

Speech: “We owe it to Zaida, Michael and the rest of the group of experts to continue to use their reporting in our decisions.”

Thank you Mr President. Today we discuss the group of experts work on the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Tragically this report comes after the murder of two UN human rights experts, Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan.

I'm glad that we're meeting in the open today; this isn't an issue to discuss behind closed doors. We owe it to the families of Michael and Zaida, and their interpreter Betu Tshintela to speak loudly and clearly in this Chamber; to express our deepest condolences and to reiterate our strongest resolve to see their killers brought to justice.

This is a message that needs to go far beyond this room, indeed far beyond the borders of the DRC.

Because, we in this Council asked for the information that Michael and Zaida went to gather. We asked them to be our eyes and ears. Wherever in the world men and women of the UN are murdered, wherever in the world they are harmed or abducted, we cannot stay silent, we cannot stand aside. We must ensure that the perpetrators of these crimes face the fullest consequences for their actions. We need to ensure accountability.

We took a first step through resolution 2360, with new designations criteria for those who kill UN personnel. The Secretary-General took a second step, commissioning a Board of Inquiry which uncovered more detail. But more needs to be done.

So I welcome the Secretary-General's call in his letter to the Council for a follow-on mechanism and we urge him to take action swiftly towards a further investigation so that we can uncover the truth for Zaida and Michael, and for the safety of all UN personnel around the globe.

Because five months on from the murder of Zaida, Michael and Betu, accountability has yet to materialise. Those who ordered their killings remain at large.

Zaida and Michael were two of the most pre-eminent experts on the Kasai regions. Tragically, it appears that their very expertise made them a target. The violence that they sought to illuminate was brutally turned against them. Make no mistake, Mr President, they were killed for shining a light on the horrific human rights situation in the Kasais. And we must not let that light go out.

First and foremost, this means recognising the link between the political and

security situations. Uncertainty and inertia over the implementation of 31 December agreement is only fuelling instability and violence. So with the Honourable Vice Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo here today, let us all agree that the December agreement must be fully implemented.

If implementation continues to falter, we worry what will happen next. We need only look to the first half of this year and the 430 officially recorded human rights violations linked to the electoral process. That is more than in the whole of 2015.

And as the report of the Group of Experts shows, such violence is breeding further violence. I'm appalled at the reports of child rape in Kavuma. I'm glad that some of the militia responsible have been caught and put on trial. This is welcome, but without political stability, the tide could turn and these positive trends could be reversed.

There are clear warning signs already, Mr President; warning signs like growing reports of widespread sexual violence, including by FARDC in the Kasais. Or growing reports of widespread recruitment of children by Kamuina Nsapu or of continuing violence in the East. And we should all be concerned that armed groups continue to fund their hateful crimes by stealing natural resources.

These crimes need to stop and those responsible must be held to account.

We need to recognise that we have tools at our disposal to help this happen... tools like sanctions already imposed by this Council. These must be fully implemented if they are to be effective. We also have a responsibility to keep sanctions under close review. Those who engage in or support acts that undermine the peace, stability or security of the Democratic Republic of the Congo can and if needed, will be sanctioned by this Council.

The Human Rights Council international investigative mechanism will also play a crucial role in the Kasais so let us all urge the DRC to cooperate fully with its work.

Mr President, I would like to thank the committee, which you chair, for their work and for this report and I would also like to thank you personally for the sensitive and effective way in which you have steered our work.

Finally, Mr President, we owe it to Zaida, Michael and the rest of the group of experts to continue to use their reporting in our decisions. As we have heard so clearly today, it is reporting for which the highest price has been paid. And it must not be a price paid in vain.

Thank you.