Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"I congratulate the Chilean Mission for guiding the Council smoothly through a hectic first month of 2015"

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Thank you Mr President.

I congratulate you and the Chilean Mission for guiding the Council smoothly through a hectic first month of 2015. And let me welcome again our five new colleagues, whose contributions we are already valuing.

Mr President,

Thank you for convening today's wrap up session. I'm pleased that we are again holding this session in public. We have covered a broad range of issues in January, including the worrying developments in Yemen; escalating violence in Ukraine; the situations in the Middle East, Syria, Mali and the DRC, as well as emergency discussions on Lebanon and Nepal. I congratulate you on the informative open debate on inclusive development and preventing conflict. And I look forward to tomorrow's debate on the important role that women must play in the protection of civilians. Together with the UN community, we commemorated the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and expressed our solidarity in the fight against anti-Semitism.

In addition, the Council has travelled to Haiti to see firsthand the work of MINUSTAH. And sadly we have already agreed five press statements this year condemning new terrorist atrocities.

Mr President,

Equally sadly, we have also started the year as we finished last year: addressing a series of seemingly intractable conflicts that have divided us. In this 70th anniversary year of the United Nations, it is more important than ever that we face up to these challenges and work harder to overcome the divisions that have prevented the Security Council from taking action.

Let me mention three such conflicts:

First, we have already met twice this year to discuss the worrying escalation in violence in eastern Ukraine. The separatist attack on Mariupol last Saturday that killed 30 people was a provocative and indiscriminate act that risks increasing the scope and severity of this crisis.

This was not the first separatist attack targeting civilians this year. They could not have carried these out without Russian support and military hardware. Because despite our calls, the Minsk agreements of 2014 in September remain unfulfilled and the Russian military support for the separatists continues unabated, in clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity.

If Russia wishes to work for a peaceful solution, it needs to match its leaders' words with deeds. Trust in Russia is currently at a low and hard work will be required to regain it. But a political settlement should be achievable and Russia will find willing international partners, if it is prepared to change course on Ukraine.

Mr President,

We have also discussed the brutal conflict in Syria. An additional 76,000 people were killed in Syria in the course of last year; the majority through the regime's barbaric actions, including indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas. Persistent, credible reporting of continued regime use of chemical weapons, in the form of chlorine, is an outrage which warrants Council attention. And, despite adoption of Resolution 2191, the grave humanitarian situation continues to worsen.

Let us not sit and watch another year go by as the toll of death and misery mounts. It is more imperative than ever that we come together to support a political process, in line with the Geneva Communiqué, that brings an end to the violence. I look forward to Staffan de Mistura briefing the Council on his latest efforts next month and working with Council colleagues to find a viable end to this appalling conflict in the course of 2015.

Mr President,

This month we also discussed perhaps the most intractable issue of all: the Middle East Peace Process. For over 50 years the Council has toiled with this issue; and a solution is long overdue. The Council shares the same core commitment to a negotiated settlement which leads to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. But last year the prospects for a two-state solution moved backwards. This year we must turn that momentum around. We must remain open to working with partners to revisit the parameters resolution. With sufficient time for proper negotiation, we may yet secure the full support of this Council for a resolution of this nature, which could help to kick-start a sustainable peace process.

Mr President,

The challenge for the Council during this anniversary year will be whether we can make progress on these, and other, seemingly intractable conflicts. The overlap of views between us is greater than many give us credit for. The differences are relatively few. But they are

acute. To succeed we will need to focus on these differences and not let them disrupt the areas that we do agree on. We owe it to all those suffering from the effects of conflict to do our utmost in these efforts.

I thank you.

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