

Ensuring UNMiK is able to meet Kosovo's current needs

Thank you, Mr President. I would like to begin by thanking the Special Representative and his team for their continued commitment 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 Her Excellency the Foreign Minister of Kosovo for their statements this morning.

Over the past 20 years, UNMiK has played a key role in Kosovo's transformation into a multi-ethnic, stable and inclusive democracy. However, the situation in Kosovo today is very different from that of 1999, when UNMiK started its work. We therefore continue to support a review of UNMiK to ensure it is able to meet Kosovo's current needs and challenges effectively.

Dealing with the health and socio-economic challenges of Covid-19 must remain the Government of Kosovo's top priority, as it is for governments across the world. We welcome the support in managing the effects of the virus that UNMiK together with UN Kosovo Team has provided during this reporting period. I am proud the UK has been able to provide nearly £2m through UN agencies to support this response. However, I echo the Secretary-General's concerns that political infighting has delayed legislation needed to manage the pandemic and mitigate its economic impact. We urge all political parties in Kosovo to focus on building consensus in the public interest.

Mr President, the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia remains crucial for regional stability and prosperity and is in the interests of both countries. We welcome the resumption of the EU-led Dialogue facilitated by EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajcak. We also welcome progress towards greater economic cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia recently achieved in Washington. The UK stands ready to support a comprehensive, conclusive, legally binding normalisation agreement that respects territorial integrity, is acceptable to the citizens of both countries, and delivers long-term benefits to them and the whole region.

To that end, we welcome the joint statement made by President Vucic of Serbia and PM Hoti of Kosovo on 7 September, affirming their commitment to the EU-facilitated Dialogue. Progress in the Dialogue and wider reconciliation between Kosovo and Serbia will require both parties to implement all outstanding agreements, and establish and protect a rational, calm atmosphere to allow cooperation. We look to the leaders of both countries to take a constructive and inclusive approach, working in good faith to overcome differences.

Mr President, the UK wants to see justice for war crimes committed during the conflict in 1999. We cannot allow impunity. We regret the continuing slow progress in domestic prosecutions for war crimes, and urge Kosovan and Serbian authorities to work together in dealing with these historic crimes.

In that context, the UK supports the work of the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office. It is vital that these institutions are able to continue their work without interference. We urge the Governments of Kosovo and Serbia and the members of this Council to cooperate fully with them.

We commend the technical support that UNMiK has provided to the Belgrade-Pristina Working Group on Missing Persons. The UK is committed to supporting all efforts to resolve Missing Persons cases from the conflicts of the 1990s. We have been supporting several projects through the International Commission on Missing Persons and the Missing Persons Resource Centre. It was disturbing to hear harmful and provocative comments by senior Ministers recently on this topic. The UK is clear that all, but particularly those in positions of power and authority, have a responsibility to refrain from such rhetoric, which is disrespectful to victims and families. As the Secretary-General notes in his report, 1643 persons remain unaccounted for from the conflict in Kosovo. We urge all parties to redouble their efforts, and foster the cooperation needed to bring closure to all outstanding cases.

Mr President, Kosovo's interests and those of its people, are best served by the rule of law and tackling corruption. We welcome the support UNMiK and others have given to build the capacity of institutions to conduct financial investigations, and build an inclusive justice system. There is still considerable work to be done in this area, and we continue to call on Kosovo to implement the reforms necessary, to strengthen further the rule of law, good governance and security.

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.