

Seeking a ceasefire in Libya

Mr President, firstly, thank you to the Secretary-General for his briefing, and to the Acting Special Representative to the Secretary General and her team for the continued and tireless efforts of all those working in the Mission to end the conflict in Libya.

Let me also thank you, Mr President, for chairing this timely session. Six months ago, the Berlin Conference participants represented here today committed unequivocally and fully to respect and implement the UN arms embargo, and called on all actors to refrain from activities exacerbating the conflict, including the financing of military capabilities and the recruitment of mercenaries.

But six months later, Mr President, it is clear, sadly, that some of those same countries have continued to arm and supply their proxies in flagrant violation of the arms embargo. We condemn this disregard for the commitments made in Berlin. We also condemn the disregard for the resolutions of this Council. We condemn the disregard for their obligations under international law.

The UK is deeply concerned at the ongoing conflict, fuelled by reckless international interventions, and the unacceptable humanitarian and human rights cost – all at the time of a worsening coronavirus outbreak. Continued reports of numerous civilian casualties. It is shocking that the World Health Organisation ranked Libya first in the world, ahead of Afghanistan and Syria, in numbers of attacks on health facilities and staff from January to May 2020.

The UK is particularly concerned about unacceptable civilian and mine clearance personnel casualties as a result of mines, booby traps, and improvised explosive devices left by the withdrawing forces aligned with the LNA. The UK continues to fund specialist NGOs to map explosive hazards, share expertise with the mine action community and conduct demining on the ground.

We are shocked by the disturbing reports of the discovery of mass graves in Tarhouna. The Libyan authorities must secure these sites until a proper investigations can be conducted. We condemn all human rights violations and abuses, and violations of international humanitarian law, including indiscriminate attacks, unlawful killings, sexual and gender-based violence, and the silencing of journalists, activists and human rights defenders.

The persistent climate of impunity in Libya must be addressed. This is why the UK co-sponsored the resolution adopted at the Human Rights Council's 43rd Session establishing an international, independent Fact Finding Mission to investigate violations and abuses in Libya. We call on all parties to allow access to the Mission across the whole country.

In the economic sphere, the independent audit of the two central bank branches is a vital step towards improved transparency and reunification. We

encourage all parties to cooperate fully with this process. We continue to condemn unequivocally the blockade of oil facilities and welcome the UN-led efforts to end the blockade. Libya's legitimate National Oil Corporation should be allowed to operate unimpeded for the benefit of all Libyans.

We are particularly concerned at reports of Wagner Group and other foreign mercenaries entering Libyan oil fields. Wagner Group activities exacerbate the conflict, as does all external military support – including the provision of mercenaries and arms and deployments of combat aircraft.

But what have the external backers of the parties gained, Mr President, from their continued disregard of the commitments they made in Berlin? Despite the rapid developments on the ground, it is clearer than ever that there can be no military solution. Only a political process will be able to provide a sustainable, inclusive settlement for the people of Libya.

Now, despite all this, there is now a window of opportunity to make real progress and change Libya's troubled trajectory. We welcome the engagement of the parties in the UN-led 5+5 military talks, which we are supporting as co-chairs of the Security Working Group. This is especially important now given the high risk of further escalation around Sirte. Only by engaging in the 5+5 dialogue in good faith can the parties avoid further bloodshed and put Libya back on the road to a political agreement. We fully support UNSMIL's efforts to de-escalate the situation around Sirte.

Instead of emphasising maximalist goals and red lines, the parties should engage constructively in the military talks to agree a viable ceasefire. And instead of further fuelling the conflict, the international backers must recognise that their interests lie in meeting their Berlin commitments and supporting the parties to achieve a ceasefire, a return to a UN-led political process and an inclusive political solution for the people of Libya.

Thank you.