

Speech: “Peacekeeping should exist alongside both conflict prevention and peace-building work.”

Thank you Madam President – I warmly welcoming the Secretary-General’s briefing and I agree with his nine point plan for reform and with every other word that he said.

I’d like to pay tribute to the brave men and women serving in UN Peacekeeping missions. For many around the world, they are all that stands between stability and chaos. Over 3,500 peacekeepers have lost their lives holding that line, including nine this year. We are humbled by their sacrifice.

We have a duty to those peacekeepers, to all those risking their lives today, and to all the people they protect, to ask tough, fundamental questions about peacekeeping deployments.

Peacekeeping is one of the best things this organisation has ever created. Peacekeeping is the jewel in the UN crown. Peacekeeping is the UN’s unique selling point. Peacekeeping is also a good investment. In human terms, UN peacekeeping saves lives. In terms of peace, it significantly increases the survival rate of peace agreements. We should continue to invest in this crucial tool that answers the call to help when no one else is coming. But like all investments, we should examine the market. In the first place, we must think long and hard before deploying missions, about whether peacekeeping is the right tool at the right moment.

Horizon scanning and early warning give us the opportunity to use other tools; preventative diplomacy, conflict prevention, mediation.

Early action to prevent conflict and mass human rights abuses remains vital. But that must start long before peacekeepers may be required.

Too often, that moment is missed so when a peacekeeping mission is required we must ask: does this mission have a clear objective, and does it have a clear exit strategy? Does it have the right mandate? The next question is: will the host government cooperate?

Now there’s at least two elements to that question. First, when a government opposes the very deployment of a mission, and secondly where the government hinders the mission’s ability to fulfil every part of its mandate once it has been deployed.

History has given us enough tragedies to support the deployment of peacekeepers when host governments are unwilling or unable to protect their own people. With or without the government’s consent.

Where the host government does not cooperate, this Council has a crucial role to play. We must ensure that States shoulder their primary responsibility to

prevent conflict, minimise suffering and ensure that cycles of conflict are not repeated.

Where there are spoilers to peace, including host governments who seek to stifle missions, we must use all the tools at our disposal to change that behaviour.

But time after time, the message sent by this Council is one of disunity and confusion. We had a chance last year to bring pressure to bear on the parties in South Sudan, but at the crucial moment we failed to deliver. We cannot complain now about the tragic status quo in that country if we aren't prepared to act ourselves.

Once deployed, we must recognise when a peacekeeping mission is no longer the right tool for the job, where other parts of the UN system are better placed to support development and peacebuilding needs, as in Haiti, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire.

We know that peacekeeping is but one tool available to the UN. It cannot deliver every aspect of the UN's response to conflict; peacekeeping should exist alongside both conflict prevention and peace-building work.

And, where military force is necessary, the UN is not the only organisation capable of delivering it. We need only look to West Africa, where ECOWAS has demonstrated regional leadership through deployments in both Mali and in support of the political transition in the Gambia. Or in Somalia, where the African Union mission is degrading the threat from the terrorist group Al Shabaab.

But military operations can only create the space for the political process to progress. So we must redouble our efforts to address the political challenges to peace, not only the security ones, if we are to deliver the Secretary-General's agenda on sustaining peace.

My final point, Madam President, is that, if and when we deploy peacekeeping missions, we must make sure that they are effective.

This means better mission planning, more pledges of troops and equipment, and stronger mission performance.

Mandates must be limited, realistic, prioritised with a clear end goal and the benchmarks for getting there, building on and complementing the work of other parts of the UN, so that we can measure the impact of their activity and hand them over when peacekeeping's task is complete. We must robustly review missions regularly to establish where current situations sit on the spectrum of conflict, and ensure that we are responding and resourcing them appropriately.

Pledges of troops and equipment need to meet specific shortfalls identified by the UN, including the deployment of more women. We need to develop a greater breadth and depth of capabilities, so that the UN can deploy the most appropriate tools to deliver mission mandates.

