

Empowering youth to lead across Africa

Thank you, Mr President, and may I add my own congratulations to you on assuming the Presidency and my thanks to the Russian delegation for their habitually professional chairmanship of this council.

Thank you also, Mr President, for convening a debate on this important issue. And my thanks to our briefers. And like others, I found our briefers today thought provoking. And it's a reminder that we should strive to incorporate different perspectives when we select briefers for our meetings.

Silencing the guns in Africa is our shared ambition. It will be impossible without the involvement and empowerment of Africa's youth. I thought Ms Chebbi made powerful points about use of narrative and the way in which there can be a problem narrative around youth, and I agree with her on that. But as this is the Security Council, let me start at least on international peace and security issues before addressing some wider points.

Mr President, every young person deserves to grow up free of the fear of violence. Sadly, this is still not the case for many children and young people in parts of Africa. In South Sudan, for example, while it is very positive to note that 955 children were released by armed groups in 2018, it is a matter of some sadness and concern that a further 453 children were reportedly recruited and used by armed actors. So the United Kingdom calls on all parties in South Sudan to redouble their efforts to end grave violations against children and tackle impunity. And we should ensure that we discuss this during our forthcoming visit and are united in our demand for action.

Mr President, wherever children and young people are affected by conflict, they deserve support and services to help them enjoy a brighter future. This must include access to education. Last week, we were able to announce a \$630 million package to support education, particularly for women and girls. And the United Kingdom recently committed a further \$110 million in funding to the Education Cannot Wait initiative, the UNICEF fund delivering education in emergencies. Those funds will support 600,000 children in conflict-affected countries to receive an education.

But Mr President, our task is huge. And I would remind the council that UNICEF estimates that at least that many children, 600,000, are out of school because of political violence in Cameroon alone. We hope that the recently announced national dialogue in Cameroon will tackle the underlying causes of this crisis so that children and young people can receive the education they need to thrive.

Mr President, when children and youth are empowered and involved in the decisions that affect their futures, they can act as powerful agents for change, as this council recognised in Resolutions 2250 and 2419. Africa's youth does not only deserve the opportunity to have a say in how societies are run, they have a right to it. And Africa's youth do not merely deserve a meaningful role in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding efforts,

they are fundamental to their success. We know from our evidence and research that peace and reconciliation efforts which involve women, and by definition are therefore inclusive and inclusive of young people as well, have a 35% greater likelihood of lasting for 15 years or longer.

Mr President, we've seen the power of youth-led movements for change in Africa in recent months, as young people spearheaded Sudan's peaceful movement for accountable, civilian-led government. I heard Prime Minister Hamdok in these halls last week and was inspired by what he had to say and, in particular, his commitment to put women and youth front and center in building a better Sudan.

Worldwide, young people are still too often marginalised in political and civic life because, Mr President, people under the age of 30 make up more than half the world's population, but less than 2% percent of elected legislators.

Again, young Africans are in the vanguard of efforts to change this. In Nigeria, youth advocates campaign to tackle a barrier to young people's participation in politics. The 'Not Too Young to Run' bill, passed in 2018, lowered minimum age requirements for elected office. And that bill has since inspired a global campaign, supported by the Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Youth, and the UK stands firmly behind the 'Not Too Young to Run' initiative.

Mr President, young Africans who are too young to vote or run for office are the most still mobilising action on global challenges. I want to pay tribute to the leadership of teenage activists like Leah Namugerwa who campaigns for action on climate change in Uganda and Peace Ayo Adegbola, who advocates for girls education in Nigeria – and my apologies to both of them if I've mispronounced their names.

Mr President, if all of Africa's youth had the opportunity to realise their leadership potential and achieve their aspirations, the effect on the continent – the effect on the world – would be transformative. But for that to happen, all of Africa's youth need what so many young people take for granted: peace and security, human rights and good governance, quality education, healthcare and access to productive employment opportunities. And I agree with Ms Chebbi on the importance of the particular effort to tackle gender-based violence. And I would add to that that health care provision must include sexual and reproductive health.

Mr President, the United Kingdom will continue working with our African partners on initiatives to meet all these challenges, including through the UK Africa Investment Summit to be held in London in 2020. This is an indispensable element of our comprehensive support for Africa's long-term peace and stability. And I don't need to say it, but the United Kingdom's relationship with Africa and its peoples is enduring.

Thank you, Mr President.