

# Identifying underlying drivers of the conflict in Africa

Madam President, our thanks first to you and to Cote d'Ivoire for convening today's important debate and also our thanks to our briefers for giving us their time and and their insights.

Madam President, the deteriorating situation in West Africa is a source of major concern, as we've heard from everyone around the Council today. This was underlined again by last week's terrorist attack in West Niger in which many Nigerian soldiers lost their lives. And our condolences go to the families of these troops and of all those civilians, national forces and UN peacekeepers who have suffered at the hands of violent extremists in West Africa.

As we've heard, too, the UN has a vital role to play in supporting national and regional efforts which address the drivers of violence. But this instability cannot be solved by the UN alone, nor through purely military or counter-terrorist initiatives. We need to address the underlying drivers of this conflict. Strengthening stability and security across West Africa requires a comprehensive approach to the interconnected drivers.

In too many parts of the region, corruption, failure to provide basic services and the lack of economic prospects for young people combine to provide fertile grounds for extremist groups. The impacts of climate change cause shocks and stresses which exacerbate the risks of inter-communal violence, including by contributing to competition over scarce resources. And serious organised crime networks, often operating across national boundaries, exacerbate instability and prey on local communities in the absence of state authority.

Madam President, tackling these challenges requires a comprehensive approach across all three pillars of the UN system: in peace and security, in development and in human rights. And it requires coordinated work from all partners.

We recognise the important role of regional efforts to tackle terrorist groups, including through the G-5 Sahel Task Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force, just as we commend the efforts of regional organisations, including the AU and ECOWAS. For our part, the UK is set to deploy 250 personnel to Mali in 2020 to provide vital long-range reconnaissance capabilities to MINUSMA. And we have contributed over \$6.6 billion in bilateral funding to support the operation of the MNJTF and \$2.4 million to the G5 Sahel Joint Force.

And we are working closely with West African partners to support nationally and locally-led conflict prevention efforts to prevent both extremism and intercommunal violence. For example, in northern Nigeria, UK development funding, worth nearly \$50 million over five years, is currently supporting

initiatives to increase economic opportunities for marginalised youth. And in Borno state, we're providing a further \$28 million in funding for projects to reduce young people's ability to recruitment by violent extremist groups.

But while individual initiatives like this matter, we know that long-term solutions to instability are grounded in prosperous and inclusive economies. And to that end, the United Kingdom is proud to be hosting a UK Africa investment summit on the 20th of January in London in order to mobilise high quality international investments for the region.

Madam President, we need to also deliver long-term solutions because there are no quick fixes to such complex issues. And while states must, of course, take the lead in delivering for their citizens and finding political solutions to conflicts, there is more the UN can do to support them. A coherent "whole of UN" approach is required. This should include work by UN country teams to support national efforts to prevent violent extremism from taking hold; following a proper assessment of the capacities, capabilities and resources nationally; and we are keen to see more coherence coordination between UNOWAS and the UN development actors in the region. And we should continue our work through the counterterrorism and sanctions committees to deny terrorists access to arms, to funding, and to bring them to justice, as well as supporting member states in strengthening their own counterterrorism frameworks and capacities.

We should also scale up efforts to address the root causes of instability in the region through focussed and coordinated peacebuilding programmes. In this regard, we are very pleased the Secretary-General has recently re-approved Mali's eligibility for access to peacebuilding funds. The UK remains one of the biggest supporters of the Peacebuilding Fund, having doubled our contribution to \$43 million in 2018. And we look forward to continuing to work with the Peacebuilding Support Office and Peacebuilding Commission to leverage those resources for the benefit of the communities facing the challenges of inter-communal violence and of terrorism.

Madam President, I've had the privilege to serve in in West Africa to travel extensively around the countries of the region, so this is an issue which is very close to my heart. And I think we just need to focus on three particular areas. I think the UN needs to come together to focus more fundamentally on them, but essentially the three ingredients are: security – and we talked about this already – but progress will not be made unless states can provide security within their territory and can work together across boundaries and borders to deliver this within the region. So we need to work together to help them build that capacity.

But security will only be sustained if governments work to deliver good governance and the rule of law. And many of us have spoken about this; we set this out very clearly in SDG 16. This is the key precursor to investment and growth. And investment and growth when it comes can help deliver the third ingredient, which is economic growth and development. This lifts people out of poverty and this stops people being tempted down the routes in the path of violence.

So I think, you know, we've heard everyone this morning talk about these things. The challenge is how we deliver them. And I think in that regard, it was very interesting to hear the African Union talk about this concept of recess, to look again at all the multiple initiatives that we have across the region – I think there were 15 or so that were mentioned – and see how we can bring greater coherence to them so that the UN in the region can work better together to deliver them.

For our part, the UK will continue to play our role in partnership with the UN and with our friends across West Africa.