

Speech: “We must all work together – the United Nations, this Council, the countries and organisations of Africa – to address the root causes of conflict.”

Thank you Mr President, and thank you Secretary-General and Commissioner Chergui for your positive and constructive briefings this morning. It was also a pleasure to hear the interventions of the Foreign Minister of Senegal and the Deputy Minister of Ukraine, who reminded us that yesterday was Nelson Mandela Day. He would have turned 99 yesterday. And so I wanted to begin with a quote from him, in his book, Long Walk to Freedom, he said, and I quote: “Man’s goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished.”

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And that flame does remain hidden for far too many people across the continent of Africa. For the people of the Kasais in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for the people of South Sudan, that flame may appear almost extinguished, lost amidst the shadows of instability and conflict.

But though the flame grows dim in parts of the continent, Mandela was right; it cannot be extinguished.

We know this from the great strides made by countries like Cote D’Ivoire, moving away from years of war, and now looking ahead to decades of peace.

We see it in progress towards democracy, like the elections in Somalia in February, where women won nearly a quarter of the parliamentary seats, and that was a vital step towards one person, one vote elections.

And we see that flame burn brightly in the work of organisations like the African Union, like ECOWAS, helping African countries find common cause to overcome common concerns.

And Mr President, this Council has a vital role to play in fostering that flame. And to do so, here are three particular things that I think we need to do.

First, we must all work together – the United Nations, this Council, the countries and organisations of Africa – to address the root causes of conflict. We spend too much time and money responding to crises rather than preventing them. And that’s why the United Kingdom so strongly supports the Secretary-General in his agenda of Sustaining Peace and his increased focus on conflict prevention.

And for that agenda to succeed, the United Nations needs to diversify the way

that it engages, using development cooperation proactively to build peace, and supporting more diplomacy, including mediation. As the ECOWAS's mediation in the Gambia showed, this means more cooperation with regional actors who have the right experience and influence to deliver results on the ground. And this Council, and our colleagues in the African Union, must demonstrate unambiguously to those who perpetuate conflict that there are severe political and economic consequences for doing so.

Second thing, Mr President, we must all be ready to respond when conflict does occur. Effective, efficient UN peacekeeping is one of our strongest assets to do so. And it is a shared asset; African nations provide over half of the peacekeepers deployed to African missions. And I want to pay tribute to them, all of them, for their service, so often in dangerous circumstances.

The United Kingdom is committed to improving the planning of peacekeeping missions, the quality and quantity of pledges of troops and equipment, and the performance of missions and troops on the ground.

But this will all count for little if we don't have the trust of those we seek to protect. This means, amongst other things, eradicating the corrosive spectre of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers. We must implement fully the framework for action in Resolution 2272 to uphold and enforce the high standards of conflict. Zero tolerance must mean zero tolerance.

And in parallel, we need more women working in missions, out in the field reassuring local populations, gathering vital intelligence, contributing to more effective operations.

And thirdly, Mr President, we need to strengthen and deepen our existing partnerships. The UN and African Union relationship is critical for peace and security in Africa. As we've seen in Somalia, Mali, Central African Republic, this relationship makes such difference to those most in need.

So we applaud your efforts to make those joint efforts more systematic and we are reassured that the UN/AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security will lead to better co-operation and co-ordination.

There are many issues we should address to realise fully the co-operation envisioned in resolution 2320: agreeing mechanisms and processes, sharing standards and procedures – including on human rights, accountability and transparency – and establishing, as the Secretary-General reminded us again today, a source of sustainable and predictable financing for African peace support operations.

We welcome the work that the United Nations has done with the African Union so far on this agenda. And we now need to see that work continue and I look forward to our visit as a Security Council to Addis Ababa in September.

So there is a lot more to do, Mr President. But we cannot be deterred in our efforts to support peace and security in Africa. And I'd like to close by returning to the words of the late Nelson Mandela. "Do not look the other way; do not hesitate. Recognise that the world is hungry for actions, not

words. Act with courage and vision.” So let us all act in that spirit.

Thank you.