

Speech: Stability in the Great Lakes Region

Thank you, Mr President. And thank you, Personal Envoy Djinnit for your briefing today, for the SG's report and for all your very diligent work and your strong personal dedication on these issues since 2014. We appreciate everything you've done and we wish you the best of success for the future.

It was particularly welcome to hear today both about your recent successes and to be reminded of all you've achieved over the last five years. We particularly welcome your success in securing the voluntary repatriation of fighters from Rwanda and also of M23 fighters from Uganda. That is an important achievement and as you said, it shows that we can make progress on these really difficult issues.

You also, in setting out the six areas that you'd focused on over the last five years today, I think you helped set the agenda for your successor when he takes over. And I'd like to highlight three of those in particular:

First, we warmly welcome the emphasis you have placed on promoting the participation of women in political life and in peace processes, and we strongly agree with the call you made just now to support the region's efforts to achieve a minimum quota of 30% of women's representation in political processes by 2020 – in time for the 20 year anniversary of 1325.

Second, very much agree with you about the importance of the rule of law and human rights. And in this regard, we strongly support your plans for a high level conference on justice and good governance in May and you will have our full support for that conference.

And then third – and this is a point that my US colleague touched on as well – we very much agree with you on the importance of tackling the exploitation of natural resources, in particular by armed groups in eastern DRC. It's very good that you have initiated political discussions with the countries in the region on this issue and I think it will be very important that that dialogue continues under your successor.

Mr President, let me just touch very briefly on three of the country-specific issues that are mentioned in your report:.

On the DRC, of course we we join the Special Envoy in our commendation of the Congolese people for exercising their democratic right to vote in a peaceful manner in the recent elections.

But we all know that democracy is a process, not an event, and it will be vital that all stakeholders in the DRC remain focused on supporting a more stable and inclusive political environment in the DRC. And we fully agree with the conclusions in the Secretary-General's report on the importance of resolving the issue of foreign armed groups and their dependents in the DRC

and regional issues involving refugee populations. Regional dialogue will be vital in finding solutions that respect the fundamental human rights of all those involved in or affected by conflict.

Second, turning to the Central African Republic, we attach great importance to ongoing efforts by the parties to implement the political agreement for peace and reconciliation and would encourage all stakeholders to consider what role the PSCF may be able to play in supporting this process.

And then finally, on Burundi, we think an inclusive dialogue will be a vital precursor to credible and inclusive elections. We welcome all the work you have done on this issue. All international partners should continue to support the EAC in their efforts to end the political crisis in Burundi and preserve the Arusha Accords.

Again, we encourage all stakeholders to consider whether the PSCF can play an enhanced role in promoting dialogue in Burundi and to coordinate their efforts with the PSCF in this regard.

Finally, in conclusion, we look forward to hearing your successor's plans to engage further with regional heads of state and government, picking up on the six themes you've outlined – in particular the three I think I've focused on. And as you have shown in your tenure in this role, the Special Envoy role has an invaluable part to play in supporting and strengthening the partnerships that will underpin greater regional stability. Thank you for everything you have done.

Thank you.

[News story: UK and Iceland sign agreement on defence and security cooperation](#)

UK Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, and his Icelandic counterpart, Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson, today signed an MoU between the UK and the Republic of Iceland to enhance defence and security cooperation between two founding members of NATO.

The signing of the MoU represents a significant step forward in the process of formalising the already positive bilateral relationship the UK and Iceland have, recognising the two countries' shared interests, values and responsibilities. Through NATO, the UK participates in military exercises in Iceland, including during Trident Juncture in 2018 and Dynamic Mongoose in 2017, and Iceland also contributes to the UK-led NATO enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Estonia, seeking to protect our allies from external

security threats.

The MoU will provide both the UK and Iceland with a means for developing and furthering their defence relations, and will help to enhance security cooperation in new areas such as policing, counter-terrorism, search and rescue, risk and crisis management, and cyber security. This builds on recent cooperation, including a visit in January by members of the Icelandic National Security Council (NSC) to meet UK NSC counterparts, and ongoing cyber cooperation between the Oxford Cyber Centre and the relevant Icelandic authorities.

RAF Typhoons will conduct NATO Air Policing from Iceland later this year for the first time, patrolling Iceland's airspace and helping to guard NATO's northern flank. This demonstrates the benefits of our bilateral defence and security relationship to wider European and North Atlantic security.

Speech: Latest rocket attacks in Israel, humanitarian situation in Gaza and the status of the Golan Heights

Thank you very much indeed, Mr President, and like our German colleague, I'll try to be brief because I think there has been a lot of common themes across the Council today. And while I share people's dismay that so many of these issues come back to us repeatedly, I think that if there is any unity in the Council it has been the condemnation of violence from both sides and the need for both sides to make progress.

I think, Special Co-ordinator, you asked us to be very clear about the condemnation of the recent rocket attacks. Dual British-Israeli citizens were [injured] in the latest rocket attacks so we have no hesitation in joining you and others in condemning unreservedly what has happened and in condemning such acts of terrorism and violence wherever they occur. And I'll note that there was another attack near the Ariel settlement on 17 March. We along with others support the Egyptian and UN efforts to broker a ceasefire and restore the situation to calm.

