

Supporting economic and political stability in Iraq

Thank you, Mr President, and thank you to the SRSB. You paint a picture of the ongoing challenge in Iraq, in the economic space, social space and, critically, in the security space. The United Kingdom will continue to stand with the Government and people of Iraq to face and overcome these challenges.

Mr President, it's also good that we're joined again by the Permanent Representative of Iraq. Welcome, Ambassador.

We welcome the political progress that we've seen in Iraq since we last met. The completion of Prime Minister Kadhimi's government formation process – including the appointment of two women ministers and the appointment of a cabinet member from a minority community is encouraging.

We also commend the actions taken by the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to ensure the safety of its citizens as they tackle the Covid-19 pandemic. The UK supporting Iraq in addressing Covid-19, including through the provision of over \$12 million in assistance. But we note the significant challenge the virus is causing in Iraq, as spelt out by the SRSB.

The UK is also committed to supporting the government in addressing the broader challenges facing Iraq. The most urgent of these is tackling the economic crisis facing the country through undertaking crucial economic reforms. Again, the UK will help, including through our technical assistance partnership with Iraq that we agreed just this week.

We also welcome Prime Minister Kadhimi's moves to prioritise economic stabilisation. However, it's clear that the challenges of Covid-19, combined with the collapse in oil prices and consequent budget deficit, are compounding long standing problems posed by Iraq's undiversified economy and rapid population growth. Reforms, although difficult, are necessary if Iraq is to achieve long-term economic and social stability. So we urge the Council of Ministers to put forward a reform programme without delay and to build parliamentary support for it. The UK stands ready to support and has already contributed over \$19 million to the World Bank Iraq Reform and Reconstruction Fund.

Mr President, we also express our deep concern at what the SRSB described as a spike in violence against civil society activists in Iraq – in particular, the targeted assassination of activists in Baghdad and in Basra. And we note with concern this morning's IED attack against a WFP vehicle in Ninewah Province. We wish a speedy recovery to the one WFP employee who was injured and we urge the Government of Iraq to investigate this attack and bring the perpetrator to justice, as it should for all the attacks of this kind.

We also condemn the actions of groups who seek to target the US and Coalition personnel through continued rocket attacks and the attacks against Iraqi

contractors working for the Coalition. And we join others in expressing our concern at the increased frequency of attacks by Daesh in recent months, particularly in the disputed territories.

The UK, like the other members of the Global Coalition, remains committed to supporting Iraq in its efforts to combat Daesh and its attempts to re-establish itself in Iraq. Mr President, as the SRSG said, effective Baghdad-Erbil cooperation is critical to addressing Iraq's challenges. We welcome the recent short-term budget arrangements, which are in place until the end of 2020, but urge the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to resume talks on a long-term sustainable budget agreement.

And we commend Prime Minister Kadhimi's efforts to strengthen bilateral relations with Kuwait, including to strengthen cooperation on the Kuwaiti missing persons and property file and the return of the remaining Kuwaiti National Archives. We call for the resolution of all outstanding issues.

We note President Kadhimi's call for early elections in June 2021, and we urge the Council of Representatives to complete the outstanding work on the electoral law and associated issues. We will work closely with UNAMI and the Government of Iraq and the Independent High Electoral Commission to ensure that the elections, when held, are free and will allow the Iraqi people to have a genuine voice in their future.

Thank you, Mr President.