

Speech: Inclusive political dialogue in Central Africa

Thank you Mr President, and thank you also indeed to SRSF Fall for all that you had to say and for your efforts.

We welcome very much UNOCA's continued support for tackling the underlying root causes of conflict in this region. We believe that national, regional and international cooperation remain key to resolving these challenges. With that in mind, SRSF Fall, I was pleased to hear about the support that you've been giving to ECCAS and to its Secretariat as they develop their own action plan for reform. And certainly, I am sure that colleagues here look forward to being updated on that as it approaches finalisation over the rest of the year, so thank you for what you've done there.

The Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic is an example of how UN, AU and national efforts can deliver progress towards peace. And in that context, the meeting of the Central African Republic-Cameroon bilateral joint commission in Bangui on 6-7 May was very welcome. And we encourage the neighbouring governments to support the implementation of this agreement.

Mr President, the United Kingdom is a longstanding friend and partner of Cameroon. We very much appreciate Cameroon's generosity towards refugees from the Lake Chad Basin and from the Central African Republic. And we work with Cameroon on tackling the threat from Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa.

Nevertheless, Mr President, we share very much the concerns expressed by the Secretary-General in his report. And we all discussed those concerns in our Arria meeting on the 13th of May, when we heard testimony from those on the ground and from the humanitarian agencies and from OCHA on the worsening humanitarian situation in Cameroon, which is rapidly reaching a crisis point. And to remind us, Mr President, the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon has driven more than 560,000 Cameroonians from their home, including 32,000 refugees into Nigeria. Some 4.3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance – and that includes some 2.3 million children. And it is the trend which is particularly concerning, as we learnt from our humanitarian briefers on the 13th of May. There's been a huge increase in those numbers over the past year. So we are dealing with a situation which is deteriorating and deteriorating rapidly.

And there are reports of human rights violations and abuses by both the security forces of Cameroon and armed separatists and denial of humanitarian access, which are causing real concerns. We are deeply troubled by reports of the targeting of health facilities and healthcare workers, which must stop. We remind all parties that any deliberate targeting of health facilities or healthcare workers is a violation of International Humanitarian Law.

We very much welcome the visit by Michelle Bachelet, the High Commissioner for Human Rights. And it's now important that access is achieved for human rights officials in the affected regions.

Mr President, there is a real risk of a long-term, intractable conflict in Cameroon, which could have a negative impact on fragile regional stability, with implications for wider international peace and security. We underline the importance of Cameroon's unity and territorial integrity. And we believe that our African partners have an important role to play in supporting a sustainable solution to this crisis – including through ECCAS and to African Union leadership.

We continue to urge the Government of Cameroon to establish a credible, inclusive, purposeful political dialogue. There have been a number of welcome announcements by the Government of Cameroon, but we have to see those turn into reality on the ground. The Peacebuilding Fund provides a real opportunity for the Government of Cameroon to get expert support for its proposals and its initiatives.

Mr President, as the Secretary-General's report makes clear, shrinking space for political opposition, civil society, a free, independent media is a concern with respect not only to Cameroon, but also Chad, the Central African Republic and the Republic of the Congo. We urge the governments of these countries to take constructive steps to ensure the protection of civil space and civil and political rights, given that these are fundamental building blocks of long-term stability.

The United Kingdom also remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian and security situation in the wider Lake Chad Basin caused by the conflict and the actions of Boko Haram and Islamic State in West Africa. We utterly condemn the violence wreaked by these groups on civilian populations and recognise the sacrifices made by the armed forces of the countries in the Lake Chad Basin in the fight against terrorism. The United Kingdom remains committed to our support for efforts to tackle this crisis. It is right that a coordinated, coherent response should be led first and foremost by the governments of the affected countries themselves, but with support from regional partners, the United Nations and the international community, including of course the United Kingdom.

I very much welcome the joint visits, SRSF Fall that you have been taking undertaking with SRSF Chambas to the countries of the region. And I look forward very much to this Council receiving your joint report once you've been to all of those countries. I think that would be a good opportunity for us to come back to this issue and discuss it amongst ourselves.

And finally, Mr. President, let me say that we remain very concerned about the current Ebola outbreak in Northeastern DRC. It's crucial that the international community provides the necessary technical and financial support to the response led by the Congolese Government and the United Nations. We welcome very much the recent appointment of a senior UN Ebola coordinator based in Butembo.

Thank you very much, Mr President.