

Speech: “Darfur will remain unstable and unpredictable so long as the root causes of conflict remain unaddressed.”

Thank you Madam President,

Allow me to begin by stressing my condolences to the representative of the Russian Federation for the terrorist attack in St. Petersburg yesterday that was such a senseless loss of life. I would also like to wish you Madam President all the very best for your month in the hot seat and many thanks for your kind words about last month. And I would also like to congratulate the Joint Special Representative Kingsley. A very warm welcome and congratulations on your appointment and thank you for the briefing that you have just given us.

Madam President, Darfur is at a crossroads. Down one path lies continuation of 14 years of conflict, 14 years of bloodshed, impunity. It's a path that has forced 2.6 million people from their homes. It's a path littered with persistent violations of international humanitarian law, human rights violations and abuses, and persistent sexual and gender based violence. And it's a path, simply, that Darfur has been on for too long.

But there is another road to take. In recent months, we have seen a welcome absence of violence between the Government of Sudan and opposition groups. We've seen UNAMID granted access to areas previously cut off. Vital humanitarian assessments are now underway.

So today we need to send a clear message to the Government of Sudan; choose the right path. Choose the path that will improve the lives of the people of Darfur, choose the path to sustainable peace.

This means tackling the culture of criminality and banditry in Darfur. It means ending the abundance of small arms and light weapons which are only adding fuel to the fire. And it means bringing to justice, domestically and through the International Criminal Court, all those who have carried out violence, all those who have failed to respect international humanitarian law and human rights, no matter their allegiance, no matter their links to the government.

In truth, Darfur will remain unstable and unpredictable so long as the root causes of conflict remain unaddressed. So let us all encourage the Government of Sudan to use the current cessation in violence to shift its efforts away from counter-insurgency and towards building a sustainable peace. They will need the support of this Council and the international community as a whole as they do so.

The first step has to be political. A political agreement between the parties to the armed conflict would not only secure a permanent cessation of hostilities, but would also be a significant step towards addressing the drivers of intercommunal violence. So we call upon all parties to the armed conflict to engage meaningfully with the African Union High Level Implementation Panel peace process to secure a political agreement.

The second step towards a long term solution is long term access to Darfur. In order for UNAMID to fulfil its mandated duty to protect civilians, the mission requires unfettered access throughout Darfur, not just for a few days, or even for a few weeks, but on a sustained basis. The recent access is welcome, but it will count for little if it is not maintained.

We are concerned that Government of Sudan security agencies continue to impose unnecessary access restrictions on UNAMID. This is particularly troubling when the mission is prevented from accessing vulnerable populations of the internally displaced and those most in need. So let us insist today that UNAMID is given unrestricted access throughout Darfur to enable the mission to fulfil its mandate effectively.

And this brings me to my final point. As pen holder here in New York on the UNAMID Mission, we believe that if there is to be sustainable peace in Darfur, UNAMID must evolve alongside the security situation. The strategic review will be crucial in this respect, and we welcome the Government of Sudan's help for the visit by the Strategic Review team to Darfur. We're encouraged that they could visit all five states, including areas previously denied, such as Golo and Nertiti in Jebel Marra.

However, if UNAMID is to be adapted as we hope, we all need to be confident that the Government of Sudan is willing and able to protect its civilians in areas where UNAMID's presence is altered. This needs more than just unfettered and reliable access; it requires the Government of Sudan to commit to the principle of operational flexibility for UNAMID and to commit to improving its own ability to protect civilians.

In conclusion, Madam President, until the Government and parties to the conflict take these steps, Darfur will remain at that crossroads. The people of Darfur cannot afford a wrong turn; they have suffered for too long. It is incumbent upon us all to ensure that the path chosen is the right one; the one that will improve the lives of civilians and lead to sustainable peace.

Thank you.