

Speech: Preventing the destabilising ability of mercenary groups

Thank you Mr President, and a warm welcome to the Security Council to Equatorial Guinea on assuming the Presidency in the month of February, and I also thank and congratulate the Dominican Republic for their excellent stewardship of this Council in January. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, His Excellency Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, and His Excellency Dr Richard Sezibera for their briefings today. Let me also wish a very happy New Year to our Chinese colleagues.

Mr President, the United Kingdom welcomes this debate and the focus on stability, conflict prevention and peacebuilding during Equatorial Guinea's Presidency of this Council. The United Kingdom recognises the deeply negative effect that contemporary forms of mercenary activity can have. That includes the link between their activities and barriers to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

We are committed to supporting our African partners to achieve their vision of a more peaceful and prosperous continent. We are working jointly to tackle a range of shared security challenges and we are working on the provision of capacity building for African Security and Justice institutions and training for African peacekeepers.

We are also committed to aligning our development support with initiatives which will foster Africa's long-term stability. It is clear that there is a mutually reinforcing link between stability and security and prosperity and growth.

That is why we are stimulating high-quality investment into Africa to create wealth, build infrastructure and create jobs. It is why we are supporting Africa's youth to access life-changing education and skills. And it is why we support so strongly the empowerment of women and girls, so that African development is truly inclusive and therefore truly sustainable.

Mr President, the holistic approach we take to supporting Africa's security and stability must also be applied to the modern mercenary phenomenon. We must recognise that it is not just a source of conflict, but a symptom of underlying causes of instability.

Mercenary groups thrive where there are fragile state institutions, a culture of impunity, weak rule of law and extreme poverty. Some have links to serious and organised crime threats, including the trafficking of small arms and light weapons and the illegal exploitation of resources.

Their activities can undercut the rules-based international system which this Council was designed to uphold. Where this occurs, we should bring the full range of mechanisms at the Council's disposal to bear, including sanctions

regimes.

Mr President, as you pointed out, it is important to draw a distinction between mercenaries, a term clearly defined in international humanitarian law, and properly regulated and responsible private security companies. The legitimate global private security industry provides an essential service, supporting diplomatic, commercial and humanitarian activity in complex environments around the world.

The United Kingdom remains committed to raising standards in the private security industry. In this regard we welcome the important work of the Montreux Document Forum and the International Code of Conduct Association (ICOCA). We urge all states, companies and NGOs which employ private security companies to recognise ICOCA membership and certification to relevant standards in their contracting process and to abide by the International Code of Conduct for private security providers.

In this context, the United Kingdom is troubled by reports of the involvement of some private military companies in destabilising activities in a range of countries. This is particularly troubling when those countries are on the Security Council's agenda, such as the Central African Republic, Syria, Ukraine or Venezuela.

We urge all such private sector organisations to ensure that their actions do not cross the line between legitimate security service provision and irresponsible or destabilising activities. There may be a role for the relevant Security Council sub-committees to consider whether there is evidence that any such actors have perpetuated or exacerbated conflict or instability.

Mr President, in closing, I would like to pay tribute to the ongoing efforts of the African Union and African sub-regional organisations to prevent unconstitutional changes of government. This includes preventing the use of mercenaries to destabilise or replace democratically elected governments.

The United Kingdom urges the African Union to continue to strengthen its capacities in this regard by making effective use of information gathered through the Continental Early Warning System, and greater use of preventive diplomacy and mediation practices.

Thank you Mr President.

Press release: Universal Periodic Review 32nd session: Minister for

Human Rights statement

Minister for Human Rights Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon gave the following statement to mark the end of the Universal Periodic Review:

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique process involving a peer review of the human rights records of all 193 UN member states. It is an important tool of the Human Rights Council (HRC), aimed at sharing best practice. The UK strongly supports the UPR process, and we have spoken at every session and about every country since the process began. This session saw reviews of 14 countries, namely [Afghanistan](#), [Cambodia](#), [Chile](#), [Comoros](#), [Cyprus](#), [the Dominican Republic](#), [Eritrea](#), [the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#), [New Zealand](#), [Slovakia](#), [Uruguay](#), [Vanuatu](#), [Vietnam](#) and [Yemen](#).

Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

The eradication of forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking continues to be a high priority for the UK Government. It is a global problem requiring a global response. We continue to advocate better international coordination to fulfil commitments made under the UN Sustainable Development Goal 8.7, to ensure that governments and international agencies prioritise interventions and resources to tackle modern slavery and support victims. The UPR is a valuable opportunity to drive this agenda forward. We commend the efforts of the Dominican Republic and Uruguay, including their endorsement in 2018 of the Call to Action to end modern slavery. We support all efforts to ensure that high-level commitments translate into national action which delivers real change for the most vulnerable in our societies. There is still a great deal of work to be done to eliminate the crime of modern slavery by 2030. We continue to urge states to work domestically and internationally, across governments, business, and civil society, to drive forward change in a holistic way.

UN Treaty Body

Since the 27th session of the UPR, we have made the recommendation to a considerable number of states to 'adopt an open, merit-based selection process when selecting national candidates for UN Treaty Body elections'. These expert bodies are a central part of the UN human rights system, charged with monitoring the implementation of human rights conventions in states which have signed up to them. The UK will continue to advocate strengthening the quality, independence and diversity of Treaty Body membership.

Afghanistan

I recognise the Government of Afghanistan's commitment to making progress on human rights, but I note that significant challenges remain, particularly in relation to civilian casualties, gender-based violence, the safety of journalists, and torture and ill-treatment of detainees. I am also concerned by the security challenges faced by ethnic and religious minorities. The UK urged Afghanistan to establish an independent mechanism to thoroughly assess

how members of religious and ethnic minorities can be better protected against violent attacks.

