

The role of reconciliation in the maintenance of international peace and security

On behalf of the United Kingdom government and as current Council President, I would like to thank everyone, first of all, for joining us here this morning and sharing your thoughts on this important issue. In particular, I thank Mr Özerdem and, of course, Miss Elman for their very powerful and touching and poignant contributions. But I also pay tribute to the contribution of Secretary-General António Guterres; again, your words resonate very strongly. When you spoke of no reconciliation without justice, no justice without truth, that should remain our primary aim and objective. And we all recognise that reconciliation is an important – indeed a pivotal building block – for lasting peace. Why? Because it has the power, not only to resolve existing conflicts, but also to prevent future violence by helping people, by helping communities to overcome old grievances. That is why the United Kingdom has and will remain a steadfast champion of the Secretary-General's vision for sustaining peace, which puts conflict prevention and peacebuilding at the very heart of the United Nations' important work around the world.

It is also why we, the United Kingdom, along with other nations, have long advocated for faith leaders to play a key and pivotal role. Today, in a world where more than three quarters of people say directly their faith is important to them, there can be very little doubt that faith leaders have the ability to influence individuals and communities in a way governments simply cannot. Faith is part of the solution. Faith leaders can also amplify the voices of the vulnerable communities, support reconciliation and peacebuilding by mediating, encouraging dialogue between different groups. And as Mr Özerdem said, we must also remember the causes of the conflict and then move forward and change.

From a United Kingdom's perspective and I personally, as a minister who oversees human rights, have been focus regularly to seek insights from faith leaders, belief leaders around the world, not only to seek their support, but directly to inform policy and our work on finding practical, workable and importantly, sustainable solutions. This year, as many of you will know, we asked the Bishop of Truro to conduct a review into our response, the United Kingdom's response, and on this, I would emphasise it is also important to get your own house in order; we should reflect, never is the job done. We should constantly evolve as governments ourselves. So we asked the Bishop of Truro to look at our response to the persecution of Christians around the world and also other religious minorities as well, Muslim minorities, Ahmidas, Shia's, the Bahá'ís to name but a few. And we are proud of both the honesty and the transparency shown during this process.

As we are of the important priority, we are giving the free media campaign. It was Thomas Jefferson who said the liberty of speaking and writing guards

our liberties. And that is why the United Kingdom, together with our partners around the world, are also seeking to defend media freedom and to protect journalists who do an incredible job, often with great danger to themselves. Why? Because this is as important as we are working with religious communities and working to defend religious freedom and protect the persecuted.

So as such, going back to the Bishop of Truro's review, we have already accepted as a government all of the wide-ranging recommendations in that review. They include establishing an early warning system to accelerate our response to atrocities. As I look around the Security Council this morning, we will be seeking a Security Council resolution on the persecution of Christians and of people of all faiths. And we hope today's debate will prepare the ground and inform later discussions on this important priority.

Moving to justice, we have seen how transitional justice mechanisms can support persecuted people and lay the foundations for peace. For these mechanisms to be successful, they must involve, as Ms Elman said, all parts of the community, particularly women. The United Kingdom has and will remain a steadfast advocate for engaging and involving women at the heart of conflict resolution, not as an afterthought, but pivotal to ensuring peace is achieved, peace is sustained, and that countries and nations can build. It is also important to involve women to ensure that children's views are represented effectively, to involve faith and belief and community leaders. Indeed, all voices should be heard as we look towards building justice. This inclusivity is vital. But of course, that means we must be tailored to the country concerned.

Mr Özerdem, you talked about local ownership and we've seen that in certain areas of the world. But Gambia has shown one possible model; it secured the confidence of the public by establishing a truth, reconciliation and reparations commission that was seen to be independent, consultative and inclusive. Related to this, accountability is another important element for long-term reconciliation. Impunity must no longer be the default option. That is why the United Kingdom has supported the established United Nations policy to oppose amnesties for war crimes against humanity, genocide or gross violations of human rights, including in the context of peace negotiations.

And what about the Security Council?

Mr Secretary-General, your excellencies, colleagues, this council has a pivotal and key role to play working with the Secretary-General and his offices, mediation and support special political missions, the Peacebuilding Commission and others. As countries transition from conflict and instability to sustainable peace and security, we all have a particular responsibility right here on the Security Council to ensure their efforts succeed. That means monitoring reconciliation processes, women mediators, deciding when to deploy special political missions and ensuring that women and other excluded groups have a place at the very heart of the table at every stage of recovery and reconciliation. And we should also consider, importantly, how faith leaders can support our effort in this regard.

To conclude, I thank you once again, Secretary-General, to our briefers and to all members for your input that we will hear from today, for your continued commitment to support reconciliation that is fair, that is inclusive, that is effective. For after all, we owe it. We owe it to all those who have suffered conflict. We owe it to those who continue to suffer to help all of them overcome their differences and return to their homes, return to their community. And ultimately, we all need to play our part in building a lasting peace.