Violence not only creates fear and a cycle of violence among the Israeli and Palestinian populations, it also undermines the humanitarian situation in Gaza. And we have been concerned by the number of Palestinian deaths in the West Bank over the last few weeks.

A number of colleagues mentioned the heightened tensions at Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. We urge all parties to work together to restore calm and to support the status quo under the custodianship of the King of Jordan.

The protests at the Gaza perimeter fence continue and we remain concerned about the volume of live fire that's been used. And this is resulting in horrific injuries and it is also resulting in fatalities. This is not to take away one iota from Israel's right to self-defense. And it's not to undermine or gainsay the fact that Hamas operatives cynically exploit these protests but it is worth repeating that this perpetual cycle of violence serves no one's interests. And as the German ambassador said: the emphasis ought to be on what can be done to implement 2334 and reduce the the violence that we see every day in the territories and in Israel.

And I just want to join others who referred to the March of Return – that anniversary will be with us shortly. We urge all parties to demonstrate restraint and avoid future violence. We continue to support the need for an independent and transparent investigation into last year's events in Gaza. And we welcome the recent decision by the Israeli Military Advocate General to order five criminal investigations relating to 11 separate instances of Palestinian fatalities during the Gaza protests.

It is customary, Mr President, to turn to the issue of settlements. Our views on settlements remain well-known. Suffice it to say that we share the Secretary-General's views on the expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem. We also remain gravely concerned by the threatened evictions of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem and across the West Bank. And my Foreign Secretary wrote to the Israeli Government to condemn the planned demolition of the Palestinian village of Khan al-Ahmar and we continue to press Israel to abandon these plans entirely.

Mr President, a number of Council members have referred to the issue of the Golan Heights. For the United Kingdom, we view the Golan Heights as territory occupied by Israel. Annexation of territory by force is prohibited under international law and that includes the UN Charter. The United Kingdom does not recognise Israel's annexation in 1981 and we have no plans to change that position.

Before I conclude, Mr President, could I just correct something I said earlier? Dual British-Israeli citizens were injured in the rocket attack and not killed. I apologise for the error.

Thank you.

[**News story: Lord Duncan visits Stirling innovators leading the way in**](#)

responding to an ageing society

Last week [Friday 22 March] Lord Duncan had the opportunity to hear about the world-leading innovations being developed by Stirling institutions in response to one of society's most pressing issues, an ageing population. By 2050, worldwide there are likely to be two billion people over the age of 60.

UK Government Minister Lord Duncan said:

A key priority for the UK Government is to support innovation for our ageing society. As people are living longer, we want to make sure they are also living independently and happily. This is why the UK Government is investing over £300 million from our Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund to tackle issues like this.

Scotland has a reputation as a world leader in innovation and research and it is great to see the vital contribution by the University of Stirling to one of society's most pressing problems.

At the University of Stirling, Lord Duncan learned of the University's ageing and dementia research as well as proposals for an intergenerational village and innovation hub.

Visiting Symbiosis, who recently received UK Government funding, Lord Duncan saw first-hand their developments into supply chain models and commercial gene therapy.

Lord Duncan also met with senior staff at CodeBase Stirling and learnt how they benefit local economies and how technology can be harnessed to help the needs of an ageing society.

The Ageing Society 'Grand Challenge' forms a key part of the UK Government's modern Industrial Strategy. Its mission for the Ageing Society Grand Challenge is to ensure that people can enjoy at least five extra years of healthy independent living by 2035 whilst also narrowing inequalities.

Press release: Joint statement on 4th anniversary of Saudi intervention in

Yemen

The Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, and the International Development Secretary, Penny Mordaunt, said:

Today, on the fourth anniversary of the intervention by the Saudi-led Coalition into the conflict in Yemen at the invitation of the Government of Yemen, we call on both sides to urgently implement the agreements made at the Stockholm peace talks and end this dire conflict.

Yemen's humanitarian crisis, the largest in the world, has continued to worsen. The UK will continue to show leadership as part of international efforts to end the appalling suffering millions are facing.

This year we have committed an additional £200 million of UK aid, bringing our total commitment to over £770 million since the conflict began. This support will save lives by meeting the immediate food needs of more than 1 million Yemenis each month over the year, treating 30,000 children for malnutrition and providing more than 1 million people with improved water supply and basic sanitation.

We have been at the forefront of work towards a political solution to the conflict, leading on two UN Security Council Resolutions and bolstering international support for UN efforts to secure peace. Talks in Stockholm in December were a landmark point – the first time that the parties had come to the negotiating table in over two years. But there remains a serious risk that this window of opportunity to make progress towards lasting peace slips away. The UK urges both sides to act in good faith, cooperate with the UN Special Envoy and General Lollobrigida and rapidly implement the Stockholm Agreements.

We have been clear that a political settlement is the only way to bring long-term stability to Yemen and to address the worsening humanitarian crisis. We will continue to make every effort to support the UN-led process to get to that solution.