

Speech: Preventing Conflict over Natural Resources

Thank you very much Mr President and like other colleagues, thank you for bringing this subject back to the Security Council's attention. I think we've heard a lot of common themes today. While natural resources often bring great benefits to a country, they can also contribute to the outbreak of conflict and feed the conflict cycle. We have already heard from other speakers that at least 40 per cent of all intrastate conflicts in the last 60 years have had a link to natural resources according to the United Nations.

Natural assets that ought to drive domestic economic growth all too often can be subverted and diverted. In Iraq, we've seen how Da'esh used oil resources to fund their campaign of terror. In Libya, competition for control of oil resources remains one of the key drivers of conflict. The trade in diamonds has driven conflicts in countries such as Angola, DRC, Liberia and Sierra Leone. I was very interested in what our colleague from Cote d'Ivoire said about the total cost of this being something like \$50 billion per year – exceeding aid budgets – and that's a very telling figure.

Conversely, resolving disputes over control of natural resources can be a central pillar of peace processes. For example, oil was a crucial element of the peace agreement between Sudan and South Sudan.

Beyond oil and diamonds, conflict over land and water resources is a growing risk. Population growth and climate change – and thank you again to the Swedes for their excellent Presidency debate on this – climate change threatens to increase competition for natural resources, and hence, the risk of conflict.

SDG 12 calls for responsible consumption and production and this is integral to reducing the risk of conflict and achieving a sustainable peace. National responses have unfortunately proven insufficient to tackling such complex challenges. We believe that a multilateral approach is critical, needs to be based on international cooperation and respect for the rules based international system including the relevant parts of international law.

Mr President, a number of speakers mentioned sanction regimes. These can provide a useful tool for tackling the role of natural resources in perpetrating conflict. The Council has imposed sanctions on the trade in diamonds in Angola, DRC and Sierra Leone, and timber, for example, in Liberia. Calibrated sanctions on trading charcoal in Somalia, oil from Libya and DPRK and the absolute prohibition of the oil trade with ISIS have all helped curtail the ability of spoilers to destabilise already fragile situations. But the success of these sanctions regimes and hence our ability to mitigate or prevent conflict relies on implementation by all Council members but also all UN member states.

In UN peace operations, our responses should be tailored to the context. We

need to pay attention to the underlying causes of conflict including, where relevant, to support countries to overcome issues pertaining to the nexus between natural resources and conflict.

That said Mr President, I just wanted to respond briefly to what the Russian Representative said; not all interventions Mr President, are driven by negative motivations. It is important that the Council and countries are ready to address crimes against humanity. It is important that they are ready to address grave human rights abuses and important that we are ready to address the imminence of overwhelming humanitarian catastrophes. So I just want to place on record that we reject his descriptions of why Western interventions have been made over the past years.

Mr President, a number of speakers also mentioned the Council's recent visit to the DRC. We heard how the illegal exploitation of mineral resources by armed militia in Eastern DRC is fuelling conflict and imposing suffering on the civilian population. The value of goods smuggled across the Eastern DRC border exceeds that of formal trade, with gold the most valuable component. So I was very interested in the ideas the French Representative put forward about including gold in an enhanced regime. If we are to end the conflict in DRC, we need to see an end to the smuggling of the mineral resources, and we support MONUSCO's role in helping the government address this.

We believe we can also do more to identify and address risks related to natural resources and conflict through early warning systems and efforts to support countries to alleviate potential triggers. We very much appreciate the work of UNCTAD in this respect. I share the French approbation of EITI. There are also some other ideas that we believe are very much worth exploring. Sweden had ideas around tax and audit and tackling organised crime, and China had an interesting idea around using the PBC. We would be very willing to work with colleagues on the Council to try and advance these instruments.

The Kimberley Process has also been raised. The UK is proud to be a founding member of the Kimberley Process and we are encouraging the current reform process designed to make the framework even more effective. And in addition to Kimberley, the United Kingdom is committed to strengthening the international framework for regulation of trade in minerals linked to conflict.

And I'd like to highlight the mining and trading of tin, tantalum, tungsten and I've already mentioned gold. These minerals are key components from modern technology under the right conditions, the mining of these minerals can build both prosperity and security for local communities. But otherwise we end up with deplorable practices from human rights abuses to illicit financing of conflict.

We want to help address these issues, Mr President. We believe that we should be encouraging compliance with the OECD due diligence guidance for responsible mineral supply chains from conflict affected and high risk areas. Implementation of this guidance becomes mandatory for the biggest importers in the European Union in January 2021 and I can assure the Council that even

after Brexit, the United Kingdom will remain committed to this regulation. We also support the European partnership for responsible minerals which is a multi-stakeholder initiative consisting of governments, civil society and the private sector, recognised by the European Union as an official accompanying measure to the EU regulation.

In conclusion Mr President, the role of the Council in tackling the problem of natural resources as a cause of conflict continues to be a very important instrument that we should ensure we use to the full.