

“There is space for hope and for a brighter future for the Iraqi people”

Thank you very much, Mr President, and let me join others in welcoming you to the Presidency and saying that the United Kingdom looks forward to working with you and your delegation. And our thanks to the Belgian representative for an excellent stewardship of the month of February and the Council's business.

Let me start by thanking the Special Representative for her briefing, but also for her continued efforts and those of your mission to support and advise the Iraqi government. Your work is important and, as we've all heard, it's a difficult time. So you have our staunch support.

While Iraq has made notable progress in recent years, as many speakers, including the Special Representative, have said, the past few months have been challenging. And with the latest setback about the resignation of the Prime Minister, I agree with Dominican Republic: we need to appeal to Iraq's leaders at this time to put the Iraqi people and the sound governance of the country first. The delays in forming a new government, commanding the confidence of the Iraqi parliament and people is regrettable. The United Kingdom calls on all Iraqi leaders to put the national interests first and to work together constructively to support a new Prime Minister. Iraq urgently needs an inclusive and representative Government committed and able to deliver on the demands of the Iraqi people.

This aim is all the more important, given the clear dissatisfaction with the status quo shown by the large scale demonstrations in Iraq since October last year. Thousands of Iraqi citizens have protested to voice legitimate demands for political, economic and social reforms. But hundreds have been killed and thousands injured. The Iraqi people have the right to protest peacefully, and we are deeply concerned by the disproportionate use of force by security forces, including the use of live fire and human rights abuses, including attacks on journalists. The UK urges the Iraqi authorities to follow through on their commitments to conduct credible investigations into the violence and hold those responsible to account. And we also unequivocally condemn attacks on diplomatic premises. It is vital that protests remain peaceful.

I would like to say to the Iraqi ambassador, the United Kingdom stands ready to support you in Iraq in delivering crucial reforms which address popular concerns. We welcome the progress made on electoral reforms and we urge the Government of Iraq to continue engagement with UNAMI and the international community to ensure that the new electoral reform law delivers on protesters' demands, including for credible, free and inclusive elections.

As the report from the Secretary-General highlights and as the Special Representative outlined, Daesh remain a persistent threat to Iraq's security as well as to the region and the wider world. We therefore hope that Iraq and the international community can continue to work closely together to address

this common threat. The Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh continues its support to and close partnership with the Iraqi security forces in full respect for Iraqi sovereignty. And I am proud that British troops in Iraq have trained over 100,000 members of the Iraqi Security Forces.

Militia groups continue to threaten Iraq's stability and risk escalating regional tensions. We condemn the storming of the US Embassy in Baghdad on 31 December and continued attacks by militia groups on military bases and diplomatic premises. The Government of Iraq has a duty to ensure the safety of all diplomatic premises in Iraq. But we urge all parties – and I want to stress that includes Iraq's neighbours – we urge all parties to show restraint and to avoid dragging Iraq into a conflict, which is not what the Iraqi people need.

We are deeply concerned that 1.4 million Iraqis remain displaced and over 4 million Iraqis will need some sort of support and assistance this year. Reports of forced and undignified returns of displaced persons are troubling. And I take this opportunity to recall that under international conventions, all returns must be safe, dignified and voluntary.

Mr President, the United Kingdom is ready to support Iraq, deliver durable solutions, including on reconciliation, reconstruction and provision of services. It's particularly important that political instability and protests don't distract from or prevent action being taken to address the grievances which drove the rise of Daesh.

We all know, Mr President, having heard the briefings today, recent months have been difficult for the Government of Iraq and the Iraqi people. There's been progress on key issues, including regional outreach discussions between Baghdad and Erbil and reconstruction through the funding facility for stabilisation. As the SRSG said, there are grounds for hope and we should not overlook this progress. But I want to echo what was said by the German Representative in particular about corruption and the importance of tackling this.

My last point, Mr President, relates also to the Iraq-Kuwait file. I pay tribute to the work of the Kuwaiti Representative who is in the Chamber. As the American and German Representative's said, the recent developments on this file are very welcome. The United Kingdom remains committed to helping strengthen relations between Iraq and Kuwait through the work of the Tripartite Commission, which we support.

We stand ready, Mr President, to continue to support the next Government of Iraq as it continues to deliver on the legitimate demands of protesters and to implement crucial reforms. We urge maximum restraint and peaceful dialogue from all sides. There is space for hope and for a brighter future for the Iraqi people.

Thank you very much, Mr President.