

Preventing famine in communities affected by conflict

Thank you, Mr President. I want to thank the Dominican Republic for their leadership in calling for today's session. And let me also thank our three UN principals for their briefing, in the context of Resolution 2417.

It is important, colleagues, that we meet today to consider our role in preventing harm. That's what 2417 is about. So I'm very pleased to see this meeting taking place today.

The prospect of famine in the 21st Century is a man-made and preventable failure, as our briefers have set out. The link between conflict and hunger could not be clearer: armed conflict and violence is playing a central role in denying civilians their basic rights to food and to life.

The UK shares the strong concerns raised on the rising risk of famine and acute food insecurity in Yemen, North-East Nigeria, South Sudan and the DRC. We are just as concerned about the deteriorating food security situation in several other conflict-affected countries, including Somalia, Burkina Faso and Afghanistan. It is clear the Covid-19 has further compounded such humanitarian emergencies, increasing pre-existing vulnerabilities.

Armed actors are violating the rights and safety of civilians, deploying tactics that use the suffering of civilians as a weapon of war and wilfully disregarding their obligations under International Humanitarian Law to protect civilians. This includes the prevention of humanitarian access to life-saving support through bureaucratic impediments, delays to aid delivery, blockades and inhibited monitoring. But as we know from our discussions, unfortunately and tragically, aid workers who try to serve populations in many different theatres face deliberate attacks.

Now, the rising risk of famine and acute food insecurity in conflict zones requires immediate action on the ground, firstly, by both governments and non-state armed groups. And in regards to the countries cited in today's briefing, I want to make a few brief comments:

On Yemen, famine can only be prevented by urgent external financial assistance to the Central Bank to improve the affordability of food and medicines, through immediate funding for the UN's desperately under-resourced humanitarian response and urgent progress towards a nationwide ceasefire. All UN member states, I think, have a responsibility to provide funding to the UN-led response, particularly those who have made commitments to do so. And of course, the Yemeni parties bear the primary responsibility to agree urgently to UN peace proposals.

In North-East Nigeria, the deliberate targeting of aid workers by non-state armed groups in the North-East is an abhorrent and unacceptable violation of International Humanitarian Law. Close joint-work between the UN and the

Nigerian Government is essential to ensuring the full protection of civilians, as well as progress on humanitarian access.

In South Sudan, we continue to see a stalling peace process and escalating violence at sub-national level. Again, it's vital the Government of South Sudan and also any non-state groups ensure unrestricted access for humanitarian workers and reduce risk that aid workers face there.

And in the DRC, an expanded security and political effort that works with regional, national and sub-national authorities is needed to address conflict drivers.

But more broadly, the international community must come together. We must coordinate and prioritise our efforts. We must break the cycle of armed conflict and humanitarian crisis. We have a collective responsibility to act fast, but we've heard today that our contributions are not keeping up with needs.

Earlier this month, the United Kingdom announced a call to action to prevent famine. This included the announcement of an additional aid package worth over \$150 million, which aims to alleviate extreme hunger for over six million people. Now I say additional, as the United Kingdom is proud to be one of the main humanitarian donors, not just to individual country appeals, but also to core funds such as CERF. And I believe that in 2020, the UK has given just over \$1 billion in humanitarian assistance. We have given just under \$1 billion in assistance to deal with Covid-19.

The UK has also announced the appointment of Nick Dyer as the United Kingdom's first Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs. We call on all member states to rapidly mobilise all financial means to support swift humanitarian action before it's too late.

Mr President, we, the members of this Security Council, must also play our role. Not only is it incumbent on us to be stepping up with our funding, but we can also mobilise our diplomatic efforts. We can use our influence with actors on the ground to insist on unfettered humanitarian access and ensure the protection of civilians in this regard.

Having welcomed this briefing today and the white note which preceded it, I would like to set out what I hope will be a common expectation that UN reporting on these situations, and on others of concern, should continue. This should include updates on progress against the UN's recommendations, and it should include evidence on wrongdoing where collection is possible to increase accountability and to allow us, as members of the Council, to focus on those responsible.

If the risk of famine continues, then the Council needs to take action to improve the protection of civilians and work against denial of humanitarian access in whichever situation that occurs. And we believe that the Council must remain fully engaged in this agenda over the coming weeks. We believe we should return to this discussion later this autumn and hear from our briefers whether the situation has changed for the better or for the worse, and

consider what further action we could take.

Colleagues, famine and hunger should not be inevitable consequences of war and conflict. A famine declaration means it's already too late to save lives. It is a collective failure, including by us here. We must not stand idly by and allow ourselves to get to that point. We must act now to prevent a catastrophe in the coming months.

Thank you, Mr President.