Cambodia

On Cambodia, I am concerned by: the shrinking of democratic space through the dissolution of the Cambodia National Rescue Party; the imprisonment of Kem Sokha; and the national election in July 2018, which lacked legitimacy. The UK notes that Cambodia has identified steps to address some of these issues, including amending Article 45 of the Law of Political Parties, and removing the required three days notification of NGOs' activities to the local authority. Additionally, while the transfer of Kem Sokha to house arrest was a positive step, we urge the Government to drop all charges against him, and address restrictions on freedom of expression.

Dominican Republic

Turning to the Dominican Republic, I recognise the progress made regarding human rights, including engagement on migration, work to eliminate violence against women, and willingness to improve prisoners' rights. However, the UK urged the Government to resolve human rights issues resulting from the absence of migrant documentation. We also urged the implementation of the prison reform programme as soon as possible, prioritising pre-trial detention issues. The UK also encourages the Dominican Republic to pass and implement legislation to tackle 'femicides', noting with concern that the number of such occurrences in the country has increased.

Eritrea

I am concerned by the human rights situation in Eritrea, noting in particular the human rights issues surrounding national service and places of detention. We urged Eritrea to reform their national service and to ensure due process for all detainees, releasing those arbitrarily detained for political and religious reasons.

North Macedonia

I recognise progress made by the Government of North Macedonia, particularly through the adoption of the new Media Law in December, constructive Government engagement with civil society organisations on judicial reforms, and parliamentary oversight of the intelligence agencies. However, the UK encourages further efforts from the Government to address remaining challenges, in particular developing effective legislation to counter hate crimes, tackling corruption in prisons, and investigating all reported crimes against journalists.

Yemen

On Yemen, while the outcome of the Stockholm peace talks in December 2018 was encouraging, abuses and violations, carried out by all parties to the conflict in Yemen, are deeply concerning – specifically, civilian casualties, persecution on the grounds of religion or belief, and restrictions on freedom

of expression and association. Women's rights have also been particularly affected, as has access to education for girls. Children continue to be recruited to fight, and arbitrary arrest and detention continues to take place, as does the torture and the ill-treatment of detainees. The UK urges the Government of Yemen to fulfil its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law, ensuring the protection of civilians, and to immediately cease the practices of arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and other ill-treatment. The UK hopes that peace talks will continue and improve the capacity of the Yemeni Government to protect the human rights of all its citizens, including the protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief for all communities.

I urge all countries under review during this session to give full and serious consideration to the UK recommendations. I encourage these States not only to accept them, but also to implement them in a timely and comprehensive manner. I look forward to the formal adoption of these recommendations at the 41st session of the UN Human Rights Council in June 2019.

Further information

Press release: Joint declaration on Venezuela



Joint statement by the UK, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, France, Hungary, Austria, Finland, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Sweden and Croatia.

On January 26th, various Member States urged Mr. Nicolás Maduro to take the necessary legal steps for democratic presidential elections to be announced within 8 days.

On that same day, the EU High Representative/Vice President issued a statement on behalf of the 28 EU Member States, also calling for the urgent holding of free, transparent and credible presidential elections and indicating that, in the absence of an announcement on

the organization of fresh elections with the necessary guarantees over the next days, the EU would take further actions, including on the issue of recognition of the country's leadership, in line with article 233 of the Venezuelan constitution.

The UK along with Spain, Portugal, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, France, Hungary, Austria, Finland, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Sweden and Croatia takes note that Mr. Nicolás Maduro has chosen not to set in motion the electoral process.

Subsequently, and in accordance with the provisions of the Venezuelan Constitution, they acknowledge and support Mr. Juan Guaidó, President of the democratically elected National Assembly, as President ad interim of Venezuela, in order for him to call for free, fair and democratic presidential elections.

Further information

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1. 4 February 2019 Added a Spanish translation.
2. 4 February 2019 First published.

[Press release: PM's Chinese New Year video message 2019](#)

[PM Theresa May's Chinese New Year video message 2019](#)

The fireworks are being prepared. The red envelopes are being filled. And, around the world, hundreds of millions of people are coming together to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

Across the UK, lanterns are being hung in Manchester, Liverpool, Nottingham and many of our other great cities – including here in London, home to one of the biggest Chinese New Year celebrations outside Asia.

The festivities are undoubtedly one of the highlights of Britain's cultural calendar, showcasing the strength, vibrancy and diversity of our multicultural society.

And they're a reminder of the incredible role that our Chinese community plays in British life – from students who have just arrived here to study, to families whose roots in this country go back well over a century.

It's a legacy and a contribution that I celebrated here at Downing Street last week, bringing together leading figures from across our Chinese community – people without whom the UK would not be the successful, dynamic country it is today.

So wherever and however you are celebrating, let me wish you a very happy new year, and a prosperous and auspicious Year of the Pig.

News story: Opportunity for charities to become authorised advisors to EU citizens applying to settle in the UK

The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) has launched [a new scheme for charities and other organisations](#) to apply more quickly to become registered advisors to EU citizens when they apply to settle in the UK.

The scheme is aimed at smaller, community-based charities and other organisations, including faith-based and local advice groups.

Successful applicants will be able to provide basic 'level 1' advice (solely on EU settlement), without needing to complete the written exam, which is usually part of the application process.

The streamlined process will allow applications to be considered more quickly, with decisions expected 4 to 6 weeks after receipt.

It is a criminal offence for a person to provide immigration advice or services in the UK unless their organisation is [regulated by the OISC or meets certain other specific criteria](#).

Details about what assistance can be given to migrants without the requirement to be regulated can be found in the [OISC immigration assistance document](#).

Further guidance for the Community and Voluntary Sector about registering with the OISC, as well as information on the new EU settlement scheme registration is available on [the OISC website](#).