

Inclusive government action needed to bring stability to Mali

Thank you, Mr President, and let me also thank on the Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing. And like others, I'd like to begin by offering my condolences and those of the British people for the loss of life we have seen in recent attacks in Mali and the wider Sahel, I think particularly of last Thursday's terrible attack in Niger – a particularly a shocking reminder of the cost of instability in the region. But also attacks against MINUSMA personnel, which we of course also condemn, including the 9 January attack on MINUSMA forces. And I join the German Ambassador in his condolences for life lost by Malian forces and civilians, of course, as well.

Mr President, those developments are a testament to the urgent need for the international community and the governments of Mali to work together to help achieve long-term peace and stability in the country and the region. It's worth just reflecting on where we stand with the peace agreement, that peace agreement signed in 2015, so coming up now to its fifth year. And over those five years, we've still not seen more full implementation whilst MINUSMA loses troops and the situation in the region gets worse and worse. So it is extremely concerning that we have only seen limited progress towards the implementation of the peace agreement.

The Ambassador of Niger said that the parties needed to speed up. That is a call I unequivocally echo, and it's one that I think a number of has been saying for some time. So we do welcome recent developments, including the inclusive national dialogue and of course, the deployment of reconstituted forces by the government of Mali to the north. And we also welcome the announcement of a high-level workshop to increase participation of women in the peace process. But overall, I agree with my American colleague that benchmarks set by this Council must be met and that failure by the political actors to act for peace will have to lead to consequences, including sanctions.

In particular, we need to see the transfer of key services and competencies to regional leaders, as well as the operationalisation of a northern development zone. And I agree with all of those who have talked about the importance of meaningful participation of women in the peace process.

Mr President, dynamics in the centre are a cause of significant concern. I want to welcome the Prime Minister's appointment of a High Representative to coordinate efforts better in the centre, but we now need to see action. And as the Ambassador of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reminded us, you cannot have security without development and services as you cannot have development without security. So we need a comprehensive, politically-led strategy, coordinated across all sectors to protect civilians, reduce inter-communal violence, reestablish basic social services and allow for effective justice and reconciliation.

Of course, Mr President, we know these things are easier said than done; it is a complicated and difficult undertaking. But implementation of the peace agreement must happen and it must happen more quickly.

Now, let me turn, Mr President, to MINUSMA. I want to echo the tributes paid by others to MINUSMA and its troops and the hard and difficult work that they do. I want to say as well that we very much commend MINUSMA's plans and efforts to adopt a more mobile, flexible and agile posture with high-end capabilities to enable them to more effectively carry out their mandated tasks. We look forward to discussing these issues in more detail.

And I would just say, Mr President, as well, that the UK's planned deployment of 250 troops to the mission is testament to the important role that we believe MINUSMA plays and also of this region. I'd just like, in that context, to echo Under-Secretary-General Lacroix's call for a swift resolution of land issues that are hampering deployment.

Mr President, we shouldn't have to underline again around this table the urgency of action to address the drivers of conflict in Mali and the broader Sahel. The UK is ready to play its part alongside others through diplomacy, security support, humanitarian aid and development assistance.

Mr President, it's only with inclusive, effective Malian political leadership that those international efforts can deliver stability.

Thank you.