Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"A dialogue should be an exchange, not a broadcast, of views"

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Well, thank you very much, Mr President.

Let me begin by thanking you and your team for your hard work this month. Thank you too for your invitation to hold this wrap-up session which is a very welcome initiative. As your statistics make clear it's been a productive month in terms of products but it's also been a challenging one when you look at the increased threats to peace and security around the world. I look forward in particular to the reflections of the other recently elected members of this Council. But as I am personally a new arrival I thought I would take this opportunity to offer my thoughts on the work of this Council from my first two months here.

And I want to share my impressions on three issues - our working methods, the importance of Council unity, and the challenges ahead.

So, on working methods first. In my first couple of months here, I've been struck by how formal our interactions can be, whatever the format, including in Arria formula meetings, in so-called informal consultations, and even in so-called informal interactive dialogues. In all these fora, I want to ask everyone what can we do to be more responsive and more interactive with each other and with those briefing us?

This month we met a very broad range of leaders, activists and specialists working in Somalia, Syria, Sudan. We welcomed the Force Commanders to the Council. All of these individuals bring insights that are invaluable for our work. But the formality of our interactions with them can sometimes limit our ability to draw effectively on their experience.

And I think particularly when we are meeting in private, we need to break away from the predictable pattern of reading prepared statements out loud, and instead properly engage with each other and briefers. Maybe even - shock horror - with each other on a first name basis that reflects our familiar and daily interactions. We should ask questions, we should interject. A dialogue should be an exchange, not a broadcast of views. If we do all agree on a point, then why does everyone need to say it? Why don't we just say that we agree with someone else and move on? Otherwise we end up reading out talking points that have already been made by other people.

I know that others around this Council, and beyond, share this view. And both the Peace Operations Review and the Office of Internal Oversight Services recommend that we have more open and honest conversations. So to do so, I believe we need to begin by looking again at making our working methods and make them more engaging and interactive.

For my second reflection, I've been struck how this Council can make real progress when there's unity. And we've seen such unity on counter-terrorism, on the fight against Ebola. We're also seeing it on some of the hardest issues we face, such as Yemen and Libya.

But as events in Ukraine and Syria have demonstrated, when the Council is divided, our response falters and people suffer. As we look ahead to the next six months, we need to redouble our efforts to find common cause on those issues too.

And there are areas where we can agree, even on the most divisive issues like Syria. Through the Geneva Communiqué we were able to agree that a transitional governing body is needed; one that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people. A strong, stable, inclusive government in Syria is the only way to counter the threat posed by ISIL – the Assad regime has neither the legitimacy nor the ability to do so. And the moderate opposition cannot do so alone. So whatever our national starting point in this conflict we must all come together to help UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura in his efforts to bring about a political settlement, which is the only way to find an end to this awful conflict.

So if we can make an extra effort to seek out common ground, we can adopt some slightly more engaging working practices, maybe we will have a little bit more success in addressing the challenges ahead.

And that's my final reflection – it's on the scale of the challenges which this Council, and the UN as a whole, will face in the coming months. Ramlan, you set out a long list: Middle East, migration, conflicts in Africa. And one could add climate change, conflict prevention, achieving the sustainable development goals. It's clear we have a lot to do. But in addition to all of those, I want to focus on two further issues of particular importance to the United Kingdom; the selection of the next Secretary-General and the review of resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

As I announced on my first day in April, the United Kingdom wants to see a more transparent, structured and inclusive selection process for the next Secretary-General. That means getting the broadest selection of credible candidates - men and particularly women - and setting a clear timeline for appointment. And it's this Council that must take the lead in this process, as it's this Council that has been mandated in the Charter to make the recommendation to the General Assembly. So I think we need to accelerate our work on this, but also think about how we can broaden out and give all Members and civil society an opportunity to assess the candidates' credentials.

If all qualifications are equal, the UK believes that it’s high time for a woman to lead the United Nations. Twenty years on from the Beijing Declaration, it’s time for the United Nations to show leadership and embody the practices it encourages all of its Members to follow.

Which brings me also to Women, Peace and Security. There has been too little implementation of resolution 1325 in the fifteen years since it was adopted. The UK sees the High Level Review on Women, Peace and Security in October as a chance to begin a new phase for this agenda; one focused on implementation and results for women affected by conflict.

We want to see women at peace talks, and real protection for the most vulnerable. Roman will be leading the Council when we consider this issue in October, and I look forward to working closely with him and the Spanish mission, and with all of you, to further this agenda.

So finally, let me close by welcoming that you are holding this session in public. It is a pity that this is the first wrap-up meeting since the French Presidency in March. These open sessions are important. And like the working practices I’ve described, they can bring greater transparency and greater engagement to our discussions and our decisions.

Thank you, Mr President.

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