

Speech: “For the first time in a generation, elections were not dominated by the conflict, but defined by campaigns about issues affecting ordinary people.”

Thank you Mr President.

And let me begin by welcoming His Excellency Vice President General Naranjo back to the Council, and let me also thank you warmly for the personal leadership you have shown in implementing the Peace Agreement and in working very closely with the United Nations and the UN Mission in Colombia. Thank you.

I would also like to thank Special Representative Arnault for his briefing today and for all the excellent work by him and his team in recent months.

Mr President, the United Kingdom welcomes the Congressional and Presidential elections held between March and June, which were the least violent and most inclusive in Colombia for decades. On behalf of the British Government I would like to congratulate President-elect Duque on his electoral victory, and also Vice President-elect Marta Ramirez, the first woman to take up this office in Colombia.

For the first time in a generation, elections were not dominated by the conflict, but defined by campaigns about issues affecting ordinary people.

We also warmly welcome another remarkable milestone brought about by the peace process: FARC’s participation in the elections for the first time, and last Friday, joining the new congress. The speed of the transition continues to surprise and inspire all who follow this journey.

But, as with all such transitions, the challenges remain considerable. And as the Special Representative has just said, the 2018 elections mark the beginning of a new phase of consolidating the peace process and broadening its ownership to all constituencies. Dialogue and cooperation will continue be an essential part of that work and FARC’s presence in Congress will enable their voice to join others in building a consensus about the future.

We commend President Santos’s statement on Friday welcoming the FARC to the Congress and commending their commitment to work within Colombia’s constitution and democracy. And we welcome President-elect Duque’s rejection of polarisation and his commitment to work for unity.

Mr President, we recognise the enormity of the achievements in implementation of the Peace Agreement to date, but, as set out in the Secretary General’s

report, we also recognise the significant work that remains. Though the elections were the most peaceful in recent history – a significant achievement – we are concerned by the security situation in some post conflict areas, particularly due to the proliferation of illegal armed groups. Violence between these groups has brought new fighting to some areas, and displacements, especially in the Pacific Coast region. This has claimed the lives of an increasing numbers of human rights defenders and social activists, who in many cases are targeted because they champion the rights of local communities.

I welcome the steps taken by the Government to reduce this violence, including the recent commitment by both President Santos and President-elect Duque to new special protective measures for social leaders in rural areas. We hope that the measures will help to address this challenge and we welcome the recruitment of more women officers in the National Protection Unit as a positive step.

As the Special Representative mentioned, on socio-economic reintegration of FARC members, we agree with the priorities he has set out for the coming months. And we hope that the parties will seize the opportunity to inject renewed momentum behind improving security and accelerating reintegration of former combatants, socio-economic development, and crop substitution programmes.

I also note that negotiations with the ELN continue in Cuba. We will welcome any developments that lead towards an end to violence.

Mr President, let me conclude by paying tribute once more to President Santos, who took the bold step of coming to the Security Council to ask for our support in 2016. His Government started an extraordinary journey that belongs to all Colombians and the UK remains committed to supporting them all the way to the end. This Council has been incredibly proud to support Colombia's Peace Agreement over the past two and a half years. In a world where conflicts destroy so many lives and cause untold suffering, Colombia's peace process offers inspiration and hope to us all. We look forward to continuing to work with President-elect Duque and his Government on continued implementation over the months and years ahead to consolidate gains already made for the Colombian people and to continue to inspire peacemakers around the world.

Thank you.