

Supporting a sustainable, collective response to challenges facing the Sahel

Thank you President, and I thank ASG Pobee, Executive Secretary Tiare, and to Mr Usman for their briefings.

President, the regional picture in the Sahel is stark. Countries are facing unprecedented challenges with escalating violence, rising humanitarian needs and famine-like conditions. As always, it is ordinary people who suffer the most. The United Kingdom remains committed to supporting the people of the Sahel – last year we contributed around \$355 million to the region.

However, if our collective response to these challenges is to be sustainable then the right conditions need to be in place.

Firstly, political will is needed to drive forward accountable governance, rule of law and justice. With three countries in the region now in the midst of political transitions, continued engagement with ECOWAS and the African Union is vital. We urge the Burkinabe, Chadian and Malian authorities to prepare for elections in open dialogue with civil society, including women and young people.

Second, effective counter-terrorism and respect for human rights must go hand in hand. To do otherwise risks aggravating grievances, undermining trust with local communities, and driving recruitment to terrorist groups. The harmful impact of Wagner Group operations on civilians in Mali and elsewhere on the continent is, by now, well documented. This is why Wagner will not succeed in Mali, and why they are not the right answer for any other country in the region.

We welcome the UN's efforts to build the G5 Sahel Joint Force's capacities for human rights compliance. But we urge the Joint Force to implement the mitigation measures identified under Human Rights Due Diligence assessments, as a condition of MINUSMA's support.

Finally, President, like others we look forward to the outcome of the Independent High Level Panel Strategic Assessment on the Sahel. We also look forward to the forthcoming discussions in the region on the Accra Initiative. Together these will help us to identify how best to work together to support regional security.

The United Kingdom remains committed to helping address the Sahel's challenges through a holistic approach, with accountable governance and human rights at its heart. Thank you.