict is seven and a half years old. It's longer than the Second World War. Over half a million people have died in Syria. Millions have been displaced and chemical weapons have been used, including by the Syrian regime. I think we're running out of superlatives, Mr President, to describe the horrors of this conflict. We meet every month on Syria in this chamber, but this time does feel particularly important. The Turkish plan which they have discussed with the Russians for Idlib, is the crux. It needs to be developed and it needs to be implemented. And as other speakers have said Mr President, Russia in particular needs to uphold it, and we look to Russia to do this because Russia is a P5 member with particular responsibilities for international peace and security and Russia needs to exert her influence on the Syrian authorities. Otherwise, the crimes that are committed against the Syrian people are committed in Russia's name.

We heard earlier, Mr President, about the voices of Idlib. There are 3 million voices in Idlib who will want to know why the Idlib plan cannot be implemented. There are 18 million voices in Syria who want the Council to act to protect them.

A lot has been said today Mr President, some of it very familiar. Some of it common to those Council members who have spoken. I will not rehearse some of the assessments, but I would just like to go on record as saying that the United Kingdom agrees with our American, our Dutch, our Swedish, our Polish and other partners in their assessments. We wholly agree with them.

I want to highlight in particular four points. First of all, I want to agree with what the Representative of France said about the situation on the ground but also what he said about the French, Americans and British taking our responsibilities if chemical weapons are ever used again.

I want to talk about the political process. We want to see the constitutional committee convened. We look to the Special Representative to do this. We believe you have all the authority you need to pick those names. We trust you to do the best you can in the interests of the people of Syria and in the interests of peace. We look for a date to be set and we ask you to report back to this Council by 31 October. We look to the Small Group and the Astana Group to make progress on coming together in support of the United Nations. And I repeat what my Dutch and Swedish colleagues had said about

reconstruction money. There are 3 million voices in Idlib and 18 million voices in Syria as a whole who will want to know why progress can't be made on the political track.

Turning to humanitarian: we would like to hear from the Syrian representative why there are still problems with access and why there are still problems with safe passage that the Under Secretary-General referred to.

I noted what the Representative of Equatorial Guinea said about scorched earth. This is a truly terrible situation, but he is right to draw attention to that and we would like to know what the Syrian regime is doing to put that right.

A large number of speakers, Mr President, talked about IHL and the principles of precaution, discrimination and proportionality. We absolutely uphold those as the United Kingdom. It is unbelievable that hospitals are being attacked. It's even more unbelievable when those hospitals are part of a de-conflicted area.

Last week Mr President, the United Kingdom announced some \$40 million for Idlib. We hope that will help, but I just wanted to go back to what the Under Secretary-General said about is it a reprieve or a stay of execution. This is a dreadful choice, but it has to be a reprieve. There are 3 million voices in Idlib and 18 million voices in Syria who will want to know why this can't happen.

Turning to the wider issues Mr President, awful and horrific as Syrian conflict is, the prospect of a wider interstate war is waiting in the wings. The Syrian people are not only attacked by their own government, they risk being drawn in and the victims of a wider conflict. It is not legitimate to use the territory of Syria to fire missiles at Israel. The risk of miscalculation, a misunderstanding that led to the downing of a Russian aircraft encapsulates on a small scale the much bigger and even more frightening risk of a wider miscalculation. And I would like to, at this point, echo the colleagues who have sent their condolences to our Russian colleagues for the loss of their air crew. But I repeat, the risk of miscalculation is incredibly high. It was a Syrian air force that shot down that Russian plane and the proximate cause was the actions of Iran and Hezbollah on the ground. This ought to serve as a very powerful warning not just to the Syrian authorities but also to the Russians and the Iranians of the prospect of something much wider and even more horrible than we have yet seen in Syria.

Lastly Mr President, the Special Representative referred to Kofi Annan and we will have a tribute to Kofi Annan in the United Nations later this week. This morning, a wreath was laid to Dag Hammerskjöld, who is also one of the iconic Secretaries-General that the UN has been fortunate enough to have lead it. I think we do them no credit, Mr. President, if we allow this conflict to continue. The best legacy we could hand Kofi Annan in response to all his work in 2012 – I was present for that Geneva meeting – the best legacy we could offer is to bring the Syrian conflict to an end and help the Syrian people.

Thank you Mr President.