

Lifesaving humanitarian work in Tigray should not be politicised

Thank you Mr President and thank you Secretary-General for your briefing.

Mr President, I start by paying tribute to UN staff around the world who work tirelessly to deliver principled humanitarian aid, assessing and addressing needs on a neutral, impartial basis. I think we all agree that their lifesaving activities should not be politicised, and that Member States should make every effort to support and facilitate their work.

That is why the United Kingdom, like many of Ethiopia's partners, was deeply disappointed by the Government of Ethiopia's decision to expel seven UN officials. The strength of international concern about this is apparent in the fact that over 40 countries quickly joined a joint statement delivered by the United Kingdom at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on 4 October.

Mr President, as we have heard and seen, the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia is now critical.

The UN personnel who were expelled were dealing with the increasingly desperate needs of those in the north of Ethiopia. Our special envoy for famine prevention and humanitarian affairs visited Tigray and Amhara just last week and saw first-hand the UN's efforts to respond to this emergency. The removal of key UN personnel will have a direct impact on the ability of the international community to deliver vital humanitarian assistance.

But unfortunately, Mr President, this is not the only obstacle to delivering aid in northern Ethiopia. I want to reiterate our urgent call for the TPLF to cease their military campaign and act in the best interests of ordinary people in Tigray. And likewise, I reiterate our call on the Federal Government to work with the UN and other international partners to eliminate all barriers to humanitarian access.

As we have heard before, that needs to include urgent action to restore telecommunications and banking services in Tigray, enable deliveries of food and fuel and expedite issuing of visas for humanitarian response staff. Time is of the essence: thousands of truckloads of food and medicine and millions of litres of fuel need to move into Tigray in order to avert deaths on a catastrophic scale before the end of this year.

Finally, Mr President, it should be evident to all that there will be no military solution to this conflict. It is past time to stop fighting and as the Secretary-General urged, to start talking. We welcomed the African Union's decision to appoint His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo as an envoy in August, and I reiterate our full support for him, the African Union and the United Nations as they work to end this tragic conflict and help those in need.