

Protecting Civilians affected by Conflict-induced Hunger

Thank you very much, Mr President.

I would like you to, if you may, Jose, to pass on our welcome and thanks to the Foreign Minister for being with us today. And I wanted before him to congratulate the Dominican Republic on your efforts to ensure that this issue was properly discussed and debated and also to ensure transparency for the Security Council in so doing. So thank you for that.

Let me also thank our briefers today but more importantly, thank them and their teams – and their vast teams, in many cases – for the actions that they are carrying out around the world in some of the most dangerous places. And it's particularly nice to see David Beasley back and well.

Our briefers today have rung a huge alarm bell about situations across the world and they've all made clear that as the world faces this COVID-19 pandemic, this issue presents an ever more urgent challenge. Many people will die from this virus, but it's a sad reality that every year many people will also die from food insecurity caused by conflict. And the risk of a further knock on impact from the virus on the food supply was made very clear by our briefers. And put simply, have a better chance of survival. And so I would urge all member states today to respond generously to existing humanitarian appeals.

Now, the UK is one of the largest humanitarian donors but humanitarian aid is a last resort. It's a sign of political failing.

And Mr President, I want to focus today on two countries on this Council's agenda, Yemen and Syria, whilst recognising the important comments made by our briefers on other situations in the world.

In Yemen, more than half of the population – a staggering 15.9 million people – are severely food insecure. And we therefore urge the Yemeni political leaders, particularly the Houthis, to respond constructively to the call by the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to immediately cease hostilities, focus on reaching a negotiated settlement, and do everything possible to counter a potentially disastrous outbreak of COVID-19. And that must include in facilitating unimpeded humanitarian access. Taking these actions is more important than ever to avoid a worsening of food insecurity and the already dire humanitarian situation in Yemen. Political leaders must now show real leadership and they must act in the interests of their people.

In Northwest Syria, the United Nations reports increased rates of stunting from malnutrition. Today, three out of ten displaced children under five years old in the Idlib region are stunted. The Syrian regime will not allow aid to flow from Damascus to the civilians in that area. So those children, like millions of other civilians in Northwest Syria, are entirely reliant on

the cross-border delivery of humanitarian aid. It is crucial, therefore, that this Council renews the UN Security Council Resolution 2504 before it expires in July to allow the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to deliver the food, medical items and other assistance that people so desperately require.

And beyond the Northwest, we are deeply concerned for the fate of civilians all over Syria and needs to see effective humanitarian access across the country. And that concern is why the UK has given over \$4 billion since the conflict began to Syria and Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries.

Mr President, it is unacceptable, illegal and inhumane to use hunger as a weapon of war. We call on all parties to conflict to recall their obligations under international humanitarian law, protect the most vulnerable, including women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons, refugees and internally displaced persons.

But, Mr President, this Council's response to this challenge must include horizon scanning for future problems. In UNSCR 2417 the Council asked the Secretary-General to provide it with early warning about conflict-related famine and food insecurity conditions. Through this mechanism, the Council must consider the situations in Yemen and in South Sudan. It is our hope that the Secretary-General will consider further ways to continue responding in a timely manner to this request and member states should not constrain his ability to do so.

This council must also be prepared to take robust action to ensure the flow of humanitarian assistance to populations in need. In Security Council Resolution 2417 the Council recalled that it could consider adopting targeted sanctions where appropriate and in line with existing practices, which would apply to individuals or entities obstructing the delivery or distribution of humanitarian assistance to people in need whilst ensuring they do not negatively impact principal humanitarian assistance. So just as it is vital, this Council takes steps to ensure that humanitarian assistance can be received quickly and that the necessary exemptions are made from sanctions regimes to do so, as we have done recently in respect to North Korea. So too, we must pursue those individual actors impeding aid getting to those who so desperately need it.

Mr President, in 2018, at the adoption of Resolution 2417, the United Kingdom's representative concluded his intervention by saying "the lesson is clear: humanitarian aid can only ever be a sticking plaster. The solutions are political'.

Mr President, that remains the case.

Thank you.