

## Adapting Security Council working methods to be innovative and agile

Thank you, Mr President, and thank you also to our briefers this morning. I would like to thank you, Mr President, and Estonia and St Vincent and the Grenadines for arranging this meeting and for bearing the concept note that will inform our discussions.

Mr President, as others have said, COVID-19 has presented an unprecedented challenge to this Council over the last two months or so. Most importantly, the spread of this disease has had significant implications for international peace and security that the Council needs to address. But it's also presented major challenges for the Council's working methods. And in my intervention today, I will consider how the Council has adapted to these challenges before moving on to more general points.

So firstly, on COVID, I would like to pay tribute to the efforts of China, the Dominican Republic and Estonia. Under their presidencies in March, April and May, the Council has been able to move to a position where open videoconferences of the Council cannot be broadcast live on UNTV. And we are able to adopt resolutions and PRSTs through written procedure. We should not understate the work that has been required to achieve this outcome, including from the Secretariat. The move to broadcasting Council videoconferences in full was a particularly important step for the transparency of the Council's work.

But the UK regrets that the Council working methods have not been able to respond in a more agile and effective way to this crisis. I recall in this context Article 28 of the Charter, which requires the Council to be organised in a way that enables it to function continuously. Due to a lack of Council consensus, neither the Council nor its subsidiary bodies have held formal meetings since the 12th of March. There are therefore no verbatim transcripts of our meetings. Our technical platform has not been able to accommodate simultaneous interpretation or open debates and continues to suffer from occasional technical glitches. Meetings are conducted without the benefit of the established framework of the provisional rules of procedure and the mechanisms for resolution of disagreements that they provide. We all hope that we can return to the chamber soon, but as long as we are confronted with these extraordinary circumstances, we need to continue to pursue opportunities for improving our working methods. When we do return to the normal, we need to consider how we can put contingency plans in place to ensure that we are able to respond more quickly and effectively to any future crises. Last week's Arria on the anniversary of Victory in Europe Day showed us what can be done with quite some style.

Mr President, I would like to turn to the potential tension between transparency and effectiveness that is highlighted in the concept note. One significant challenge in this regard is maintaining an appropriate balance between open and closed meetings. Achieving the right balance requires

Council members to approach the monthly programme of work with an open mind. It is too easy to fall into the trap of following the same format each time an issue appears on our agenda. One option that I would like to highlight is the private meeting; the opportunity for UN member states to participate provides an element of transparency, but the closed nature of the meeting removes the temptation to address the media rather than Council colleagues.

But, Mr President, the assumption that closed meetings are more effective does not always hold true. To be effective, Council members need to enter these meetings with a willingness to engage in a discussion and consider action. Regrettably, we still see too many examples of Council members reading up prepared statements or refusing to engage in a serious discussion of outcomes or next steps.

My final point on transparency relates to civil society. The UK believes that engaging with a diverse set of briefings is an important element of transparency, and we will continue to promote civil society participation in Council activity. But as highlighted in the Arrria that the UK and the Dominican Republic held in February, the Council needs to do better at handling the risk of reprisals to our briefers. We look forward to continuing discussions with Council colleagues on this important issue.

Turning to efficiency, there has been some progress in bearing down on speaking times to the Council, but the Council still spends too much time in lengthy meetings that address the conflicts of yesterday rather than shouldering its responsibilities to address today's conflicts and prevent future conflicts. We support informal horizon scanning briefings by the Secretariat and the development of sofa talks to address this challenge. It's important that we use these opportunities effectively, and as Professor Luck has said, implement agreed working method reforms were widely.

But informal discussions are no substitute for Council meetings, not least for reasons of transparency. We must therefore continue to subject the Council's programme of work to critical analysis and be prepared to bring new issues to the Council. The current crisis means that the Council's work on prevention is more important than ever, and I was pleased to hear Ms. Landren's point on systemic threats. We have to look beyond the immediate geographic nature of the challenge to the wider challenges like climate that threaten us more globally.

The UK is also prioritised reducing the length and the pace of Council products over the recent years. We've had some success, especially with reducing the length of peacekeeping mandates. But there is more work to be done and the UK will maintain our focus on this.

In conclusion, Mr President, the Council's working methods have perhaps never been under greater scrutiny. While we have made significant progress since March, our ambition should be for the Council to be a leader in innovation and agility. And we must remember fundamental reason for this Council's existence and ensure all we do best serves that purpose. I look forward to continuing discussions on how we can rise to that challenge.

Thank you, Mr President.