

Ensuring stability and security in Abyei

Thank you, Mr President and thank you to both briefers for your updates. The United Kingdom welcomes the continued improvements in bilateral relations between the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan, evidenced by the Sudanese Foreign Minister's first official visit, being to Juba.

The recent agreement of a Declaration of Principles by the Government of Sudan and the SPLM-N Al Hilu, is also welcome. We commend the role of the Government of South Sudan in facilitating upcoming negotiations, and continue to urge all parties to engage constructively in meaningful talks.

Mr President, it is disappointing, however, that Sudan and South Sudan's high-level engagement, including over Abyei's final status and border demarcation, is yet to be realised in any meaningful way in Abyei, where the security situation remains unpredictable, affecting the daily lives of ordinary people. We urge both countries to seize this opportunity of renewed engagement to reach a resolution on Abyei.

The UK commends the women and men of UNISFA for their ongoing efforts to support peace and security in Abyei, including through the removal of explosive hazards, the facilitation of intercommunal dialogue, and the promotion of women's empowerment.

We also welcome UNISFA's continued engagement with the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan, including the outcomes of the second Joint Political and Security Mechanism meeting in October 2020. The UK calls for the parties to continue to engage regularly on the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism and border-related benchmarks.

We remain of the view that UNISFA has an important role in supporting progress in Abyei. We note the advice of the Secretary-General in his letter of 1 April that regional consultations on an exit strategy for UNISFA were inconclusive. We hope that, in time, progress can be made between the parties to develop viable options.

Mr President, it is regrettable that the mission continues to face operational challenges in fulfilling its mandate. There has been limited progress made on the Council's repeated requests to facilitate the operationalisation of Antony Airstrip, the issuing of outstanding visa requests, and the appointment of a civilian deputy head of mission.

We reiterate our call for both parties to facilitate the removal of these operational obstacles which are severely impeding the stability and security of Abyei. We also urge all parties to fully respect international humanitarian law and allow humanitarian actors to deliver aid to those in need without hindrance.

Finally, Mr President, the UK would like to note wider regional tensions and their potential impact on Abyei. It is positive to have Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia's participation here today. It is our sincere hope that any regional tensions can be resolved through dialogue, and that regional partners, as well as the UN, are able to ensure current disputes do not diminish the effect of UNISFA.

In closing, the UK commends the important role UNISFA continues to play in challenging circumstances and supports the renewal of its mandate.

Thank you.