

Speech: Early peacebuilding and prevention to avoid escalation of violence

Thank you very much indeed Mr President and welcome back to New York. Can I join other speakers in saying how welcome it is to have ECOWAS and the African Union also with us today.

Mr President, yesterday the Council discussed the complex challenges of post-conflict reconstruction, where President Ouattara reminded us of the immense human and economic cost that civil war wrought on his country and the steps that Cote d'Ivoire had taken to sustain peace and promote economic development.

With the cost of conflict so clear, if we are to prevent the worst atrocities and injustices in accordance with the aspirations of the UN Charter, it is crucial that we learn the lessons of what it takes to resolve conflict and sustain peace in the long term.

Today Mr President, I would like focus on the complementary roles that states, sub-regional and regional organisations, and the UN can and should play in the prevention and resolution of conflict.

I would like to make three specific points:

Firstly, as other speakers have noted, the role of states is paramount. Member States bear the primary responsibility for protecting their inhabitants and for refraining from acts of aggression. That also means, Mr President, refraining from persecuting their own people. The best and most durable solutions are 'home grown' and inclusive.

But building resilient societies is not an easy task. By addressing the structural drivers of fragility, and ensuring that people's legitimate demands are met – including for justice, security, and economic opportunities – we can significantly reduce the risk of conflict. This is why Mr President, democracy and human rights do have a very important role to play in stability but also in prosperity. There is some very good evidence freely available that explains the link between democracy, human rights and prosperity and thriving societies. Strong national capacities for conflict prevention are also essential, and it is important that the multilateral organisations are willing and equipped to support such national efforts. For this reason, the United Kingdom supports the UNDP-DPA joint programme on building national capacities for conflict prevention. The deployment of UN Peace and Development Advisors has assisted Member States to generate the analysis that allows for early identification of conflict risks and the ability to devise de-escalation strategies. One such risk identification system is now operational in Cameroon where it tracks emerging conflict trends and risks in a situation that is of increasing concern for international peace and security.

Secondly, Mr President regional organisations often have a considerable comparative advantage over more distant international institutions, including at times the UN. Few regional organisations have been as active on conflict prevention and resolution as the African Union – a welcome development of the last two decades. And in the Lake Chad Basin, the Central African Republic, Comoros, and the DRC, the AU has often in the driving seat. In countries the Sahel region, where a range of cross-border issues form fertile ground for conflict, the work of ECOWAS has been crucial. When it comes to sustainable and inclusive economic development, regional co-operation can ensure that limited resources are deployed effectively, and economic isolation does not persist to become another cause of conflict. In the Horn of Africa, IGAD supports countries to achieve better economic integration. With regard to support for conflict prevention and mediation, regional actors have a unique advantage due to their understanding of the local context and conflict dynamics. In Guinea Bissau for example, successful ECOWAS mediation delegations comprised senior officials from Equatorial Guinea and Senegal. With regard to peace support operations, regional groups have a crucial role, as we saw in the Gambia in 2017. Quick mobilisation by ECOWAS succeeded in restoring stability to that country.

The United Kingdom is committed to ensuring that regional entities are sufficiently resourced so they can fulfil critical functions alongside the United Nations. Specifically on financing of African Union peace support operations, this is the why the UK supports the principle of providing UN assessed contributions – up to a ceiling of 75 per cent – to AU-led peace support operations authorised by this Council. We continue to work constructively with our partners to ensure the necessary conditions are fulfilled, particularly with regard to human rights compliance, to make this a reality.

And thirdly, I would like to emphasise that coordinated efforts between the UN, regional organisations and member states, based on comparative advantages, increase the effectiveness of all our efforts to prevent conflict and sustain long term peace. The UN Charter, Mr President, underscores the important role of regional organisations in the pacific settlement of disputes, and the Secretary-General was absolutely right to point to the farsightedness of the Charter's framers in this respect.

It is positive to see today the broad commitment from this Council to strengthen work with the AU and others. And it occurs to me that broader support in this forum for the important roles of NATO and the OSCE might have provided for more effective responses to the challenges faced in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine.

Mr President, where national and regional efforts fail, this Council has a responsibility, as the only competent body legally to surpass State monopoly on military intervention, to act to restore international peace and security. This is a last resort we can better avoid by mobilising all the tools at our collective disposal for early peacebuilding and prevention to avoid escalation.

Thank you Mr President.