

Ensuring a timely return to constitutional rule and the protection of human rights in Mali.

Thank you Madam President and thank you again to SRSW Wane and to Madam Dicko for your briefing and for everything you are doing in these most difficult of circumstances.

Like other Council members, the UK is seriously concerned about recent developments in Mali. We deeply regret the deaths of eight peacekeepers as a result of hostile acts, since the Council last met to discuss the situation in October. The frequency of these deplorable attacks speaks to the severity of the security challenges facing Mali, with dire consequences for civilians and peacekeepers alike. It underlines the need for concerted efforts by the Malian authorities and international partners to stabilise the country.

These efforts need to be led by a legitimate government focused on meeting the needs of its people. Instead, we have a transitional government focused on extending its time in office. Mali's proposal to delay elections by up to five years is deeply disappointing. It brings into question the transitional authorities' commitment to democracy and the rule of law, despite assurances given to members of this Council during our visit to Bamako last October.

We continue to stand behind ECOWAS mediation efforts. We call on the transitional authorities to prepare for elections without delay so that constitutional order can be restored as soon as possible. Like ECOWAS, we believe that any longer-term reforms should be taken forward by the next democratically elected government. We encourage the transitional authorities to continue engaging with ECOWAS in good faith, so that a credible election timetable can be agreed.

With the conflict in Mali escalating and spreading further south, civilians are in greater need than ever of protection and humanitarian assistance. The confirmed presence of the Wagner Group in Mali risks destabilising the country further. The UK made clear our concerns in the joint statement we co-signed with other international partners on 23 December. We have seen how civilians have had their human rights abused, and how UN peacekeepers have been put at risk, by the presence of unaccountable Wagner forces in the Central African Republic. The deployment of mercenaries will only increase the challenges facing Mali. We urge the Malian authorities to rethink their decision.

The UK remains committed to the Malian people and to helping build long-term stability and development. Through our deployment to MINUSMA, UK troops are making a tangible contribution to mission objectives, including protection of civilians in hard to reach areas. They are also helping UN human rights teams to investigate abuses. Last November the UK's Global Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, visited Mali and heard about the declining space for

human rights actors in the country and the ongoing barriers to women's involvement in political and peace-building processes. The UK is using programme funding to help amplify women's voices and we welcome the voice and testimony of Ms Dicko here today. As we look toward elections and the re-starting of the Peace Process, we urge the transitional authorities, signatory armed groups and all stakeholders to redouble their efforts to include women and youth.

The UK will continue to monitor the situation in Mali closely, and we believe the Security Council should do the same, keeping all options open with the aim of ensuring a timely return to constitutional rule and the protection of human rights.

Thank you, Madam President.