

Speech: “The absence of famine is not the absence of need. Hunger by any other name is still hunger”

Thank you Mr President and thank you Secretary-General for your briefing.

Eight months ago, Secretary-General, you issued an urgent wake up call to the world. The threat of famine, the threat of millions starving to death, loomed large over the people of Somalia, South Sudan, northeast Nigeria and Yemen. Today, thanks to your call to action and thanks to the global efforts that followed, famine has been kept at bay.

And yet, this is no cause for celebration. As you have set out in your briefing, the absence of famine is not the absence of need. Hunger by any other name is still hunger. And in each of those countries I just mentioned, the need remains colossal, overwhelming in fact, and even greater than it was in February.

In Somalia, over 3 million people are going to bed hungry. The same can be said for over 5 million people in northeastern Nigeria. In South Sudan, there are literally more people without food than there are with food; more than half of the population – over 6 million people – are severely food insecure. And in Yemen, as we heard earlier this week, over 17 million people are now food insecure, nearly 7 million of whom are just one step away from famine.

And if only to deepen the tragedy further, in all four of these countries the impact falls most acutely on women, girls and children.

As this Council well knows, the long-term solution to all these crises is ending and preventing conflict. But long-term fixes alone are no good when hunger kills in the short term. We need aid to reach people in need quickly. And as a Council we need to find the political will necessary to overcome the barriers that too often prevent this from happening.

We need only look to South Sudan, where fighters from each side accuse civilians of feeding or being fed by the enemy. Access restrictions, bureaucratic impediments and attacks on humanitarian workers continue to delay the delivery of life-saving assistance, with over 1,600 access incidents reported since the start of 2016. That's the delivery of food being denied to those most in need at least twice a day for nearly two years.

In northeast Nigeria, it's a similar story, with aid agencies unable to access many of those in need due to continuing fighting between Boko Haram and government forces. As a priority, the Government of Nigeria must protect civilians and provide unimpeded humanitarian access.

In parallel, the government needs to set out clear steps for ending the conflict which aren't reliant on military measures alone. Sustainable peace

can only be achieved through addressing the root causes of the violence.

In Yemen, the gravest humanitarian situation today, food is the biggest weapon, and lack of food the biggest killer. The Council has been very clear this week about the need for increased commercial and humanitarian access into and across Yemen, including through increased capacity at all Yemeni ports, particularly Hodeidah.

We also need to see public-sector salaries paid regularly across the country, starting with the health, water, sanitation and waste management sectors, to stem cholera and preserve essential government services.

It's only in Somalia, Mr President, that drought is partially responsible for the situation. Even then, the war remains the principal trigger and contributor to this unfolding humanitarian tragedy. Access restrictions are again a central cause of the crisis, with impediments to the delivery of humanitarian assistance at the federal and state levels as well as hefty, illicit fees that limit reach and increase delivery costs.

In conclusion Mr President, what we are witnessing in all of these countries is the return of hunger as a weapon of war.

The destruction of farms, livestock herds and markets; the blocks on humanitarian aid and access for commercial goods; these are all deliberate tactics to decrease people's access to adequate nutrition and healthcare.

We need to recognise that this is happening as a result of political decisions. So in turn, this Council must bring our own political pressure to bear on those responsible and hold them to account.

We have the power and duty to influence their behaviour in the right direction. It is time to say "enough is enough."

Thank you.