

Speech: Adapting UN Peacekeeping to Fit Our Times

Thank you Mr President, first of all for convening this debate and for your contribution at this most opportune and important time.

May I also take this opportunity to thank Secretary-General Guterres for his leadership and his commitment to reform on peacekeeping; Chairperson Faki; and to Ms Touré. You gave a passionate, powerful and poignant reminder through your reflections on the role of peacekeeping and how its effectiveness can be improved. And I am sure we all heard your voice, your plea and your contribution in very clear terms.

Mr President, as we mark 70 years of UN Peacekeeping, it is right that we pause, we reflect, on the many lives saved, and on the regions and countries that have been stabilised over the years. There are millions of people living in some of the most challenging places on earth. They have been given hope, they have been given opportunity. This is the proud legacy of the toil and sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of men and women who have put their lives at risk. Some indeed have lost their lives. And why? To protect the most vulnerable.

In this 70th anniversary year, we salute their service and the service of those who support UN efforts through regional bodies, like the AU Mission in Somalia. Over the past 70 years, the challenges that peacekeepers have faced have evolved: disputes are increasingly complex; mission settings are increasingly dangerous; and too often, our collective contribution in this building has failed to keep pace.

Mr President,

UN Peacekeeping is far too important to fail. In recent years, we have indeed made progress – for example in planning and force generation. The Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial Meetings in London in 2016 and Vancouver in 2017 delivered 80 new pledges of personnel and capability. This progress must continue. We welcome the Secretary-General's call to action this year and also I welcome his statement today on the sharpened focus on the safety and security of peacekeepers, and the UN's Action Plan to implement some of the recommendations is also very timely. I also welcome the Secretary-General's statement today to provide regular updates on the delivery of this Action Plan.

And as we embark on this collective effort to improve UN Peacekeeping, the United Kingdom would suggest three areas on which to focus:

Firstly, the Security Council must take its responsibilities seriously, and have the information available in order to do so. We must set clear, achievable objectives for Peacekeeping Operations, and not be afraid to sequence, so that mandates provide the right direction, the right resources,

at the right time. We should go further, setting mandates that are more strategic and take a longer-term view. To do this, the Council needs high quality, timely, and accurate information and analysis. We need to work together better to achieve this – both states and institutions.

Secondly, to succeed, Peacekeeping Operations need to be complemented by all the tools that the UN and international community have at our disposal. We need better coordination – at headquarters and in the field – with peacebuilding, better development, and all the other arms of the UN to support. This is why we support the vision and themes underpinning the Secretary-General's Sustaining Peace Proposals and his Peace and Security Architecture reforms.

And thirdly, we must, we must, improve performance, and strengthen accountability for underperformance. There needs to be a better match between the capacity of the troops, and the tasks they are asked to perform. This requires the Department for Peacekeeping Operations to reinforce work on force generation, on training, and on performance monitoring and indeed on evaluation. It also requires Member States to deliver the capabilities they have committed. We must continue to recognise the essential role of women in ensuring the successful delivery of peacekeeping and engage more women in all components of all missions.

And above all we must, we must stop sexual exploitation and abuse by those sent to protect civilians, and we must offer real protection for women, children and indeed all vulnerable communities, as Ms Touré highlighted in her contribution.

Furthermore, addressing conflict-related sexual violence is equally crucial. The United Kingdom is looking to host an international meeting in 2019 marking progress and next steps, five years on from the Global Summit on Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict. And whilst welcoming the progress made, in particular the UN's new victim-centred approach, there still remain too many incidents of concern across the UN system.

Mr President,

Through the leadership of the Secretary-General, we have an opportunity to make UN Peacekeeping fit for our times. It is the responsibility of all of us to work together to seize that opportunity – that means the Council, the Secretariat, regional and sub-regional bodies, host states, and those who provide troops, police and financing. And let us not forget those UN Peacekeepers, under the banner of the United Nations, act in the name of each and every one of us. It is therefore our responsibility to ensure they embody the ideals of the UN Charter, because through them we ultimately “unite our strength to maintain international peace and security”.

Thank you.