

Speech: The Potential for the First Free and Fair Elections in DRC History

Thank you Mr President. I would like to thank both of our briefers, SRSZ Zerroughi and Ms Mbela for their briefings. I'd particularly like to thank Ms Mbela for her brave work as a human rights activist in DRC and for making such clear recommendations to the Council, to her government and to the Electoral Commission and I hope to touch on some of those recommendations later.

Mr President as both of our briefers and many of my colleagues today have made clear, the DRC is at a crucial point in her history. The elections scheduled for 23 December could lead to the country's first ever peaceful democratic transfer of power. This would be a huge achievement for the 85 million Congolese people who have faced such devastating conflicts over their history.

These elections are about more than simply democratic rights. Successful elections have the ability to enhance the political security and humanitarian stability in the DRC and the region which will in turn enable future security, growth, trade and prosperity.

A stable, prosperous DRC is vital not only for the Congolese people but also for the region and the world. As we have seen over many years, insecurity in the DRC not only has a negative impact on millions of Congolese, but has devastated the wider region. Therefore it's completely right that we as a Council hold regular discussions, follow the situation closely, and ensure follow-up to the Security Council visit just over a month ago, and in particular to take stock of progress against many of the commitments that we received from the government and other political leaders in the DRC.

Mr President, I do think it's important to register the positive developments that have happened in recent months. We welcome the positive steps taken by the government towards elections, including on voter registration and the publication of the final list of candidates for the elections. We also welcome President Kabila's repeated commitment that he does not intend to stand for a third term as per the Constitution of the DRC. But as Ambassador Haley reminded us earlier today, democracy isn't just about a single event; it's about a process. So we call on all political actors in the DRC to create the conditions for free and fair and credible elections, in particular, by implementing the confidence building measures of the 31 December Agreement, ensuring that civil and political rights are upheld. This includes fully respecting the political space and allowing political parties to gather peacefully.

We welcome President Kabila's commitment to this Security Council during our visit that his government would allow peaceful protests by the opposition. We are therefore deeply concerned by the reports of further arrests and detentions of protesters and the continued detention of political prisoners.

We call on President Kabila and his government to live up to their commitments to allow peaceful protest by the opposition and to release all political prisoners.

Political parties and their leadership must also do their part and encourage their supporters to engage in the democratic process peacefully. Any violence will diminish the credibility of elections in the eyes of the Congolese people and the international community.

We also call on the key political actors, including the opposition, to engage constructively with the electoral process, including on the vexed question of voting machines and the voter register. The efforts of the Electoral Commission are crucial to deliver a credible election. And we join Ms Mbela in calling on the electoral commission to engage with key stakeholders, to address concerns and restore confidence in the electoral process.

One way of restoring confidence in the electoral process and the elections, and in particular in the voting machines, would be through the implementation of the recommendations of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. We were encouraged that during the Council's visit to Kinshasa, the Electoral Commission said that they were determined to implement the recommendations by the Westminster Foundation. We would encourage the Electoral Commission to continue to implement those recommendations as soon as possible to increase confidence in the voting machines.

Mr President, we commend the logistical support that MINUSCO has provided so far for the upcoming elections and welcome that they stand ready to give further support if needed on request from the government of the DRC. We call on the electoral commission to engage with MINUSCO as soon as possible on any logistical assistance that may be required.

The United Kingdom stands ready to support the political process both in the region, where we've provided funding on voter education, civil society engagement, and women's participation and domestic observation, and here at the United Nations.

Mr President, in conclusion it's not the politicians that stand to win or lose the most in these elections. It is the people of the DRC. The people who have seen devastating levels of conflict and resulting humanitarian suffering since independence. So we call on all leaders to put aside their personal ambition and to do what is right for their people: participate in and support potentially the first of many credible elections in the DRC.

Thank you.