

Assessing the global ceasefire to help fight COVID-19

Thank you, Mr President. I thought it was a particularly thoughtful and thought-provoking set of briefings, which perhaps reflects the subject matter that we're discussing today. I think there's a lot for us to take away from that. Because this is our first Council meeting in follow up to the original resolution, I just want to again pay tribute to the painstaking French diplomacy that got us here, particularly to Nicholas de Rivière. And I want to pay personal tribute to the Tunisian Permanent Representative Kabtani. The UK strongly supports implementation of resolution 2532, and calls on all Member States to uphold their international commitments. Breaches of arms embargoes agreed by this Council are worsening in conflicts throughout the world. Let me talk about the situation in three areas out of many which we could discuss today, Yemen, South Sudan and Sudan, and see if we can draw any conclusions.

Mr President, in Yemen, following the Secretary-General's call, we did see unilateral ceasefires by the Saudi-led coalition. These were sadly not reciprocated. But that is why the Council must continue to strongly support the UN Special Envoy's efforts to secure a lasting political solution to the conflict in Yemen and why it is vital that all Member States comply with the arms embargo. It's also vital, as this Council has called for regularly, that all parties engage constructively with the process. And we urge all to cease provocative military offenses, in particular the Houthis in Marib, as well as their cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia. The humanitarian crisis, already the world's worst, is significantly worsening, with the effects of Covid-19 restrictions on access and shortages of United Nations funding, as described regularly by Mark Lowcock in our debates on Yemen, which make the peace process even more necessary and even more urgent. And we must also not lose focus, Mr President, on South Sudan. Recent increases in violence, combined with food insecurity and flooding, put South Sudan again at risk of catastrophe. The peace deal of 2018 remains the best chance for long-term stability. But pressure is needed from all parties in order to deliver further progress if we're going to maintain that ceasefire, protect humanitarian workers, and ensure that we can help South Sudan respond. More encouragingly, we welcome recent progress towards a comprehensive peace agreement with Sudan, including the important steps taken in Juba on the 31st of August with the Sudan Revolutionary Front. And again, we urge all parties involved to work together with the international community to ensure the swift and effective implementation of this agreement and for all other groups to engage without preconditions to achieve a comprehensive peace that the Sudanese people have called for. My colleague, the distinguished representative of China, mentioned sanctions. I do think it's a shame that there has been some intentional blurring of issues on sanctions and attempts to take advantage of a potential Covid-19-related tragedy. Sanctions are a vital tool in our armoury. Let's take the example of Syria and work that through. There are UK and EU sanctions on Syria. They specifically target

those responsible for human rights abuses against ordinary Syrians and those who support or benefit from the Assad regime's corruption and murderous activity. Sanctions don't apply to food, medicine, medical equipment or medical assistance. Put simply, the problem facing Syria's health sector is not sanctions, but rather that the regime is more intent on bombing hospitals than building them and the restrictions imposed on cross-border aid. Humanitarian exemptions apply to sanctions regimes mitigating the impact of sanctions on humanitarian programmes. We have always worked, and we continue to work, with organisations and individuals to ensure that sanctions do not affect humanitarian operations and that organisations and individuals are able to import non-conflict-related goods. The issue in Syria, of course, is a chronic mismanagement of Syria's economy by a corrupt regime and its friends. Turning, if I might, to the question of famine. Resolution 2532 underpins some vital humanitarian principles and interests. Conflict and Covid-19 has seen the outlook for food security in 2020 become increasingly bleak. And Mark Lowcock not only warned about that today, but also in his white note. So an end to conflict, and the realisation of resolution 2532's ceasefire call, is essential. Millions of people are in crisis or emergency stages of food insecurity. And the risk of famine looms in several countries. The United Kingdom continues to support the UN and other international organisations, which we believe may provide an effective and efficient support in places that need it most. The United Kingdom's current contribution is approaching a billion pounds additional to existing funding already announced. More also needs to be done though on the ground by governments and non-state armed groups, to improve humanitarian access in areas where it is hard to reach the most vulnerable populations. Access has been further challenged by Covid-19 lockdown measures and international travel restrictions. And as Mark Lowcock pointed out, I would urge all governments to ease visa restrictions on key humanitarian workers. But the Council needs a better understanding overall of who is blocking access, what its impact is on the humanitarian situation, and how to address it. Let me just quickly say I'm grateful to Undersecretary-General Lacroix for his comprehensive briefing on the peacekeeping side, and I wish to express thanks and appreciation for peacekeepers and their actions to support their host countries and of course, to avoid inadvertently spreading the virus themselves. Ultimately, Mr President, conflict prevention and resolution is our only lasting solution. Women have a crucial role to play here, and the gendered impact of Covid-19 risks undermining peace and worsening conflict. However, this remains largely unacknowledged and undervalued by governments and international organisations. The United Kingdom strongly urges parties to armed conflict to invest in peace processes which include meaningful participation of women, youth, religious groups and civil society. Let me conclude, Mr President, by saying that I think we need more regular horizon scanning of situations which may threaten international peace and security, using effective early warning mechanisms and United Nations analysis coming from those in the field and relevant UN agencies and departments. It is vital that we take a unified and combined approach. And that's not just a message to the United Nations, but also to us, its Member States. We need to be ready to be agile to support the UN as they collectively shine a light and tell us where more activity is needed, whether that is in our humanitarian funding, or whether it is in our political messaging. As the impact of Covid-19

affects vulnerable countries in different ways, so we need to look further ahead at evolving risks to instability and take action to prevent conflict. Problems with access to humanitarian aid and health care should be highlighted in particular, and that could lead us to take more timely interventions, which must be the goal of all us. Thank you, Mr President.