

Reflecting on challenges and progress in the peace process in Colombia

Thank you, Mr President.

My thanks first to our Special Representative, both for your briefing today, but also for the huge amount of work you and your team are doing, including in what have recently been challenging circumstances. Whenever you come to this Council, you set out clearly a pragmatic way forward for us and for all partners in the peace process, and we're grateful to you for that work.

I also want to thank our civil society briefer, Ms Herrera, both for sharing your brave and powerful testimony with us today, but also for reminding us that culture is what makes us human and that it's one of the cornerstones of peace anywhere in the world.

Finally, Vice-President Ramírez, it is very good to see you in the chamber today. Welcome to you and to your team. The Security Council's relationship with Colombia is one of partnership, and we look forward to working together with you as Colombia continues its journey towards a lasting peace.

Mr President, as we have just heard, this past reporting period was marked by protests and unfortunately, acts of violence and destruction.

We echo the Secretary-General's call, in his most recent report, for all political and social actors in Colombia to commit to non-violence and to choose dialogue to find solutions to the challenges facing Colombia.

We share concerns about reports of human rights violations in relation to the protests, and we welcome the Colombian Government's commitment to conduct transparent investigations into all allegations of excessive use of force. President Duque's promise of police reform is also an important step forward.

Mr President, the challenging recent context should not cause us to overlook the achievements in peace implementation during this period. As we have heard from the SRSG, these were particularly significant in regards to the transitional justice system, which is at the heart of the Peace Agreement. The contributions to the transitional justice process witnessed in recent months were historic; and while they may have surfaced painful truths, they vindicated the purpose of the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparations and Non-Repetition. The UK welcomed the response of former FARC leaders to their indictment for kidnapping by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. We encourage all involved to acknowledge their role in crimes and injustices, fulfil their responsibility to the victims of the conflict, and to pave the way towards reconciliation. As the SRSG said, closure for those left behind is so critical.

Mr President, reconciliation will be impossible to realise fully while conflict-affected communities face ongoing insecurity. The UK continues to be

deeply concerned by the persistent threats and deadly violence by illegal armed groups targeted at former combatants, at human rights defenders and social leaders, including women and those from indigenous, Afro-Colombian and LGBTI communities. In this respect, we look forward to the implementation of the recently adopted Strategic Plan for Security and Protection for former combatants.

We also welcome the progress made by the National Protection Unit in assessing pending requests and filling its vacancies, as well as the further convictions by the Special Investigations Unit. We urge the Colombian Government to build on this, taking further steps, including – as we have called for before in this Council – to implement the public policy to dismantle illegal armed groups and increase the security and civilian presence of the State in conflict-affected areas.

Finally, Mr President, I'd like to touch briefly on reintegration. We welcome recent developments, including the purchase of land for two more former TATRs, and encourage the Government to consolidate and accelerate this progress.

Mr President, as we have noted before, this is a critical year not only for Colombia's transitional justice process but for the peace process more widely. When the Council holds its next quarterly meeting, the 5th anniversary of the Peace Agreement will be almost upon us. This will be a moment for the international community to celebrate with Colombia the significant progress achieved to date, while reflecting on the challenges still to overcome to ensure a sustainable peace. The UK remains committed to supporting Colombia as it continues on this path.

Thank you, Mr President.