

Speech: Recognising ECOWAS and Civil Society's Role in Resolving Crisis in Guinea-Bissau

Thank you Mr President, and thanks to SRSG Toure and the other briefers for sharing their views and insights.

The situation in Guinea Bissau is concerning. It is not the first country in the world to experience a political impasse. But it is a country still emerging from serious instability and violence in its recent past.

This political impasse has prevented progress on reforms that are critical to addressing key conflict risks in Guinea Bissau. The situation is only likely to become more volatile as we move towards elections. We have already seen violent confrontations between demonstrators and police, and witnessed worrying efforts to curb political freedoms. Economic growth is at risk and a serious deterioration in stability would be deeply damaging for development and human rights. The illicit economy and transnational organised crime risk becoming further entrenched – with global implications. More broadly, instability in Guinea Bissau will affect the wider region, which over the last year has been, for the most part, the site of positive political progress.

Mr President,

The United Kingdom welcomes the leadership shown by the West African region, particularly through ECOWAS. It has shown persistence and patience; this is a crisis that started in 2015. It brokered the Conakry Agreement 15 months ago. It has agreed to countless communiques and published innumerable statements. It has sent numerous high level delegations to Guinea Bissau – three in the last six months alone.

But now those most responsible for Guinea Bissau's crisis responded with stubborn refusal to give ground and find compromise.

Therefore, it is understandable that the region's patience has worn thin. ECOWAS has now forced to sanctions against individuals deemed responsible for impeding implementation of the Conakry Agreement. The African Union PSC has endorsed this move. The United Kingdom supports ECOWAS decision and we urge the Security Council and the whole international community to remain united in support of ECOWAS efforts.

We also believe it is important to recognise the bold efforts of civil society in Guinea Bissau to resolve the crisis. In particular, the mediation efforts led by the Women Facilitator's Group were an encouraging initiative and we welcome the support given to them by the UN.

As set out in resolution 2343, political support from UNIOGBIS for efforts

towards implementation on the Conakry Agreement should be a priority for UNIOGBIS. The key next step remains appointment of a consensus Prime Minister so that preparations can go ahead for legislative elections in 2018, as per the country's constitution.

As we open discussions on its renewal, the UK will focus on ensuring the Mission's mandate responds to the political reality on the ground today and that it is focused on the highest priority needs.

Mr President,

Guinea Bissau's people watched the country emerge from a period of instability but then found their hopes for democracy obstructed by a political knot which their own leaders tied. Support from the region and the international community to prevent the country from backsliding further will not succeed until those who tied the knot untangle it. We hope that good sense, compromise and a commitment to Guinea Bissau's future prevails.

Thank you.