

Speech: Standing by the people of Sudan

Thank you, Mr President. We all know this meeting takes place amidst uncertain times in Sudan.

The African Union's Peace and Security Committee issued a clear statement two days ago. Recent developments and what happens over the coming days have an impact on Darfur and potentially the wider region. The Council has to consider the implications of these important political developments. I will therefore divide my intervention into two: firstly, on the wider situation in Sudan and secondly, the impact of that wider situation on Darfur and UNAMID.

Mr President, on the 11th of April, we witnessed the climax of four months of peaceful protests demanding change and a better future for Sudan. Let us admire the bravery and determination of the Sudanese people, which saw the removal of a president who had headed a brutal regime for 30 years. However, the legitimate change that the Sudanese people are demanding has not yet been achieved. The Transitional Military council must listen to the people who continue to protest.

And first and foremost, Mr President, the authorities must protect the ongoing peaceful protests and continue to exercise restraint. The Sudanese authorities have a responsibility to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to peaceful assembly. There must be no violence, no forced removal of protesters.

We are at a moment when the Sudanese authorities have an opportunity to build trust with their people and the international community. They should seize this opportunity and demonstrate that they are genuinely committed to ending Sudan's history of violent repression. The people are saying that Sudan needs a political system which is inclusive, respectful of human rights and the rule of law and properly constitutionally rooted. The United Kingdom stands with the Sudanese people and supports the African Union's call for Sudan to return swiftly to civilian rule.

All need to work together in an inclusive political transition. And in particular, women have played a critical role in the protest movement. Their contributions will be vital in the political transition process and the subsequent civilian government.

Mr President, the protesters have, from the beginning, demanded accountability. The United Kingdom supports that call. We believe there must be justice for the crimes committed by individuals within the former government of Sudan. It is right that the Sudanese people should hold those individuals accountable. Of course, we fully support the International Criminal Court and expect full cooperation by all States with the Court and its Prosecutor.

Mr President, the latest political developments have a direct impact on Darfur. We, like others, are concerned by reports of violent clashes in several locations in recent days, which have resulted in civilian death and injury. In particular, on 15 April, as reported by UNAMID, in Kalma internally displaced persons camp, 16 IDPs were killed. I have a question for the Joint Special Representative: what was the response of the two UNAMID-formed police units stationed in Kalma to this incident?

We have also seen the negative impact of recent political turmoil on the door for peace process, which is currently stalled. It is vital for the future stability of Darfur, but also wider Sudan and the region, that we, as a Council, maintain our expectation that progress is made in finding a peaceful solution to the root causes of the conflict.

Mr President, throughout UNAMID's drawdown, the United Kingdom has consistently called for a gradual and sensible approach, guided by the situation on the ground. And we share the Secretary-General's assessment that ongoing political and economic uncertainty pose a number of challenges for a responsible exit of UNAMID and the transition to peace building. The international community must not abandon its responsibility to ensure that a handover of UNAMID responsibilities and assets is done appropriately and to those with capacity to manage the ongoing tasks. There remains a high level of need in Darfur and the root causes of conflict have not yet been resolved. An immediate step the Transitional Military Council could take to build confidence and alleviate need would be to abolish the burdensome system of approvals and permits which hinders delivery of humanitarian assistance.

We need to think carefully about how best we tackle these issues after UNAMID's eventual departure and, in particular, what sort of AU and UN presence on the ground is needed to provide the expertise and programmatic ability and to ensure a proper flow of financial support to address ongoing challenges. We therefore encourage the African Union and the United Nations to make recommendations to the Council on what those future arrangements should be.

Mr President, Sudan is at a crossroads. The Transitional Military Council faces a choice. It should listen to the Sudanese people, respect their legitimate demand for civilian rule and enable the transition to a system which respects human rights, democracy and fundamental freedoms and delivers accountability. Making that choice would mean a new Sudan. It would be a Sudan respected in the international community of nations. It would bring support and resources from across the globe, both to underpin the resolution of longstanding peace processes including Darfur and also to support Sudan's own economic and social development. It would herald a new chapter in Sudan's relations with its region and with the world.

The people of Sudan have shown incredible bravery and perseverance in their dignified demands for an end to a brutal, unaccountable regime, which has impoverished its own people through decades of economic mismanagement. The Sudanese people have forced change in their country. I salute them. Let us stand by them.

Thank you, Mr President.