

Delivering on health, safety and justice in Kosovo

Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to begin by thanking the Special Representative and his team for their continued commitment and dedication to Kosovo, as laid out in the comprehensive report on the activities of the UN's Mission in Kosovo. I would also like to extend my thanks to His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Serbia and His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Kosovo for their briefings this morning.

The situation in Kosovo in 2020 is very different to that of 1999, when UNMIK started its work. UNMIK has played a key role in that transformation. Together with the European Union, OSCE and NATO, it has promoted security, stability and respect for human rights, not only in Kosovo, but in the region more widely. However, significant challenges remain and it is important that UNMIK's efforts are carefully tailored to address these. We continue to support a review of UNMIK to ensure that it is able to meet current needs as effectively as possible.

Dealing with COVID-19 has to be the primary task of the incumbent Government in Kosovo, as indeed it is for Serbia and other governments throughout the world. The UK stands with the people of Kosovo during this global crisis. This is not a time for political manoeuvring, but cooperation, domestically and regionally. Following the vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister by the Assembly of Kosovo, we call upon all actors to continue to respect the Constitution, and for decisions to be taken quickly to enable the incumbent or new Government to make protection of citizens' lives the paramount consideration. We welcome the support the UN is providing the Government of Kosovo to help deal with the crisis through the establishment of an inter-agency task force, to support the procurement, and coordinate supplies of medical equipment. We urge that action be taken forward quickly.

Mr President, there have been many positive examples of different communities working together to deal with COVID-19. This Council should welcome the cooperation we have recently seen between the Minister of Health and the Minister of Communities and Returns, and the Mayors of North and South Mitrovica on issues relating to the Kosovo-Serb community. We should also welcome and encourage cooperation between health ministries in Kosovo and Serbia, such as the recent virtual meeting held between Ministers in both countries to discuss their response to the crisis. I would to thank the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for making such a constructive exchange possible. We hope that these actions will solidify the foundations for closer cooperation both within Kosovo, and between Kosovo and Serbia, over the pandemic and thereafter. Access to information on COVID-19 is essential. To that end, we welcome the Kosovo Government's development of a multi-language website and ask that they ensure that all information related to COVID-19 is available in all official languages of Kosovo.

I echo the Secretary-General's report in welcoming developments in this period to increase connectivity between Kosovo and Serbia. The normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia remains crucial for regional stability and prosperity and is in the interests of both countries. I reiterate the UK's long-standing support for the EU-facilitated Dialogue as the route to achieving a legally binding, comprehensive and sustainable agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. We welcome the decision of the incumbent Government of Kosovo on 1 April to lift the tariffs on goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. We call on Serbia to respond positively, and to halt its de-recognition campaign. We believe grievances, including non-tariff barriers, can be settled in the framework of the EU-facilitated Dialogue, if there is the political will and courage to do so. We look to both parties to take the necessary steps to return to the Dialogue at the soonest possible opportunity.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the appointment of Miroslav Lajcak as the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkans issues. We look forward to working with him, with our Quint partners, and with Serbia and Kosovo, to achieve a comprehensive, conclusive, legally binding normalisation agreement that respects territorial integrity, is acceptable to the citizens of both countries, and will deliver long-term benefits to them and the whole region.

Mr President, we welcome the progress made by the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office. The UK strongly supports these institutions and the important work that they do. We urge the Governments of Kosovo and Serbia and the members of this Council to cooperate fully with them. Justice must be delivered for victims and their families. We cannot allow a culture of impunity to exist for the most serious crimes; to do so would be unconscionable: it would be enormously damaging for rule of law and prospects of reconciliation across the region. We regret the slow progress in domestic prosecutions for war crimes, and urge the authorities in Kosovo and Serbia to push ahead in dealing with these historic crimes.

We welcome the progress made by the Government of Kosovo in dealing with the legacy of conflict-related sexual violence, with the first indictment filed by a local prosecution for conflict-related sexual violence as a war crime. We commend the work UNMIK has done in supporting survivors to share their stories and encouraging the Government of Kosovo to prioritise addressing sexual violence. The UK is committed to supporting victims and preventing sexual violence in all its forms. Through funding the 'Be My Voice' campaign in Kosovo, we are raising public awareness and tackling head-on the stigma experienced by victims.

Mr President, last October, the people of Kosovo voted for change. They voted for a government that promised to tackle corruption and promote economic development. There is still considerable work to be done to strengthen the rule of law and deal with weaknesses in the justice system in Kosovo. We call upon the incumbent or new Government to prioritise work to deliver the people's long-term priorities.

In closing, I would like to reiterate my thanks to the Special Representative

and his team. We look forward to continuing to support them in their important work.