

Moving Venezuela toward a democratic future

Thank you, Mr President. I join others in thanking USG DiCarlo for her briefing.

Mr President, today we have been convened to speak about what is essentially an independent operation by a rogue group of mercenaries in speedboats, not a threat to international peace and security. The United Kingdom rejects the ridiculous notion peddled by the Russian Federation that this incident was a US and Colombian supported attempt to assassinate Maduro and impose a substitute government, as the Maduro regime has alleged in its letter to the Security Council. It does, however, this discussion, give the Council a useful precedent in scrutinising such adventurism by others into sovereign territory in the future. And I, for one, welcome the Russian delegation's condemnation of the violation of national sovereignty by mercenaries. We hope this means that they will themselves be changing the approach they take in Libya and elsewhere, as the Council heard earlier this week. Indeed, we were glad to hear many Council members defend territorial integrity and sovereignty, and we hope to hear similar sentiments, especially put as vehemently by the Russian delegation, when we discuss the illegal annexation of Crimea tomorrow.

For our part, we have seen no evidence that the US or Colombia were involved in this operation. To the contrary, both governments have taken steps to address the involvement of individuals from their countries. We welcome the US government's announcement that it has begun investigations into the activities of Silvercorp, its owner Jordan Goudreau, and the failed operation. And we welcome the Colombian authorities' launch of investigations into the incident. The opposition to any form of military intervention in Venezuela is a principle with which the UK firmly agrees.

But, Mr President, as we have said many times on this subject, the only positive way forward for Venezuela is through a negotiated, democratic and peaceful solution stemming from free and fair presidential elections in accordance with international norms. Such negotiations must be approached with a genuine will on both sides to constructively engage.

So far, we have seen the spirit of engagement on the side of interim President Juan Guaido, who has engaged in several dialogue initiatives, but not from the side of the Maduro regime; that was recently seen when they rejected the US democratic transition framework without considering its potential. Instead, in an attempt to divert attention from the humanitarian catastrophe, this regime has brought upon its own people by drawing the world's attention to a small group of mercenaries who, it seems, were far from being put in a position to inflict serious harm on Maduro or his regime. So it is this behaviour, rather than failed adventurism, that worries us and on which should be focussed.

The Maduro regime has also used the COVID-19 crisis to divert the international community's attention, focusing, for example, on the thousands of Venezuelans who have returned to their country in recent weeks. As USG DiCarlo told us, economic pressure on migrant communities grows. Rather than focusing on the five million who have left Venezuela with more than 1.8 million of them alone given a welcome in Colombia.

Maduro does everything in his power to draw attention away from the humanitarian crisis and the human rights violations he is perpetrating against his own people. The regime continues to repress the opposition, stifle media freedom and harass journalists and human rights defenders. And it is now failing to guarantee basic rights to those detained as part of this operation. So we call on the Maduro regime to treat these detainees and others in accordance with international human rights standards, including their access to family, to fair trial and to choose their own defense. And we further call on the regime to allow unhindered humanitarian access, as called for by Mr Lowcock, for all Venezuelans in need, and to depoliticise humanitarian aid.

This is a crucial time for the Venezuelan people, and the challenges they've already faced are being exacerbated by COVID-19. And finally, we call on the Maduro to constructively engage in dialogue as soon as possible so that the Venezuelan people can move forward in freedom and democracy. This is what they need and this is what they deserve.

Thank you, Mr President.