

Speech: “The United Nations Operation in Cote d’Ivoire will close, after 13 years of service. In that time, Cote d’Ivoire has been transformed.”

Thank you Mr President.

As this is our first public session in your Presidency, congratulations and very good luck. And I’d also like to thank Uruguay for its very efficient and very open Presidency last month.

I join others in thanking you, Special Representative Mindaoudou, for your briefing, for your tireless efforts over the last years and for your commitment to sustained peace. I also want to welcome you, Foreign Minister to the Council and we really look forward to hearing from you shortly.

We meet today at a significant moment for the Government and people of Cote d’Ivoire. By the end of the month the United Nations Operation in Cote d’Ivoire will close, after 13 years of service. In that time, Cote d’Ivoire has been transformed. A child born when the first UNOCI peacekeepers set foot in Cote d’Ivoire would’ve entered a world of uncertainty and insecurity; today they’re living in a country with real prospects, not just for peace, but for opportunity and prosperity.

I congratulate the Special Representative and all her team for all they have done to help make this a reality. UNOCI has been an exemplary operation; one that has enjoyed an excellent relationship with the Government and with civil society, and importantly, one that is now leaving harmoniously and at the right moment.

As their mission nears its end, we must never forget that such stability did not come without cost. One hundred and fifty military and civilian United Nations personnel have lost their lives in Cote d’Ivoire over the last 13 years. The legacy of their sacrifice, and of all their service, must be a sustained peace in Cote d’Ivoire.

With that in mind, I congratulate the Government for capitalising on the space that UNOCI has given them. The country now has one of the fastest growing economies in the world. We stand with you as you continue along this positive pathway, redoubling your efforts to ensure that all Ivoirians feel the benefits brought by peace through social development.

Progress in Cote d’Ivoire, Mr President, is not just limited to the economy. I also want to draw Council Members’ attention to the Secretary General’s recently published report on sexual violence in conflict – a topic that is of particular concern to the United Kingdom. With this report came the welcome news that the armed forces of Cote d’Ivoire had been de-listed.

That means that Cote d'Ivoire is now able to contribute to United Nations Peacekeeping missions, and it has recently sent a contingent to Mali. To move from a nation benefitting from a Peacekeeping Mission to one that now contributes to peacekeeping is yet another marker of success.

There can be no let up, Mr President; there are tests ahead for Cote d'Ivoire. The 2015 Presidential elections were peaceful, but of course UNOCI was present. The Presidential elections in 2020 and a smooth democratic transfer of power to a new President will be crucial to building a peaceful and prosperous future for Cote d'Ivoire. This needs continued efforts to build the independence, credibility and authority of the electoral commission over the next few years. The credibility and legitimacy of the institutions of government must continue to strengthen.

Mr President, as the recent unrest in the country illustrates, peace can be fragile if underlying issues are not resolved. I therefore encourage the Government of Cote d'Ivoire to make the most of this opportunity that they and the United Nations have worked so hard for.

In conclusion Mr President the story of Cote d'Ivoire is a positive one, with the end of a successful mission and an optimistic future for the country and its people. It's also a positive story for the United Nations and specifically, for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. UNOCI shows how clear mandates, with a clear exit strategy, can create the space needed for the political process to progress. It is a model that we should seek to emulate elsewhere across the world. And I am delighted that this experience is something that Cote d'Ivoire will be able to share on a daily basis with this Council when it joins in 2018. Congratulations on your election this morning.

Thank you.