

Speech: “Women have spent too long enduring and surviving these crises; it’s long past time for them to play their fullest part in solving them.”

Thank you Mr President, thank you Ambassador Tete Antonio and above all, thank you Deputy Secretary-General for sharing your analysis after your important visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to northern Nigeria.

I also commend the work of UN Women and of the Secretary-General’s Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict who also took part in the visit. Together, you’ve really brought home to us the horrific, disproportionate impact that both these crises are having on civilians and in particular on women and girls.

And it’s an impact that this Council knows only too well following our visit to the Lake Chad region in March. I’m sure that none of us who are on that visit will forget the stories of anguish that we heard there; so many of them from mothers or daughters who had lost everything – their children, their families, their homes, their hope – all to Boko Haram.

Sadly, it seems that these stories are still being told. Despite the efforts of the UN, and the AU and governments of the region, the suffering continues – with over two million people still displaced in the Lake Chad region; over 96% of them because of the insurgency.

Similar stories can also be heard loudly and clearly in the DRC, which now has the highest displaced population in Africa. The reports emanating from the Kasai regions should make us all sick to our stomachs. They speak of mass graves, of brutal killing and maiming, including of women and children. They tell of rampant sexual violence; over 1,000 cases have been responded to since the crisis began last year, with the actual number of cases likely to be far higher. This has sparked a crisis that has left 400,000 children at risk of Severe Acute Malnutrition.

These two situations – the DRC and northern Nigeria – are different in many ways, and yet they are the product of the same vicious cycle. It’s a cycle of instability; one that breeds violence and leads to a breakdown of law and order. It’s a cycle that allows groups like Boko Haram to flourish and to carry out these most heinous crimes.

Put simply Mr President, we need to break the cycle.

And by we, I mean all of us, including this Security Council, but responsibility must fall, first and foremost, to the governments affected.

The governments of the DRC and of Nigeria, have a duty to restore stability, because instability fuels crises. As they do so, they must respect human rights and international humanitarian law. You can't be part of the problem if you want to be part of the solution.

This means governments protecting civilians as they restore stability. It means them acting on allegations of human rights abuses, including sexual violence, irrespective of whether they are allegations against their forces or any other group. And that includes UN peacekeepers too.

It means governments holding to account those who have committed these crimes; showing that there can be really no impunity and no escape; that the rule of law applies to everyone.

And we need to help them in that effort. And that's why the UK, together with our UN and NGO partners, are supporting the Nigerian government to re-establish basic social services to areas they have stabilised. It's why we've pledged \$6 million to support the humanitarian response in the Kasais and why we support the Human Rights Council's unanimous decision to deploy a team of experts to look into the situation there.

It's why we provide training to the Nigerian Armed Forces and to African Peacekeeping contingents on protecting civilians and on preventing sexual and gender based violence. And it's why the UK is funding legal assistance in the DRC to help survivors of these crimes.

But ultimately, Mr President, these are all comparatively short term actions. To end the crises that afflict so many women and girls disproportionately in both the DRC and Nigeria, we need to see long term progress on the women, peace and security agenda.

And at its heart this means women's equality in all aspects of politics, government and society.

It's unacceptable that women continue to be so poorly represented in formal governance and peace processes when time after time studies show that women's participation in these processes aids their ultimate success.

In Nigeria, for instance, women's participation in the House of Representatives and Senate has fallen since 2011; it now stands at around 5%. And in the DRC, only two women were involved in discussions to reach a political agreement during the crisis last year – just one more woman involved and they would have matched the total number of women sitting round this table representing member states of the Security Council.

So whether in the DRC, in Nigeria, or indeed in the Security Council, let us all advocate for the full, active participation of women. Women have spent too long enduring and surviving these crises; it's long past time for them to play their fullest part in solving them.

Thank you.