

# Identifying underlying drivers of the conflict in Africa

Madam President, our thanks first to you and to Cote d'Ivoire for convening today's important debate and also our thanks to our briefers for giving us their time and and their insights.

Madam President, the deteriorating situation in West Africa is a source of major concern, as we've heard from everyone around the Council today. This was underlined again by last week's terrorist attack in West Niger in which many Nigerian soldiers lost their lives. And our condolences go to the families of these troops and of all those civilians, national forces and UN peacekeepers who have suffered at the hands of violent extremists in West Africa.

As we've heard, too, the UN has a vital role to play in supporting national and regional efforts which address the drivers of violence. But this instability cannot be solved by the UN alone, nor through purely military or counter-terrorist initiatives. We need to address the underlying drivers of this conflict. Strengthening stability and security across West Africa requires a comprehensive approach to the interconnected drivers.

In too many parts of the region, corruption, failure to provide basic services and the lack of economic prospects for young people combine to provide fertile grounds for extremist groups. The impacts of climate change cause shocks and stresses which exacerbate the risks of inter-communal violence, including by contributing to competition over scarce resources. And serious organised crime networks, often operating across national boundaries, exacerbate instability and prey on local communities in the absence of state authority.

Madam President, tackling these challenges requires a comprehensive approach across all three pillars of the UN system: in peace and security, in development and in human rights. And it requires coordinated work from all partners.

We recognise the important role of regional efforts to tackle terrorist groups, including through the G-5 Sahel Task Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force, just as we commend the efforts of regional organisations, including the AU and ECOWAS. For our part, the UK is set to deploy 250 personnel to Mali in 2020 to provide vital long-range reconnaissance capabilities to MINUSMA. And we have contributed over \$6.6 billion in bilateral funding to support the operation of the MNJTF and \$2.4 million to the G5 Sahel Joint Force.

And we are working closely with West African partners to support nationally and locally-led conflict prevention efforts to prevent both extremism and intercommunal violence. For example, in northern Nigeria, UK development funding, worth nearly \$50 million over five years, is currently supporting

initiatives to increase economic opportunities for marginalised youth. And in Borno state, we're providing a further \$28 million in funding for projects to reduce young people's ability to recruitment by violent extremist groups.

But while individual initiatives like this matter, we know that long-term solutions to instability are grounded in prosperous and inclusive economies. And to that end, the United Kingdom is proud to be hosting a UK Africa investment summit on the 20th of January in London in order to mobilise high quality international investments for the region.

Madam President, we need to also deliver long-term solutions because there are no quick fixes to such complex issues. And while states must, of course, take the lead in delivering for their citizens and finding political solutions to conflicts, there is more the UN can do to support them. A coherent "whole of UN" approach is required. This should include work by UN country teams to support national efforts to prevent violent extremism from taking hold; following a proper assessment of the capacities, capabilities and resources nationally; and we are keen to see more coherence coordination between UNOWAS and the UN development actors in the region. And we should continue our work through the counterterrorism and sanctions committees to deny terrorists access to arms, to funding, and to bring them to justice, as well as supporting member states in strengthening their own counterterrorism frameworks and capacities.

We should also scale up efforts to address the root causes of instability in the region through focussed and coordinated peacebuilding programmes. In this regard, we are very pleased the Secretary-General has recently re-approved Mali's eligibility for access to peacebuilding funds. The UK remains one of the biggest supporters of the Peacebuilding Fund, having doubled our contribution to \$43 million in 2018. And we look forward to continuing to work with the Peacebuilding Support Office and Peacebuilding Commission to leverage those resources for the benefit of the communities facing the challenges of inter-communal violence and of terrorism.

Madam President, I've had the privilege to serve in in West Africa to travel extensively around the countries of the region, so this is an issue which is very close to my heart. And I think we just need to focus on three particular areas. I think the UN needs to come together to focus more fundamentally on them, but essentially the three ingredients are: security – and we talked about this already – but progress will not be made unless states can provide security within their territory and can work together across boundaries and borders to deliver this within the region. So we need to work together to help them build that capacity.

But security will only be sustained if governments work to deliver good governance and the rule of law. And many of us have spoken about this; we set this out very clearly in SDG 16. This is the key precursor to investment and growth. And investment and growth when it comes can help deliver the third ingredient, which is economic growth and development. This lifts people out of poverty and this stops people being tempted down the routes in the path of violence.

So I think, you know, we've heard everyone this morning talk about these things. The challenge is how we deliver them. And I think in that regard, it was very interesting to hear the African Union talk about this concept of recess, to look again at all the multiple initiatives that we have across the region – I think there were 15 or so that were mentioned – and see how we can bring greater coherence to them so that the UN in the region can work better together to deliver them.

For our part, the UK will continue to play our role in partnership with the UN and with our friends across West Africa.

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## [Webinar recording: December 2019](#)



On 11 December 2019, Christine Tacon, the Groceries Code Adjudicator (GCA) delivered a webinar talking about

- the Designation of an additional retailer,
- updates to the GCA website and YouTube channel,
- her meetings with retailer Audit Chairs,
- the new areas of work she's undertaking with the retailers, including buying alliances and implementing a whole organisation approach to Code compliance.

You can [watch the webinar](#) on the GCA YouTube channel.

You can also [register online to be notified of future webinars](#).

If you have any feedback on the webinar, please contact the GCA at [enquiries@groceriescode.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@groceriescode.gov.uk).

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# GAD's review of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Scotland)

The Government Actuary's Department (GAD) has concluded that overall, the Local Government Pension Scheme (Scotland) is in a strong financial position.

