

Speech: Peace Agreement in South Sudan is the first step on a long journey

Thank you very much indeed to General Lacroix and Special Envoy Nicholas Haysom to whom we say farewell and yet look forward to seeing you very soon of course; EGAD Special Envoy Ismael Waes who I know has been working on this dossier for so long and so tirelessly; and also by thanking Ms. Grace John for the valuable human perspective that you have offered this Council.

Mr President the peace agreement signed last week gives hope to all of us, none more so than to the 12 million people of South Sudan. And we welcome very much the commitment that the region has shown on this important issue of peace and security and we have been consistent in this Council in supporting EGAD and the work it has done.

And while the peace agreement signed is a significant achievement, it is the first step on a long journey. We must continue to strive for progress. The people of South Sudan will continue to suffer if peace is not achieved and sustained. That conflict has already killed thousands and forced a third of the population to flee their homes – 2.5 million of whom to neighbouring countries. Half the population is food insecure. Of the 7 million people who need humanitarian assistance, over half are children. And these children, following the years of conflict displacement and economic collapse, are less likely to receive an education than any other children in the world.

South Sudan's leaders have seemed at times indifferent to the suffering of their people, and this is not Mr. President the result of a natural disaster or an unavoidable situation. It is manmade and so must be the solution. Starting with political stability – the peace agreement must create the conditions for a lasting end to the violence. Now as I said the region has played a vital role in bringing parties to the conflict together and I commend the much needed commitment and energy that they have invested, including states around this table.

And now is the time to build on that momentum. A peace agreement on its own will not deliver and sustain peace for South Sudan. We need to see continued engagement by all parties and ensure that words are turned into meaningful and sustainable actions.

Mr President, those of us who have been saying these things have picked up some irritation and frustration at those sorts of comments. It's been said we're not being positive enough or that we are undermining a peace process. I believe that no one will be more positive than those of us around this table if the process really means an end to the violence and a determination to put the needs of the people first. And similarly, those of us around this table have a special responsibility to bring the experience and lessons that we have from other conflicts, other peace processes and indeed from our experience of the South Sudan conflict and peace process to bear. It doesn't serve the parties to the peace agreement or the people of South Sudan if we

do not use our experience and our knowledge from other peacebuilding situations, so it is vital that we adapt and use those lessons. In countries such as Libya, we've seen how political agreements can unravel and enable a relapse into violence. From our experience in Colombia, we've seen that ongoing commitment from the parties is the key factor for successful implementation of peace agreements.

We've also seen the implementation needs support from the region and sustained determined engagement from this Council. We need to draw from all of these experiences when we consider the situation in South Sudan as well as understanding why previous peace processes have not worked in that country, and therefore focus all of our efforts on successful implementation.

We must ensure this agreement does not repeat past mistakes. The continued violence even following the most recent ceasefire agreement is extremely concerning. 19 violations were reported by the Secretary-General between June and September. The increase in humanitarian access incidents and violence against humanitarian workers are gravely concerning. 13 humanitarian workers have been killed in South Sudan this year alone. Further to this, we are deeply concerned that UNMISS peacekeepers have been repeatedly denied access to the key areas to allow them to perform their mandated responsibilities. This is unacceptable and it must end. The region and the international community must closely monitor violations and ensure those responsible are held to account. I very much support Ms. John in calling for the establishment of the hybrid court.

As the international community we must not stand by and allow individuals to undermine peace. The targeted sanctions being imposed in July are an important tool. Now just as important now this agreement has been signed. They can be used to maintain pressure on all the parties to keep the promises that they have made. The arms embargo signalled that the international community will not tolerate attempts to impose military solutions. I urge the region and the wider international community to continue to support these measures.

The United Kingdom remains committed to peace in South Sudan, but in order to be convinced of the party's commitment, we need to see significant change in approach by the parties to the conflict. They must silence their guns, allow humanitarian workers to deliver lifesaving assistance, and release political prisoners. They must show a genuine commitment to effective and accountable implementation of the peace agreement and must demonstrate that they are willing to work for the benefit of all South Sudanese, including through checks on executive majority power and the transparent use of resources.

Mr President, today the peace process stands at a crossroads. To overcome the challenges ahead, we need unity amongst the international community. We urge the region to continue to drive forward constructive progress, especially on security arrangements in step with the UN and international community. Above all, we urge the leaders of South Sudan to put aside personal interests to work together for a better future for their people. Thank you Mr President.