

Upholding peace in Colombia

Thank you very much, Mr President. As it's the first time I'm speaking in the chamber, let me congratulate you on assuming the presidency and thank our Russian colleagues for the presidency in the month of September.

It's very good once more to have the Foreign Minister with us. You're very welcome, Foreign Minister. It's always good to have you here. And we appreciate the seriousness with which you take this Council's consideration of this important mission. And thank you also to the SRSG for the briefing.

I think we all know that we're meeting almost three years since the peace agreement was signed in November 2016 and significant progress has been made since then. Transitional justice institutions have gained more stable ground, illegal crop substitution programmes are underway and thousands of ex-combatants are being re-incorporated into civilian life. And there have been other advances.

The progress, however significant, though, has been met with a number of significant challenges. The recent announcement by former FARC leaders that they were returning to armed activity was an obstacle. We have to admit that, but we should not let it overshadow positive steps forward. We condemn the dissidents' rejection of the peace accords, but at the same time, we also welcome the swift response by the Colombian government, the FARC political party and the transitional justice system, among other stakeholders. It remains clear – and this is welcome – that the majority of former FARC combatants remain committed to the peace process. Of course, we must guard against complacency and we must step up efforts to ensure that currently manageable threats like these do not escalate and worsen and spiral beyond our control. So rather than calling broadly for the implementation of the agreement, which is customary at this session, I'd like to particularly respond to the requests made by High Commissioner Archila, who is in the room today, on the council's recent trip to Colombia, for us to be more specific in our appeals.

Firstly, therefore, Mr President, we recognize the political and financial challenges that face the Colombian government. But we believe that sufficient funding for rural development in the 170 PDET municipalities is essential to deliver the accords. Adequate resources should also be made available to the transitional justice system and reincorporation process, as these are crucial for public and ex-combatant trust in the peace process and therefore to ex-combatants' continued participation in it. Increased state presence in rural areas will assist in addressing ongoing security issues, not least the killing of former FARC members, community leaders and human rights defenders, as we've discussed here before.

Secondly, Mr. President, I'd like to underscore the importance of the party's renewed high-level engagement with vital spaces for dialogue, including: the Commission for the Follow-Up, Promotion and Verification of the Final Agreement; the National Commission of Guarantees; and the National

Reincorporation Council. These mechanisms have been less active recently, but they serve an important purpose in maintaining communication and coordination on the accords.

Looking ahead, Mr President, to emerging developments, on 27 October, Colombians will vote in regional and local elections, a milestone on the road to peace, especially given the strong regional focus of the peace agreement. The SG's report highlighted worrying statistics of candidates being threatened or killed. In this regard, we welcome the signature of the new National Pact for Political Culture and Non-Violence during the electoral campaign. We call on all stakeholders to adhere to this pact, to refrain from violence and intimidation and to ensure peaceful elections.

Mr President, the UK commends the Colombian government for the progress made so far amid challenging circumstances. We look forward to continuing this support along Colombia's road to sustainable peace.

Thank you.