

Speech: “Whole of UN” approach in West Africa

Thank you, Mr President, and thank you, SRSG Chambas, for your briefing and for your team’s work in West Africa and the Sahel. Your efforts continue to be an invaluable bulwark against the forces of instability in the region.

Mr President, the United Kingdom welcomes the progress set out by the SRSG this morning, but remains concerned by the security and political situation in large parts of the region. Many of our concerns are reflected in the Secretary-General’s report, including the threats from terrorist groups such as Boko Haram in countries including Nigeria, and other groups operating in the Sahel that wreak havoc on vulnerable populations and systematically violate women’s rights.

As we have discussed many times before in this Council, both military and non-military action is required to address these threats. We must understand their root causes and the political, security, development and humanitarian needs of the population. And it is essential that we adopt a coherent “whole of UN” approach to tackle existing problems and prevent further deterioration in the region.

Mr President, I would like to begin by addressing the situation in the Lake Chad Basin. The magnitude of this crisis is profound. The combination of terrorism, extreme poverty and climate change has rendered some 10 million people dependent on humanitarian aid. Over 2.4 million people have been forced to abandon their homes. The cholera epidemic is the worst in nearly a decade.

A regional response to the crisis in the Lake Chad Basin has been critical. We therefore welcome collaboration between UNOWAS and UNOCA and the joint ECCAS and ECOWAS Summit held in July, which demonstrated the commitment of both organisations to strengthen their cooperation.

Leaders of the Member States of the Lake Chad Basin region also met in December to reinforce the region’s approach to tackling Boko Haram. Regional CT cooperation is vital to addressing a threat that does not respect borders. The Secretary-General’s report reminds us that cooperation between terrorist groups is growing in the Sahel region.

But the region cannot be left to manage this crisis alone. That is why the UK led the drafting of Security Council Resolution 2349 in 2017, and it is why at last September’s high-level conference in Berlin, the UK committed \$186 million to support an integrated response to the crisis.

Mr President, it is vital that we follow up the success of the Berlin Conference and ensure that the international community strengthens its commitment to tackling the problems of the region, including through supporting implementation of the UN Support Plan for the Sahel.

In light of the importance of the Sahel, the UK is in the process of scaling up our diplomatic, defence and development assistance in the region. We are opening new embassies in Niger and Chad, and increasing our presence in Mali. We have deployed Chinook helicopters to provide logistical support to the G5 Joint Force through Operation Barkhane, and will be significantly increasing our development assistance to the region in the coming years.

Mr President, at last month's Council briefing on the implementation of the UN Integrated Support Strategy for the Sahel, we called on international actors to ensure that organisational responsibilities were clearly delineated and strong lines of communication were set up between them. I am encouraged in this respect by the close cooperation between UNOWAS, the Office of the UN Special Adviser for the Sahel, ECOWAS and others.

We also recognise UNOWAS's efforts elsewhere in the region, and the close engagement of the Special Representative with national efforts to sustain peace, as in Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire. UNOWAS has a crucial role supporting states in the subregion to hold timely, transparent and inclusive elections and in supporting efforts of ECOWAS and others to lay the groundwork for structural prevention of election-related violence. With elections scheduled in several countries of the region in 2019, this will be an important theme of the year to come.

Mr President, one of UNOWAS's strengths has been to act as a bridge between national players and regional and international actors. We would encourage this to continue. In Burkina Faso, for example, regional cooperation and international support will be vital to tackle instability and the risks to the wider region, and UNOWAS has the credentials to leverage and facilitate such cooperation.

The UK also welcomes the role that the Peacebuilding Fund and its implementing partners are playing in supporting reconciliation in Burkina Faso and hope that the UN will maintain its commitment to using PBF resources to support reconciliation activities across the region.

Mr President, UNOWAS has demonstrated that it can be a valuable partner for regional governments and organisations. We look forward to engaging with the strategic review process later this year to ensure that UNOWAS is best equipped to fulfil its mandate.

Thank you, Mr President.