

Speech: Ensuring Free and Fair Elections in DRC

Thank you Mr President, and let me begin by thanking SRSZ Zerrougui both for her briefing and for the excellent assistance and advice that you gave the Council during our visit last week. I'd also like to thank Special Envoy Djinnit for his briefing and for the work that he's been doing in the region to support implementation of the 31 December Agreement.

Mr President, there are only 73 days left before elections in the DRC. These elections will be crucial, both to the people of the DRC and for the prospect of peace and stability in the Great Lakes region. If successful, as the Ambassador from France has said, this will prove a historic turning point – the first peaceful, democratic transfer of power in the DRC's history, and it will serve as a foundation on which to build peace, stability and prosperity.

I believe it's important that we as a Council recognise the progress that has been made in the DRC. In particular, the publication of the list of candidates for presidential, provincial and parliamentary elections, and the fact that all parties so far have stuck to the electoral timetable that's been set out.

But if I personally took one thing away from the Council's visit to the DRC, it's that there is still much more work to be done. For elections to be credible, there needs to be an environment conducive to holding free and fair elections. But there remains distrust between opposition figures, civil society and the government, and many Congolese clearly feel that the conditions for credible elections do not currently exist.

There remain a number of unresolved issues:

First, the electronic voting machines. SRSZ Zerrougui mentioned the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's study into these electronic voting machines and the recommendations they have put forward. We would urge CENI to implement those recommendations on how to improve the machines, and we would encourage CENI to undertake outreach with the opposition and with civil society on how the machines will work and how CENI is going about implementing those recommendations. We would also encourage the opposition to engage constructively with CENI when it comes to making the best of the electronic voting machines.

Second, there are questions around voter registration, and we urge CENI to implement the recommendations of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie.

And third, as the Ambassador of Kuwait has highlighted, the 31 December Agreement contained a number of confidence-building measures, especially with regard to freedom of assembly and expression. We very much welcome President Kabila's commitment to this Council that his government would allow peaceful

rallies to take place in the run-up to the election.

And fourth, we believe that independent election observation would help build trust and confidence within the DRC, and we welcome President Kabila's commitment to facilitate observers from the region.

And fifth and finally, nobody I think underestimates the logistical challenges of organising three sets of elections on the same day. MONUSCO has offered its support to the government and we hope very much that the government will take MONUSCO up on this offer.

Madam President, MONUSCO continues to play a vital role in DRC, both in supporting elections and in protecting civilians. The UK is deeply concerned about the deteriorating security situation in North Kivu, South Kivu, Kasai and Tanganyika and the impact this has on the civilian population. This is a very worrying trend and we support the Secretary-General's call for the authorities, with the support of MONUSCO, to take the necessary steps to protect civilians.

We are also concerned about the increase in reported human rights abuses and violations from July to August 2018 compared to the same period last year. As the Ambassador from Sweden said, it is particularly concerning that 59% of the violations across the country were perpetrated by State agents, and we do call on the DRC government to spare no effort in bringing those responsible for such abuses and violations to account.

Finally, we remain very concerned about the Ebola outbreak in eastern DRC. We welcome the leadership of the DRC Government, in cooperation with the WHO and MONUSCO, in responding swiftly to the Ebola outbreak and we remain ready to provide further support.

In conclusion, I'd like to reiterate the importance of the next 73 days. We have come a long way, but there is still much to be done. This Council, together with the region, must remain engaged and supportive to ensure credible, transparent elections lead to a peaceful transfer of power.

Thank you.