

Commitment to peace in Kosovo for future generations

Thank you, Mr President.

I'd like to begin by thanking the Special Representative and his team for his statement and for their continued commitment to Kosovo's developments, as laid out in the comprehensive reports on the activities of the UN's mission in Kosovo. And I would also like to thank Deputy Prime Minister Ivica Dacic and Ambassador Vlora Citaku for their intervention this afternoon.

Mr President, we welcome the focus in the report on the government of Kosovo's commitment to respecting human rights, ensuring equal access for minority communities, improving transparency and strengthening the rule of law. We take note of the progress made in this reporting period, including the reopening of the Special Chamber of the Supreme Court, efforts to standardise judicial practice across Kosovo, progress in the prosecution of war crimes, the return of displaced persons and the identification of missing persons, the adoption of child protection legislation and the the first report on respect for human rights.

There remains, however, more to do. We urge Kosovo to redouble its efforts to address the high level of corruption and organised crime and to work to strengthen its judicial system. We welcome the important work of UNMIK and EULEX to this end. As regards to the fight against crime, we agreed it is legitimate and necessary for the Kosovan police to operate across Kosovo, including in the northern municipalities in accordance with the law.

This council should welcome the arrests of individuals suspected of involvement in smuggling and organised crime, both Kosovo-Albanian and Kosovo-Serb, as was the case during the recent Kosovo police operation. But noting the concern expressed by the Special Representative regarding the arrest of two UNMIK officials during this operation, it is also important that international personnel carrying out their duties should be treated in accordance with international law, just as they must adhere to their mission's mandates and codes of conduct. I welcome SRSG Tanin's briefing this afternoon on the outcome of UNMIK's internal view on this incident. We will consider these findings carefully.

Mr President, we welcome the progress made by the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Prosecutor's Office over the last few months. We urge Pristina, Belgrade and the members of this council to cooperate fully in the interest of achieving justice for victims. And we call on both Pristina and Belgrade to press ahead with domestic domestic prosecutions for historic crimes. The interests of all victims and their families must be at the centre of judicial proceedings. Efforts to locate missing persons and the provision of support to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, regardless of their ethnicity.

We particularly welcome the joint declaration of representatives of religious groups in Kosovo in support of survivors of sexual violence. The United Kingdom is committed to supporting victims and preventing sexual violence in all its forms, as shown during Her Royal Highness the Countess of Wessex's recent visit to Pristina, during which she focused on support for survivors from all communities.

With regard to the Kosovo elections on the 6th of October, we echo the European Union Election Observation Mission's statement. The elections were calm and well administered and the Central Elections Commission worked with dedication, professionalism and transparency, although we continue to be concerned by reports on the level of pre-election intimidation in some Kosovo Serb areas. We have been following the reports of staff suffering ill health at the National Counting Centre. We await the outcome of the investigation. We must not allow this incident to sow suspicion and distrust.

Mr President, Kosovo has voted for change. We call on the party leaders to work diligently to form a new, stable government to tackle the pressing issues facing the country. The UK expects this new government to uphold and strengthen the rule of law, to improve inclusivity in a multi-ethnic state and to commit itself to strengthening regional security.

Dialogue with Belgrade must be a priority. We call on both Belgrade and Pristina to remove obstacles to its resumption. Pristina must remove tariffs and Belgrade must stop its de-recognition campaign. For dialogue to succeed, both sides must refrain from provocative rhetoric and actions. We welcome Kosovo's completion of two more common crossing points, but we regret that the implementation of many other aspects of the Brussels agreements remain unaddressed by both parties. The people of Serbia and Kosovo have much to gain from the resumption of talks and a comprehensive, sustainable, implementable deal to their mutual and lasting benefit.

Mr President, the twentieth anniversary of the NATO intervention fell during this reporting period. This was an important moment for reflection. We remember the victims on all sides of this conflict and remind ourselves of the reasons for this intervention. We renew our commitment to building good, neighbourly relations so that peace can be safeguarded for future generations. The Kosovo of today is almost unrecognisable from the Kosovo media reported on across the world in 1999. We thank the members of this council, UNMIK staff, the European Union, NATO, the OSCE, K4, the Kosovo Special Prosecutor's Office and, most importantly, the government and institutions of Kosovo for their ongoing pursuit of Kosovo's progress and developments.

In closing, Mr President, the UK pays tribute to the work of the special representative and his team and we look forward to continuing to support them in their endeavors.

Thank you very much.