

Ensuring lasting peace in Colombia

Thank you very much, Mr President. Before I start on Colombia, let me thank you for arranging the two moments of silence and also use this occasion to pay tribute to His late Majesty Sultan Qaboos of Oman.

Turning to Colombia, I'd like to welcome the Foreign Minister. We're very pleased to have you here, ma'am and we wish you all the best in your new role. And thank you to the Special Representative for his report and for the briefing to the Council today. We very much share your analysis of events in Colombia over the past three months. This reflects both the achievements and the challenges of implementation of the peace agreement.

I'd also like, Mr President, to welcome the announcement by President Duque that he'd like the verification mission to stay in Colombia for the duration of his government. This is an important indication of the government's commitment to peace.

Mr President, October saw the first local elections since the accords were reached and the first in which the FARC political party took part. Despite the concerning levels of violence during the campaign, election day showed the strength and inclusivity of Colombian democracy, with more candidates from across the political spectrum competing than ever before and the highest turnout in modern times. We were encouraged, too by the overwhelming commitment of those elected to continue along the path to peace. The newly-elected local authorities have a key role in implementation of the peace agreement, especially through the development programmes with a territorial focus. We welcome the government's support for these programmes, including through expanded financing, and encourage coordination between national, departmental and local authorities to ensure effective implementation.

However, there are some areas in which urgent efforts are necessary to preserve the gains of the past three years. Fortunately, the mechanisms to address these already exist; the challenge is to make more effective use of them.

Firstly, we're deeply concerned about the persistent level of violence and threats towards human rights defenders, community leaders, including women and former FARC-EP combatants. We have highlighted this point on previous occasions, but we're concerned that the situation isn't improving despite the government's stated commitment to tackling the issue. To this end, we welcome last week's meeting of the National Commission on Security Guarantees, and we encourage full and ongoing use of this mechanism, including engagement with civil society to further implementation.

We encourage prioritisation of the Action Plan of the Intersectoral Commission on Security for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders, which has the potential to transform departmental security conditions for the better. We also welcome recent steps to strengthen protection of former FARC-EP combatants, and note yesterday's announcement of an operation to thwart a

plan to attack FARC political party leader Rodrigo Londoño. We encourage the government to ensure the extension of protection measures to territorial areas for training and reintegration and informal settlement of former FARC-EP combatants.

Secondly, we urge the Colombian government to accelerate reintegration programmes. These are crucial to maintain combatants and communities' faith in the process. Efforts should be made to ensure legal accreditation and access to income generating projects for former FARC-EP combatants living both inside and outside the former territorial areas for training and reintegration. More widely, we encourage the government to work with all stakeholders to resolve outstanding questions about the long-term status of these areas, particularly concerning the land on which they are located.

Finally, in his report, Special Representative emphasises the interconnected nature of all elements of the peace process. Implementing individual components of the agreement may produce limited outputs, but the outcome of inclusive, stable and lasting peace in Colombia will not be possible unless all components progress simultaneously and in a coherent fashion. In this regard, we encourage the Colombian government to take advantage of the national dialogue process it's begun following the recent protests, to build consensus with diverse sectors and ensure implementation continues in an effective and comprehensive manner.

Mr President, the United Kingdom recognises the important progress that has been achieved so far in Colombia and we look forward to continuing to support the Colombian government to ensure a lasting peace enjoyed by all.

Thank you.