

Speech: “Peacekeeping is one tool in the sustaining peace toolbox. It cannot be used in isolation...”

Statement by Ambassador Jonathan Allen, UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the Security Council open debate on Peacekeeping and Sustaining Peace

Thank you Mr President. And thank you to the briefers for their insightful contributions. And let me also, through the Deputy Secretary-General today, thank the women and men of the UN around the world for their service and courage.

The UK aligns itself with the upcoming statement of the European Union.

Mr President, conflicts rarely follow a predictable path. We must move beyond the idea of a set of sequential responses, which is why the United Kingdom supports the Secretary-General’s vision for a more holistic and inclusive approach to conflict prevention, management, and resolution. Sustaining peace requires that all of the UN system is aligned in every context and able to carry out multiple tasks simultaneously.

I would like to focus on two issues today related to sustaining peace. The first is on how peacekeeping missions should be situated within wider UN efforts.

At the most basic level, the starting point for any peacekeeping mission should be from all of the information gathered by the UN family over the years including what the UN has already achieved in the field. It should be clear what peacekeeping missions will deliver with UN partners during their deployment and how. And how they will hand over to other UN actors when they leave. For example, the peacekeeping mission in South Sudan may be the second largest in the world – but it is also only one of 20 UN bodies and agencies represented in the country.

We in this Council must reflect on these questions during mission mandating and planning. We need to take in clear views and understanding ground truth from the field. The Council must be more disciplined in setting out strategic goals which can be translated through mandates into prioritised objectives, benchmarks for success, and plans for mission draw-down once these have been achieved.

On the ground, the whole of the UN should have a joint analysis of the situation, common objectives, and clarity over roles and responsibilities towards meeting them. In the context of Liberia’s transition, a shared peacebuilding plan has gone some way towards achieving this.

Moreover, a better balance of responsibilities between missions and country

teams needs to be struck. Not every conflict driver can be addressed within the lifetime of a peacekeeping mission. Long-term change is best supported by UN country teams. They should be taking on responsibilities much earlier, not waiting until a mission draw-down looms. Important lessons will soon emerge from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Darfur, contexts where more may be asked of country teams.

And support from the top is needed for an integrated approach. The coordinating role of the Strategic Planning and Monitoring Unit in the Executive Office of the Secretary General is a welcome start. It will enable more integrated analysis and a more coherent cross-United Nations review of activity in country. We would like to see the unit regularly reviewing peace operations and look forward to its contribution to the review of MONUSCO. Mr President,

Peacekeeping missions cannot create the conditions for their own exit without a sustainable political solution to conflict. As such, the second issue I would like to focus on is the primacy of politics.

SRSBs need to be politically active, using their good offices and leveraging support from their missions and the wider UN system. We must accept that missions are political tools in themselves, both representative of the will of this Council and in their actions on the ground.

The tasks of peace operations are never merely technical. For example, the re-establishment of effective states often sits at the centre of mission exit plans. But missions cannot improve the functioning of state institutions without an understanding of how these institutions will be used and by whom. Politically blind capacity-building efforts risk worsening the situation.

UN country teams, integrated into the wider effort, also have a role to play in promoting sustainable political solutions. Greater understanding of who does and does not benefit from development programming, and how this is linked to political dynamics, is critical. And let's face the facts: where political regimes are unaccountable, unresponsive to their own people, and unrepresentative – including of women – appeals to national ownership will ring hollow.

Finally, we in this Council must be politically engaged and ready to speak. A Council united around a shared political strategy to de-escalate tensions could have a powerful effect. But even in the face of flagrant violations of its resolutions, the Council too often finds itself deadlocked and unable to act. Gertt Rosenthal noted that the Security Council rarely acts to prevent conflict. My own short experience here has shown that we are not willing to act, even when as in South Sudan, there has been conflict for five out of the six years of the country, a third of the populations is displaced, half are in food insecurity, and UN resolutions and promises made, have been repeatedly broken.

Mr President,

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in isolation and we are seeing progress towards more integrated approaches. But even the most coherent UN response will still be blunt without attention to the primacy of politics. And here, we have further to go.

Thank you Mr President.