But ultimately, peacekeeping must perform better. That means high quality training, appropriate equipment and medical provision, and skilled and courageous leadership. Missions are the human face of this organisation to so many people in the world, and they have to act to uphold the principles that we all represent, holding peacekeepers to account for underperformance or misconduct, including crucially, any allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. Peacekeeper's successes save lives, and we owe it to them and the people they protect to ask these tough questions and find the right answers.

Thank you.

Speech: "The human rights situation in Mali needs close attention."

Thank you Madam President,

It's good to see His Excellency Foreign Minister Diop of Mali, join us in New York once more. We're looking forward to hearing from you, given how much is at stake in your country.

The death of a French soldier yesterday is another stark reminder of how dangerous this environment is, and I pay tribute to his sacrifice.

I also want to thank Under Secretary-General Lacroix for his very clear briefing. And also Jean-Pierre to welcome you, we are really looking forward to working with you closely in this critical job.

Madam President, we are encouraged by recent moves in Mali to implement the terms of the peace agreement, as the French Permanent Representative and others have just said, the establishment of interim authorities in three of the five northern regions is a positive step, as is the launching of some mixed patrols that include northern groups and the Malian armed forces.

It is also welcome that the National Reconciliation Conference has taken place. This reflected a healthy cross-section of civil society in Mali, including women's organisations, youth groups, NGOs, business leaders and former combatants. The United Kingdom has consistently pushed for better inclusion of women in the peace process and this, as Sweden has already pointed out, is a critical driver for success. So it's good that debate was inclusive, positive and focused on the future of the country.

But, Madam President, I think I should be as frank in public as we are in private consultations. We do remain seriously concerned at the apparent lack of political will among the signatories to really implement the Algiers Peace Accord. Progress is too slow, it's unpredictable and it's slender. Now is the opportunity to change that.

It's in that context that the human rights situation in Mali needs close attention. The Secretary General's latest report details consistent human rights violations – including summary executions and enforced disappearances – by members of the Malian defence and security forces, the Platform and the CMA. There cannot be an excuse for such actions and perpetrators of these abuses must be held accountable: addressing impunity is an essential component of reconciliation and of peace.

I also think the link here between human rights and peace and security more broadly could not be more clear or more stark, as we will be debating in this chamber next week.

On security, this continues to be a significant concern. Despite some improvements, there is a real danger of reversing previous gains. The challenges facing the country are numerous and they are clear. The Secretary-General's latest report details the porous nature of Mali's borders, and that both violent extremist groups and organised criminal gangs continue to exploit the ungoverned space of the country.

To add to the historic presence of Al-Qaida aligned organisations in Mali, there is now a new threat from Islamic State-affiliated groups along the Mali-Niger border, spurred on by lack of a state presence. Both France and Italy have already set out the strategic context of the threat. Should it continue unchecked the impact on Mali and the wider region could be grave.

I do want to pay tribute to the on-going work of the Special Representative to Mali, Mr Annadif. Both the military and the civilian components of MINUSMA are operating in challenging circumstances. The threat to United Nations personnel from spoilers intent on disrupting the peace process continues to grow. Despite this, the staff of MINUSMA, and the French forces of Berkane, continue to do their utmost for the people of Mali and the wider region.

As others have alluded to, this task is made harder by the continued shortfall of troop numbers and equipment. It's clear that air cover, reconnaissance capability and armoured personnel carriers in particular, are urgently required. We therefore call on potential troop contributing countries to follow-up on the offers that they have made to join the mission, and we welcome Senegal's important offer of helicopters.

As I said at the beginning, political reform is the key to halting the instability.

It's unacceptable that MINUSMA should, at great cost in human life and financial commitment, be working hard to maintain a stable environment in which peace can take root, if the parties to the accord are not taking advantage of this to deliver on their promises.

