

Speech: “I am very pleased to be able to finish my time in New York with a session on Colombia, one of our greatest success stories”

Thank you Mr President,

And let me extend a very warm welcome to Vice President Naranjo. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to you, Mr Vice President, and through you to President Santos for your tireless commitment to peace in Colombia.

Thank you also to Jean for your briefing and for the comprehensive report detailing the progress that has been made under the mandate of the UN Verification Mission. I commend you and your team for your continued efforts, both in support of the FARC Peace Agreement and more recently, in participating in the monitoring mechanism for the ELN ceasefire.

The courage and diligence of both parties have allowed many positive steps to take place since the Peace Agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC was signed. Over 11,000 FARC members have registered with the UN and are now beginning their reincorporation to civilian life. The new political party – the People’s Alternative Forces of Colombia – can participate in Colombia’s elections this year. And the FARC have handed over their final caches of weapons to the United Nations.

These are remarkable achievements. But we are now getting to the hardest part and there is much more work to do. As President Santos said in Cartagena last week, less than 10 percent of the time set out for the Peace Agreement to be delivered has passed.

We welcome the continued commitment of both parties to achieve a sustainable peace. We encourage them to continue to work together to overcome the challenges which are only to be expected following over 50 years of conflict.

As we have just heard, these challenges include increasing levels of violence in some areas affected by the conflict, and the killings of Human Rights Defenders and former FARC members. I share the concerns set out by the Secretary-General in his report.

And so I welcome the important steps taken by the Colombian Government to tackle these concerns. These include the establishment of a more permanent and visible presence by the Police and Security Forces, a strengthened early warning system and a renewed focus on investigations by the Attorney General’s office. Security must be established in these areas to allow communities to realise the full benefits of the Peace Agreement. I welcome also the Government’s commitment to addressing the issue of access to land

for former FARC combatants. All these steps taken together are a clear signal of the Government's commitment to implementation.

Looking ahead, I encourage the Government of Colombia to maintain their focus on passing the remaining peace legislation through Congress. An early ruling by the Constitutional Court on amendments made to some key laws will be important to maintaining momentum. This includes a ruling on amendments to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, which are vital to make progress in the Transitional Justice system.

I had hoped that today we would be discussing the announcement of a renewed ceasefire between the Government and the ELN. Instead I am concerned and disappointed by the news just in that the ELN have broken the ceasefire and squandered this chance for sustained peace.

I urge both sides to work together to find a way of avoiding further civilian suffering.

Mr President,

President Santos, along with Colombia's leaders, took a bold step in coming to the Security Council for help in 2016. Our support for a sustained peace in Colombia will not waiver. And as Colombia holds elections later this year and goes through political change as all democracies do, it is important to remember that this Peace Agreement belongs to all Colombians, not to any specific government. The United Kingdom will continue to encourage focus and commitment to the peace process to bring about real, lasting change. This process is unique and will continue to inspire us for years to come, as it has inspired me on all of my time in the Security Council.

Mr President,

This is my final scheduled public statement in the Security Council. I am very pleased to be able to finish my time in New York with a session on Colombia, one of our greatest success stories. I wish all the conflicts that we work on could achieve the peace that has been achieved in Colombia. And it is essential that we learn the lessons of this success and apply them to the countless other issues on our agenda, which frankly could do with a little bit of that success.

As I leave this role I want to thank all Members of the countries on the Security Council, all of you who have shared this horseshoe table in this famous chamber and all of your predecessors. Thank you for your co-operation, for your insights and for all the support over the past nearly three years.

I'd also like to thank everyone who works for the United Nations. Whether here in New York or around the world I have been continually impressed by your expertise and fortitude. You really are the unsung heroes of this organisation.

And finally I'd like to thank my own team at the UK Mission to the United Nations who have supported me with skill, with expertise and dedication. And I wish all of them the very best for the future.

For the last time,

Thank you Mr President.