

Speech: Preventing further conflict in Cameroon and the Lake Chad Basin

Thank you Mr President. I may I also thank Special Representative Fall and Ms Ghelani of OCHA for briefing the Council today and for all that your respective teams are doing in what is a complicated and difficult region as you've both set out.

Today I will address issues that affect the region as a whole, the situation in the Anglophone Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon and the impact of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. I will not address DRC, Burundi or CAR as we have the opportunity to discuss these issues in other Council meetings.

Mr Special Representative, the United Kingdom welcomes the holistic approach that you have taken both with this report and to promote peace and stability in Central Africa. An approach that covers the political, humanitarian and human rights situation and addresses root causes is crucial to conflict prevention and resolution. We also welcome UNOCA's work to drive forward the Women, Peace and Security agenda, under UNSCR 1325.

We encourage UNOCA to continue to focus on building the capacity of regional organisations to enable delivery of their early warning mechanisms, conflict prevention and peace-building initiatives.

Mr President, I would like to focus now on a country of particular concern in the region and that's Cameroon.

I should start by saying the United Kingdom recognises the many positive contributions Cameroon is making to stability in the region, including their continued commitment to the fight against Boko Haram and the sanctuary that Cameroon offers to refugees from Nigeria and the Central African Republic. However, we are concerned by the reality of the rapidly deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon.

In particular, we are concerned about high levels of displacement and take very seriously Reena Ghelani's warning that this is now one of the fastest growing displacement crises in Africa and reports of human rights violations and abuses perpetrated by armed separatist groups and Government forces, including extra-judicial killings, other killings, abductions, restrictions of movement and access to health and education as described in the Secretary-General's report. We must always be alert, colleagues, to the risk that the situation escalates, affecting the broader peace and stability of the Central African region, and we have already seen over 30,000 Cameroonians flee into Nigeria. If grievances are not addressed, tensions are likely to increase further.

Mr President, these concerns are not new – I raised them in the Council's discussions in March, as did others. Unfortunately, we have not seen the

action needed to address the situation and since March, it has deteriorated further.

We welcome President Biya's recent pledge to address the situation but words alone will not improve things. We strongly urge the Government of Cameroon to take urgent action, including by:

- actively addressing the situation through inclusive dialogue with the Anglophone leadership to address the underlying issues;
- undertaking confidence-building measures in order to diffuse tensions and build conditions for dialogue. This includes the release of political detainees, and implementing the Government's own commitments on decentralisation, and the recommendations of the Commission on Bilingualism;
- allowing full humanitarian access and access to human rights monitors to all parts of the country – and I would also hope and expect that our own SRSG would have access wherever he wanted to go;
- and ensuring accountability for all those responsible for human rights violations and abuses.

And clearly Mr President we also call on the armed groups involved to cease their attacks on civilians, allow full humanitarian access, and access to human rights monitors, and to engage with the Government on these issues.

The UK, for its part, is committed to supporting Cameroon and I am pleased to announce today that the United Kingdom is contributing \$3.1 million to the UN's response in the Anglophone regions – that's equivalent to 20% of this year's flash appeal for the Anglophone crisis – to address immediate humanitarian and medical needs. We strongly encourage other Member States to fund this as an important part of the conflict prevention effort. Preventing a crisis costs significantly less than resolving one.

Mr President, we have raised our concerns quietly so far and directly with the Government and we are committed to working with the Government of Cameroon in every way we can to help resolve this situation. But I fear, unless action is taken and the situation improves, concern over the situation in Cameroon is likely to increase amongst Security Council Members and become a more prominent part of our discussions.

Mr President in addition to Cameroon I would like to raise our ongoing concern about the humanitarian and security situation in the wider Lake Chad Basin, which continues to deteriorate. The United Kingdom has played its part in providing humanitarian support, as well as significant support particularly to assist the Nigerian security forces in the fight against Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa (ISWA), but this matter needs the ongoing focus and support of the international community.

The deteriorating security situation in northeast Nigeria is of particular concern, and one I note shared by the Secretary-General. ISWA has increased the frequency, range and sophistication of their attacks and has attacked forward operating military bases in North East Nigeria. The execution by ISWA of humanitarian workers such as Saifura Khorsa and Hauwa Liman, who were both abducted while providing antenatal care to communities in desperate need is a telling reminder of the brutality of ISWA's activities.

Let me conclude Mr President by reiterating that we have an opportunity together to prevent further conflict, and the inevitable suffering and insecurity, and I hope we can all act to do so.

Thank you Mr President.