So our central message, to be absolutely clear, is that we urge the Government of Mali and opposition groups to seize the opportunities, build on recent progress, and press on with implementing the peace accords. MINUSMA is helping to create the conditions of peace, but the only people who can make that peace are the parties themselves.

Thank you.

[Our Child Benefit plan would help half a million families](#)

8th April 2017

Labour's plans to boost child benefit would help over half a millions Scottish families and nearly 1 million kids.

We want to see child benefit increased by **£240 by 2020**.

This move will lift thousands of children out of poverty and put money back into the pockets of working class families.

You can find out how many families in your local area would [be better off here](#).

We aren't the only people who want to see this happen. So do the [Child Poverty Action Group](#).

We want to see this plan in the Child Poverty Bill, which Holyrood will debate later this year.

Earlier this week new figures revealed that working poverty in Scotland is at its highest point since the Scottish Parliament was established in 1999.

Scotland has huge new powers over social security. We can radically reshape our country to make it fairer.

Rather than focusing on dividing Scotland again with another referendum, SNP ministers should be working with Labour to put money back into the pockets of working class families and lifting children out of poverty.

Agree with our plan? Then help spread our message.

[Press release: Minister condemns](#)

[persecution of LGBT community in Chechnya](#)

Reports from international human rights organisations suggest that over 100 gay men have recently been detained in Chechnya, with some reports suggesting that at least three have been killed and many have been tortured.

The detention and ill-treatment of over 100 gay men in Chechnya is extremely concerning. Reports have also suggested that at least three of these men have been killed. The statement by the regional Government, implying that such treatment towards LGBT people is acceptable, is particularly abhorrent. We condemn any and all persecution, and call on the authorities to promptly investigate and ensure that perpetrators of human rights abuses are brought to justice.

The human rights situation for LGBT people in Russia has deteriorated significantly in recent years and we continue to voice our serious concern with Russian authorities at all levels. Russia's international human rights obligations require them to protect citizens who may be at risk of persecution. We expect the Russian government to fulfill its obligations to this end, and to uphold the rule of law.

[200,000 children in east Ukraine need urgent care to overcome trauma of conflict – UNICEF](#)

7 April 2017 – More than 200,000 children, or one in four, in the two regions most severely affected by the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine require urgent and sustained psychosocial support to address their traumatic experiences, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) said today.

"The world has forgotten about this invisible crisis in eastern Ukraine, but hundreds of thousands of children are paying a heavy price, one that could last a lifetime without adequate support," said UNICEF Ukraine Representative Giovanna Barberis in a news release, stressing the urgent need for funding to reach these traumatized children.

These children live in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, within 15 kilometres of each side of the 'contact-line' that divides government and non-government-controlled areas and where fighting is most intense.

They are in chronic fear and uncertainty due to sporadic shelling, unpredictable fighting and dangers from landmines and other unexploded ordnance.

Many risk their safety to get an education. Seven schools were damaged during the most recent escalation of violence in February and March, and more than 740 schools, or one in five, in eastern Ukraine have been damaged or destroyed since the conflict began in 2014.

Parents, teachers, school directors and psychologists continue to report striking behaviour changes in children as young as three years old. Symptoms include severe anxiety, bed-wetting, nightmares, aggressive behaviour and withdrawing from families and communities.

Dedicated social workers, psychologists and specially trained teachers are working around the clock. However, as the conflict drags on, additional investments are required to meet these children's needs.

UNICEF is appealing for \$31.2 million to support these children and their families.

“Children should not have to live with the emotional scars from a conflict they had no part in creating. Additional support is needed now so that young people in Donetsk and Luhansk can grow into healthy adults and rebuild their communities,” said Ms. Barberis, calling on all sides of the conflict to recommit to the ceasefire signed in Minsk and end this senseless violence.

VIDEO: Ukraine: When a bomb shelter becomes a part of daily life | UNICEF