

Implementing Colombia's historic peace agreement

Thank you Mr President, and may I also give thanks to the Special Representative for his briefing. And may I also welcome back Minister Blum to the Council.

Mr President, as the SRSG has just outlined there were some encouraging developments during this last reporting period. The United Kingdom welcomes the productive meeting last month – facilitated by the Special Representative – between President Duque and Rodrigo Londoño. As we approach the milestone fifth anniversary of the peace agreement later this year, it is positive that both parties committed to efforts to enhance its comprehensive implementation, and to strengthen reintegration and security guarantees for former combatants.

As we have highlighted many times before in this Council, the continued insecurity in conflict-affected communities is an ongoing threat to building peace. The UK remains deeply concerned that social leaders, human rights defenders and former combatants continue to face deadly violence from armed groups and criminal organisations.

In this respect, we note the progress made by the National Protection Unit towards filling its vacancies and clearing the backlog of over one thousand protection requests. We also commend the Special Investigations Unit for its improving track record of investigations and convictions. And we are encouraged that the Ministry of Interior is strengthening its capacity to respond to the early warnings issued by the Ombudsman's Office. It is vital that these measures continue to be enhanced, in order to stem the violence against Colombians working to build a future away from conflict.

Mr President, we have long called in this Council for a realistic long-term plan to dismantle armed groups and criminal organisations and bring state services, security and justice to all citizens. Expanding and improving state presence and security is a crucial step in stabilising conflict-affected areas. Now that the Government has presented the guidelines of this dismantling policy, we look forward to its swift implementation.

The United Kingdom also remains extremely concerned by the continued recruitment of minors by illegal armed groups in Colombia. We call on all armed groups immediately to release all minors from their ranks. We also note with concern the tragic deaths of minors during Government operations against armed groups in Guaviare last month, and welcome the Government's investigation into these deaths.

Mr President, turning to the reintegration process, we are encouraged by the further advances during the reporting period, including the first session of the National Reintegration Council, and progress in land purchases for a number of Territorial Areas for Training and Reintegration (TATRs). We urge

the Government to ensure coordinated action in support of all former combatants, including those outside the former TATRs.

Mr President, the transitional justice system is a cornerstone of the Peace Agreement, and the JEP's first indictment on 26 January represented an important milestone. We welcome the constructive response to their indictment by six of the former FARC-EP leaders, asking victims for forgiveness and committing to answering their questions during the hearing of the case. Acknowledging responsibility for crimes and injustices will pave the way for reconciliation and sustainable peace.

Minister Blum, this Council has been working to respond to Colombia's request – which the United Kingdom very much welcomed – for the Verification Mission to support the JEP in verifying compliance with its sentences. And while conversations are still ongoing, I hope, from the UK perspective, that we will soon be able to take action formally to add this task to the Mission's mandate.

Let me conclude, Mr President, by saying that the United Kingdom recognises the important progress achieved so far in implementing Colombia's historic Peace Agreement, as well as the significant challenges which remain. We urge the parties to remain seized of these, and to intensify their efforts during this crucial year. The United Kingdom remains fully committed to supporting Colombia to achieve a lasting peace.

Thank you, Mr President.