

Pursuing peace in the Sahel

Thank you, Mr President, and my thanks to USG Lacroix and His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Mauritania for their briefings. I want to begin by paying tribute to the forces of the G5 Sahel, to UN peacekeepers serving in MINUSMA, to international troops deployed in Operation Barkhane, and to all those working to bring peace and security to the people of the Sahel.

Our thoughts are with the families of those who have paid the ultimate price in the service of this cause, and with the innocent civilians who continue to suffer the impact of the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel. Just last weekend three attacks by jihadist armed groups in northern and eastern Burkina Faso led to the loss of over 50 lives. The UK strongly condemns all such attacks, and calls for all parties to conflict to respect international humanitarian law and ensure the protection of civilians.

Mr President, since this Council last discussed the situation in the Sahel, Covid-19 has created new challenges to bringing about stability and development in the region. It will increase pressure on limited state resources and risks diverting international attention away from tackling the drivers of instability. In response, the United Kingdom is supporting governments and our humanitarian implementation partners in the Sahel to manage escalating health and humanitarian needs.

But we recognise that the secondary impacts of Covid-19 will also hit these countries hard, and so we are also helping the governments of the region to address the longer-term, socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. This is in addition to the \$665 million the United Kingdom is contributing to global efforts to develop vaccines, treatments and testing for Covid-19, and to the IMF to support vulnerable economies.

In this highly challenging context, we commend the efforts of the G5 Sahel nations and their partners to address security concerns and tackle cross-border threats. We welcome the increased operational output and improved capabilities of the Joint Force, and the positive trajectory of improving coordination with regional and international forces.

The United Kingdom is proud to be supporting efforts to stabilise the Sahel through our deployment to MINUSMA later this year, through our non-combat assistance to Operation BARKHANE, and our ongoing contribution to the EU Training Mission in Mali. We are also supporting the G5 Sahel Joint Force itself, with UK bilateral contributions so far totalling \$3.4 million, in addition to our contributions through other organisations. We would welcome all partners who have committed to support the Force to deliver their pledges in full.

Mr President, I would like to reiterate that there can be no sustainable peace and security in the Sahel without the protection and promotion of human rights, and compliance with international human humanitarian law. The UK welcomes the progress made in implementing the human rights compliance

framework for the G5 Sahel Joint Force, but we would underscore that all reports of human rights violations and abuses – whether by violent extremist groups, “self-defence” militias or state security forces – need to be addressed. This is essential not only to prevent human suffering, but to prevent impunity, strengthen the social contract between citizens and the state, and avoid creating grievances that fuel further violence. We urge all G5 governments to ensure that any allegations of violations committed by their security forces are thoroughly and transparently investigated, and that all perpetrators are brought to justice.

The United Kingdom is also concerned by the increasing pressures on humanitarian access in the region. It is critical that all parties respect the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian actors, and facilitate unimpeded access to ensure that emergency assistance reaches those in need.

In conclusion, Mr President, the United Kingdom will continue to play its part, working with the UN, the G5 Sahel states and all our partners across the region, in pursuit of peace, stability, sustainable development and justice for the people of the Sahel.

Thank you, Mr President.