

Positive steps towards a stable and inclusive democracy in Kosovo

Thank you Mr President, I would like to thank the Special Representative for his briefing and for his service to the international community and the people of Kosovo over the past six years. We also welcome the participation of Her Excellency the President of Kosovo and [His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Serbia which signals the importance both attach to a stable, secure and prosperous future for the region and all of its people.

Mr President, while there have been recent challenges to inter-community relations in Kosovo, we note the overall positive trajectory of the situation in Kosovo set out in Mr Tanin's briefing and in the Secretary-General's most recent report.

At the last meeting, we welcomed the handling of parliamentary elections by the Kosovan authorities and the successful formation of a new government. Today's meeting takes place just ahead of local elections which begin on 17 October, after preparations which have been managed effectively. As we did in April, we wish to register our concern at reports of intimidation of Kosovo-Serb voters. Everyone in Kosovo has the right to participate in free and fair elections without fear of intimidation. Similarly, we also wish to express concern at the intimidation of Kosovo-Serb NGOs that work with Kosovo institutions and of individuals who seek to join Kosovo's multi-ethnic institutions.

We welcome the steps taken by the Kosovo authorities on a number of issues in the reporting period. In line with its priorities, the Kosovo government has made progress in strengthening the rule of law, particularly through the endorsement of a regional anti-corruption and illicit finance roadmap; and the signing-off of the Functional Review of the Rule of Law Strategy. The government has also made strong progress towards its target of vaccination of 60% of the population against the Covid-19 virus.

Finally, we wish to highlight and welcome the significant contribution made by Kosovo to NATO's evacuation efforts in Afghanistan.

There is of course always more to be done, and we urge the Kosovan authorities, working with all of Kosovo's communities, to redouble efforts on this path.

We welcome the support provided by the UN over the past 6 months. In particular, the Mission's work on returns of displaced persons and tackling gender-based violence. We should also highlight the news of the first successful conflict-related sexual violence prosecution in July, a big step forward both for survivors and for the domestic prosecution of war crimes.

Mr President, the Mission, as well as the OSCE and KFOR, play a valuable role in documenting inter-ethnic incidents and attacks on cultural heritage in

Kosovo. The UK condemns all ethnically motivated violence. Likewise, we condemn all attacks on religious sites, including churches and mosques. We welcome the reduction in such incidents as reported by the OSCE and hope soon to see an end to all such incidents.

We emphasise our continued strong support for the EU-facilitated Dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo under EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajcak, working towards a comprehensive and sustainable normalisation agreement that will benefit the people of both countries. We encourage both parties to honour their dialogue commitments, engage in the dialogue in good faith and in the interest of all communities, avoid actions or rhetoric that could escalate tensions and lead to unintended consequences, including violence. We welcome the recent agreement brokered in Brussels by EUSR Lajcak, look forward to the start of further talks in Brussels next week, and urge commitment from both sides to find a resolution that ensures freedom of movement.

Mr President, over the years UNMIK has done vital work in helping Kosovo develop into a stable and inclusive democracy. Kosovo has made huge progress since 1999 when UNSCR 1244 was agreed and conditions on the ground are now very different. It is right for a review of the role and responsibilities of UNMIK, which will help it to operate more effectively and better address contemporary challenges.

Thank you, Mr President