

Speech: Call for Humanitarian Aid and Government Accountability in DRC

Thank you Mr President.

And thank you to our briefers for their clear and detailed accounts of why there has been such a rapid increase in humanitarian need in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

As Undersecretary General Lowcock reported, the number of people needing aid in the DRC has doubled in the past year. Today 13.1 million people need humanitarian assistance, the same number as in Syria. The United Nations has declared the worst level of humanitarian crisis – “Level 3” – in certain provinces, putting DRC alongside only Yemen, Syria and Iraq. Yet it is often absent from our screens and daily briefings. We must not let it fall down our agenda.

Mr President,

We are particularly concerned about the impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable, especially women and girls, the disabled and children. The United Nation’s Joint Human Rights Office reported that there has been a 53% increase in victims of sexual violence in 2017.

Now, the Representative of EFIM gave us a powerful testimony and I’m grateful to her.

Hope, is a woman from Masisi in the east of the country, where 90% of the women have been raped. Four men in military uniforms raped her as she collected firewood for her family. The attack left her pregnant and HIV positive. She has since fled to a temporary camp in Goma and can no longer feed her eight children. They rely on humanitarian aid, like 8 million other Congolese children. 2 million children currently face starvation. Hope is one of 4.5 million internally displaced people in the DRC – the highest number in Africa. Over 2 million people have been displaced in the past year alone, so just in the last year, an equivalent number to the total number of IDPs in South Sudan has been displaced in DRC. There are a further 740,000 refugees from the DRC in neighbouring countries as a result of ongoing hostilities.

Mr President,

International support is vital to address the crisis and the United Kingdom will continue to play a key role. We have committed to spending \$285 million on humanitarian aid between 2017 and 2022. This support will provide over 3 million people with lifesaving support, including food, clean drinking water and essential health care.

To improve the challenging and limited access for humanitarian actors, DRC Government support is crucial. While we welcome the commitments made to facilitate the work of humanitarian organisations and reduce tariffs for

humanitarian imports including medicines and food, this Council, and the people of the DRC, need to see concrete and sustained action.

In particular, we urge the Government to take the following three steps:

First, improve the administrative and financial registration procedures required for international NGOs to operate lawfully in-country, through consultations with NGOs themselves.

Second, reduce the bureaucracy for humanitarian workers to get visas and for essential relief items to get through customs.

And finally, ensure security across the country is maintained so that humanitarian organisations have sufficient access to those most in need.

The upcoming donor conference on 13th April is an opportunity for the Government of the Congo to demonstrate the progress they have made against their commitments to facilitate the improvement of the humanitarian situation.

It is also an opportunity for the international community to pledge our support to the people of the DRC and to show them that the World remembers Africa's "forgotten" crisis.

Mr President,

Let me be clear, humanitarian aid will only ever provide temporary relief in this crisis. The key root cause is political instability, which drives the deteriorating security and humanitarian situations. Too often, peaceful protesters are met with violence for speaking out about their political rights, in violation of their human rights. A number of people have been killed in church-led protests this year which we all must condemn.

Free, fair and transparent elections must be held on 23 December. With an estimated 46 million voters, spread over the world's eleventh largest country, this is no easy task. For the elections to be successful, the right conditions need to be created now.

The international community must remain focussed and united in our support for the people of DRC, and we must remain united in our expectations of its government, and our insistence on accountability and progress. We in the Security Council need to work with the region and sub-region to do so.

Mr President,

Finally, it is with great sadness that we remember the horrific, tragic murders of the UN experts Zaida Catalan and Michael Sharp, killed just over one year ago in the Kasai region of DRC. This Council must continue to push for accountability for their deaths and we call on the Democratic Republic of Congo to ensure that their investigation is thorough and transparent and to ensure that all those responsible are held to account. We should have a full update on the progress of that investigation soon.

Thank you Mr President.