

Speech: We must stand up for an effective non-proliferation regime

Thank you very much Mr President. Many thanks indeed to our Bolivian colleague for his briefing and the work of his Committee. We welcome the new coordinators and may I say at the start that we were very pleased to be paired with Equatorial Guinea in terms of capacity building.

Mr President, 1540 was the first subject I worked on when I came to the Security Council ten years ago, my first time here, so I am very pleased to have opportunity to talk about it today and to be able to say that for the United Kingdom, the 1540 Committee is a vital component of the international order. We need to empower it to fulfil its mandate. We need to support it to the hilt.

Mr President, as a number of us have said this week already, we risk seeing a situation that the Council should dread: that chemical and biological weapons become a routine part of fighting and regrettably, we have been confronted in very recent times by multiple incidents of the use of weapons of mass destruction by non-state actors. The UN Joint Investigative Mechanism found Da'esh used mustard gas on at least two occasions in Syria. There are multiple instances of mustard gas use by Da'esh in Iraq. In Australia, a planned chemical terrorism attack was thwarted in July last year. These incidents clearly exemplify why the 1540 Committee and its work to prevent the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons by non-state actors is so important.

These events, Mr. President, are awful enough. Yet in acts of unbelievable irresponsibility, those risks have been exacerbated by the use of weapons of mass destruction by state actors. The chemical weapons attacks in Douma, the attempted murders in Salisbury are the most recent instances but we also have the assassination of Kim Jong Nam in Malaysia and the horror of Khan Sheikoun a little over a year ago.

Mr President, I take this opportunity to say that in respect of Salisbury and the invitation from this Council to keep members updated, we have requested a Security Council meeting next week where we would like to brief on the outcome of the OPCW findings. It is a worrisome pattern this state use of WMD and it clearly undermines our collective efforts to deter and eradicate the use of these weapons by state and non-state actors alike.

We very strongly support the work to increase states capacity and we are encouraged that there are now only 13 non-reporting states. Any non-reporting is troubling but it is good number is going down. And as I say, we were delighted to be paired with Equatorial Guinea and provide support.

But it is clear that we stand on the cusp of a nightmare –where weapons of mass destruction are used with impunity. Where our citizens live in real fear of an indiscriminate attack at any time and without warning. It is not enough

just to condemn this. We need to find a way to take meaningful action and ensure that there are meaningful consequences for perpetrators. We have all benefitted from the international order that has kept us safe since the end of World War II. It behooves all of us, Mr President, to make every effort to uphold this international architecture.

It is clear that not all countries share this view and we have talked about that several times this week so I just want to say that in respect of this particular Committee 1540, there is one Council member who has sought at every opportunity, to slow progress and dilute the substance of every proposal whether this is Programme of Work deadlines, calls to action and efforts to take progress forward, all of these have sadly been consistently been watered down and the Panel of Experts has even been prevented from travelling. Mr President, if we are serious about dealing with the threats that this Committee was set up counter then this state of affairs can't continue.

Since last February the 1540 Committee has met formally only once and the actions agreed in the 2017 Programme of Work have barely made progress. That means also that the commitments made in the relatively modest Resolution 2325 have not been fulfilled. The new Programme of Work has only just been agreed, two months later than legally mandated and in these two months, the Committee was left without a clear steer of objectives and activities to pursue.

Mr President, I cannot think of any legitimate reason why any country would want to affect the work of the 1540 Committee adversely in this way and I appeal to everybody round the table to redouble efforts so that we have an ambitious programme of work for the Committee. We must stand up for the universal norms and standards we have spent decades building to create an effective and powerful non-proliferation regime whether that deals with state actors or it deals with non-state actors.

Thank you very much Mr President.