

Speech: Preventing conflict in Burundi

Thank you Madam President.

And first, let me thank Special Envoy Kafando for his very clear and frank briefing which has come at an important time for Burundi following the Referendum. I'd also like to thank Ambassador Lauber for your thoughtful briefing and in particular for the six recommendations you made for international community engagement, and I am happy to say that we support each of those six very clear and useful recommendations, so thank you.

Madam President, the United Kingdom would like to join the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the United States and France and other speakers today in expressing our concern at the violence seen in the run up to the Referendum. Human Rights Watch have reported that at least 15 people opposing the Referendum have been killed, six raped and eight abducted. We remain very concerned by the restrictions on political space and the media in the period leading up to the referendum. Preparations for the Referendum, and the vote itself, were regrettably held in a climate of intimidation and repression, with a lack of public information on the proposed reforms. And we heard today from Special Envoy Kafando about reports of many irregularities by the opposition and from civil society. These actions only reduce the confidence that the results of the Referendum represent the will of the electorate.

We are clear, and we strongly agree with Special Envoy Kafando, that the government of Burundi must ensure that the spirit of the Arusha Accords is respected when any constitutional reform is implemented. The current crisis in Burundi can only be resolved by continuing an inclusive dialogue that preserves the Accords. We hope that the implementation of the constitutional amendments will not impact previous agreements, particularly with regard to ethnic quotas and the representation of women in the Government.

The United Kingdom calls on the AU and the other guarantors of the Arusha Accords to pay careful attention to the preservation of these agreements during any implementation of constitutional changes in Burundi. And we encourage and support the African Union in their efforts to ensure that the spirit of the Accords is adhered to.

Madam President, as others have already said today, we remain extremely concerned by the human rights situation in Burundi. We note with concern the points made by the Special Envoy about how human rights experts have been expelled and we join his call for the Burundian authorities to facilitate their return and to cooperate with OHCHR. We continue to call on the government to implement the two resolutions adopted at the 36th session of the Human Rights Council. And we also urge the government to make progress against the criteria set by the European Union that would pave the way for resumption of EU financial assistance to Burundi.

Madam President, what we have heard today indicates that there is little prospect of an early end to the political crisis or improvement in the

humanitarian situation in Burundi. The current situation is unsustainable.

Madam President, we often talk in this chamber about the importance of conflict prevention. The risks in Burundi are huge and the case for preventative diplomacy is overwhelming. We therefore join the PBC's call for the international community to pay close attention to the situation in Burundi and we strongly encourage the Burundian government, the EAC and the African Union to vigorously pursue inclusive dialogue and to preserve the gains of the Arusha Accords which is the only way to generate peace and security in Burundi.

Thank you.