The Scottish Government asked GAD to undertake this first formal review of the 15 funds in LGPS Scotland. It was carried out under section 13 of the Public Service Pensions Act 2013.

We had previously produced a 'dry run' report of the 2014 valuations. [In this new report](#), GAD assessed the actuarial valuations of the funds as at 31 March 2017, by examining:

- compliance
- consistency
- solvency
- long term cost efficiency

The report is based on the actuarial valuations together with other data provided by the funds and their actuaries. GAD's experts concluded that the overall funding level has improved from 94% in 2014 to 102% in 2017.

This review followed a similar exercise in England and Wales where [GAD's review of the actuarial valuations of those LGPS funds](#) as at 31 March 2016 was published in September 2018. [GAD also reviewed the 2016 actuarial valuation of the LGPS Northern Ireland](#), publishing the report about those funds in April 2019.

GAD made 2 recommendations in its review of LGPS Scotland's actuarial valuations, advising the Scottish Public Pensions Agency to:

- consider the standard way of presenting relevant disclosures adopted for LGPS England and Wales valuation reports as at 31 March 2019
- develop a basis for standardised calculations, in addition to the funding calculations, to enable cross comparison of funds

The report concluded the LGPS Scotland fund valuations were compliant with relevant regulations, and there are no concerns over the funds' solvency or long-term cost efficiency.

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# More than 800 miles of roadworks completed or lifted in time for Christmas

Highways England will be working around the clock to remove roadworks in time for the big getaway, meaning around 98 per cent of motorways and major A roads will be roadworks-free in time for Christmas.

The vast majority of roadworks will be removed from the motorway and major A-road network from 6am Friday 20 December until 12.01am on Thursday 2 January.

To avoid busy travel times, Highways England is urging drivers to check traffic conditions before they set out and to make sure their vehicle is ready for the journey ahead.

Research shows almost half of all breakdowns are caused by simple mechanical problems which could be avoided with simple checks and nearly a quarter are caused by tyre problems.

Highways England's customer service director Melanie Clarke said:

We don't want roadworks to spoil Christmas so we're doing everything we can to make journeys as smooth as possible; that's why we're keeping around 98 per cent of the road network we manage free from roadworks.

And we're asking drivers to be prepared too. We know from experience that almost half of breakdowns can easily be avoided if motorists carry out simple vehicle checks before their journeys.

So, before you set off, check traffic conditions, check your vehicle, and make sure you're aware of the signs and signals on motorways.

Before they set off, Highways England is urging motorists to:

- Check fuel: Make sure you have enough to get to your destination
- Check tyres: Check your tyre pressure and the condition of your tyres, including the spare. Look out for cuts or wear and make sure the tyres have a minimum tread depth of 1.6mm, which is the legal limit
- Check engine oil: Use your dipstick to check oil before any long journey, and top up if needed – take your car back to the garage if you're topping up more than usual
- Check water: To ensure you have good visibility, always keep your screen wash topped up so you can clear debris or dirt off your windscreen
- Check your lights: If your indicators, hazard lights, headlights, fog lights, reverse lights or brake lights are not functioning properly, you

are putting yourself at risk. In addition, light malfunctions can be a reason for your vehicle to fail its MOT

Highways England has advice about [traffic conditions](#) on its website, Twitter feeds, and information line (0300 123 5000).

If you're towing, Highways England is also reminding you to ensure that you have the correct licence and insurance to tow whatever the weight, make sure you have connected correctly, and always ensure your load is secure and within the limits for your vehicle before setting off.

A series of [vehicle checks videos](#) are available to help people carry out basic vehicle checks before they set off on their travels.

Highways England is also urging drivers to stay safe by adhering to motorway signage, including the red X signals.

Highways England closes lanes for a reason and drivers ignoring red X signs put themselves and others at risk.

Drivers planning to use the Dartford Crossing are reminded to pay Dart Charge in advance or by midnight the day after crossing.

## **General enquiries**

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

## **Media enquiries**

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

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# **[Coal Authority helps to host geological competition for students](#)**

Students aged 16 to 18 have been competing in the regional heats of the National Schools Geology Challenge.

School teams from across the East Midlands competed in 3 rounds, consisting of a presentation and poster on a theme of their choosing and a challenging geological quiz.

The Geological Society of London competition, which was incredibly closely contested, was won by Loughborough Grammar School with their work on 'Spreading the word on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge'.

The Coal Authority's Helen Bennett, from our commercial reports and advisory services team, and Leigh Sharpe, from our licensing and permissions team, hosted the evening at British Geological Survey in Keyworth, Nottingham, along with other members of the Geological Society's East Midlands group.

The judging panel – Dr Sarah Lee, from the University of Leicester, Helen Burke, from British Geological Survey and Richard Lansley, from Golder Associates – was extremely impressed with the quality and creativeness of the students' work, which included interactive experiments and 3D models.

Helen Bennett said:

The standard of work produced by the students was incredibly high, all of the schools participating had put a lot of time and effort into their entries and it was so great to see so many young people gathered together with an interest in earth sciences.

All of the schools said how much they had enjoyed the evening and a teacher told me it was a great experience for students.

We hope this event will continue to raise the profile of geology in today's society and that Coal Authority colleagues – including our ICT team, who helped ensure the night was a big success – can continue to support it in the future.

Loughborough Grammar School will now compete in the national final of the competition to be held at the Geological Society of London's impressive headquarters, Burlington House, in March 2020.

If any East Midlands schools teaching geology, geography or sciences at A level are interested in entering next year's competition, please email [HelenBennett@coal.gov.uk](mailto:HelenBennett@coal.gov.uk) to find out more.

Leigh Sharpe, from the Coal Authority's licensing and permissions team, hosting one of the quiz rounds.