

Speech: “The UK stands ready to support the region’s work to bring an end to the conflict and suffering in South Sudan”

Mr President, time and time again, we have voiced our despair at the depths of the suffering of the people of South Sudan. The scale of the numbers is deeply shocking: one third of the population have been forced to flee their homes and more than half the population lack enough food to feed themselves and their families. And yet, the parties to the conflict, including the Government, continue to mount offensives on innocent civilians. They are deaf to the misery of their own people. It is more important than ever that the international community shows the people of South Sudan that we will act together to work for peace, even if South Sudan’s leaders will not.

Innocent civilians continue to pay the price for the failures of the political elite, but President Kiir’s long overdue decree ordering safe passage for humanitarian agencies is welcome. We hope that this will result in real improvements in getting assistance to those that so desperately need it. Because physical restrictions, whether resolved or not, represent just the tip of the iceberg, as bureaucratic impediments including costly registration fees, and delays in receiving permits, prevent humanitarians from reaching those most in need.

Like others, we are extremely concerned that UNMISS continues to face significant restrictions of movement, including restrictions imposed by Government forces. We are particularly troubled by a disturbing trend of harassment, threats and physical assault of UN staff. This must stop immediately. Those responsible will be judged by their actions, not their words.

Mr President, South Sudan is at a cross roads. Its leaders are being offered a last chance to commit to peace and demonstrate that they care for their people and their country. They have repeatedly failed to do so. Too many times ceasefires have been declared while gunshots continue to ring out. But IGAD’s Revitalisation Forum offers hope for the people of South Sudan, and I would like to reiterate the UK’s full support for this process and to thank both IGAD and the African Union for their hard work over recent months. IGAD foreign ministers and the Special Envoy have actively reached out to both the elites and civil society across the region as part of their revitalization process. The UK stands ready to support the region’s work to bring an end to the conflict and suffering in South Sudan, and we welcome the African Union Peace and Security Council’s clearly worded communiqué of the 22 of September 2017.

The international community must use the full range of options to ensure that all parties meaningfully and constructively engage. This cannot be an open-

ended process that allows more delays, leading to more suffering for the people of South Sudan. As the African Union communiqué says, it must be clear that this is a final chance and that there will be consequences for not engaging. As a Council, we should commit to return to this issue early in the new year in order to consider whether we have seen enough progress, whether there are individuals or parties who are blocking peace, and be ready to take appropriate action if so.

Given the fragile situation in South Sudan, we are concerned that the Government is considering running elections next year. There is no possibility that the conditions for good elections will be in place next year. Seeking to hold them when the conditions are not right is likely to drive further conflict. As the African Union and IGAD have set out, the timelines in the Peace Agreement must be revised to allow for a conducive environment for holding elections. The National Dialogue must be held in support of the Revitalisation of the Peace Agreement; it cannot provide a solution in itself.

Mr President, I want to conclude by reiterating our plea to the leaders of South Sudan: Stop the violence and engage meaningfully in the revitalisation process. Stop blocking and impeding UNMISS and the Regional Protection Force. Stop attacks against UN and humanitarian workers. And stop denying humanitarian aid from reaching your people. You are starving them to death.

Mr President, South Sudan is at a cross roads. We should do all that we can to support the region's efforts to ensure its leaders choose the right path.

Thank you.