

Speech: Stability and Constructive Dialogue in Nicaragua

Thank you very much Madam President. It's the first time I take the floor under your Presidency, so congratulations to you and your team for assuming the Presidency for September. Thank you very much to the OAS representative for his informative briefing and also to Mr Maradiaga for your harrowing testimony.

I think the Kuwaiti Ambassador has set out very clearly the legal framework under the Charter for why we are having this debate today and we're grateful to the US delegation for putting it on the Council's agenda. I won't rehearse the legal framework since I think Ambassador Otaibi gave a very good account, but I what I will say is that it's right that the Council is made aware by the regional organisation concerned of its concerns and the concerns that this may start to have effects throughout the region. I don't think we ever want to get to a stage where the Council can't hear from a regional organization about its concerns about what is happening in the territory for which it is responsible.

But more than that, I think we also need to remember that the Nicaraguan government has expelled a UN agency; it has expelled the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. So I think that's a very important fact. Independent of Chapter 6 and the regional organisation's point, it's a very important fact. The Council needs to defend the UN entities, and therefore, even if there were no other reason, we would support discussing this issue today.

And lastly, I note that there has been a situation of refugees created – by definition, refugees cross international borders. It is therefore right that the Council should be able to debate the implications of that act, which may or may not constitute an unfriendly act, but also risks being destabilising to international peace and security. I am not making a judgment that it is destabilising, but as we heard from the Kuwaiti representative, the Council has the responsibility to investigate situations that may give rise to these implications – and I stress the word 'may.' And I think that is exactly what we're doing today.

My government has been watching events in Nicaragua very closely. We regret the loss of life that has occurred since the protest began in April and we call for an end to the violence and for the government of Nicaragua to comply with its international human rights obligations, and these include the rights of people to exercise their right to freedom of expression and to demonstrate peacefully and lawfully.

We have been deeply concerned by the excessive use of force by the authorities and pro-government paramilitaries against the people of Nicaragua. We call on the Nicaraguan government to demobilize paramilitary groups and to end the repression against its citizens. We have been alarmed

at the many reports we have seen that give rise to human rights concern. These include the use of live ammunition on protesters, and we call for them to be thoroughly investigated.

Maintaining press freedoms is always important, but it is particularly so during times of unrest. And we urge the Nicaraguan government to respect these freedoms and to allow the independent press to report freely, without suffering persecution and harassment, and we are very concerned at reports of violence against independent media outlets, journalists and their families.

I would also like to register our deep concern at reports of arbitrary detentions of dissenters and again we urge the Nicaraguan government to respect the right to a fair trial and prisoners' right to due process, a proper defense, and to respect the rights of their families.

Madam President, looking ahead, I think we are all aware that the challenges in Nicaragua can be overcome only through a meaningful and inclusive dialogue which addresses the legitimate concerns of the protesters. The United Kingdom was encouraged by the establishment of a national dialogue in May and we welcome the role the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua was able to play in convening that and mediating but we regret that that dialogue has had many breaks because of the violence, and the recent decision by the government to abandon the process is very regrettable. And once again, I would like to urge the Nicaraguan government to fulfil its commitment to engage sincerely in a dialogue, including by ensuring peaceful conditions for the dialogue to resume.

Turning to the OAS, Madam President, United Kingdom supports the OAS work. We also support the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and of course the United Nations in attempting to resolve the current crisis. These organizations have important roles to play in supporting dialogue and ensuring that human rights transgressions are fully investigated.

I referred earlier to the expulsion of the OHCHR. This followed the publication of their report on human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in Nicaragua. I would like to urge the Nicaraguan government to reconsider that decision and to permit the OAS Working Group to enter Nicaragua, to carry out their important work and not to impede the work of the interdisciplinary group of independent experts established by the Inter-American Commission.

In conclusion, Madam President, a return to peace and stability in Nicaragua benefits not only to the people of Nicaragua, but also the whole region. We heard from the Russian representative a long catalogue of history. History is important, Madam President. It provides context but it is not the reason we are here today. We are here today for all the arguments that Ambassador Otaibi and I set out at the beginning. We want to see stability. We want the violence to end. We hope and urge the Nicaraguan government to engage meaningfully in an inclusive and constructive dialogue and to ensure that all human rights transgressions are fully investigated. Thank you very much Madam President.