

Speech by H.E. Mr Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve,
Ambassador, Permanent Representative

to the UN Security Council

Mali Briefing

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Mr President,

Allow me first of all to thank the Secretary-General for his statement. We are all aware of his commitment to peace in Mali.

I would also like to welcome the Prime Minister of Mali, Mr Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga, here today. Mr Prime Minister, thank you once again for welcoming the Security Council to your country a few days ago.

Mr President,

Since our last debate on the situation in Mali, in January, more peacekeepers have lost their lives and the country has experienced another peak in violence against civilians. I would like to pay tribute to their memory.

Mr President,

The Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation has not been implemented as quickly as we had all hoped.

Belgium is deeply concerned by the delays in its implementation. However, the non-finalisation of the key measures of the Agreement is jeopardising the development, security and stability of Mali and gradually destroying the hope that the Agreement had aroused in the population. It strengthens the

enemies of peace, who are quick to denounce the path of dialogue and compromise as a dead-end, advocating violence as an alternative.

Since the Agreement was signed in 2015, the violence has spread to the centre of Mali and even to the sub-region, for example Burkina Faso, thus becoming cross-border violence.

Belgium therefore obviously welcomes the recent progress in implementation. In particular, we are measuring the extent to which the constitutional reform process is crucial, yet delicate. Crucial, because it would pave the way to the implementation of a series of measures laid down by the Agreement. It would also allow the fundamental law to be adapted to the realities of Mali in 2019 - significantly different from those of 1992 - to benefit all Mali citizens throughout the country.

But this reform is also delicate. Belgium is aware that sometimes, to reach compromises that are satisfactory to all parties, it is better to invest time in the process and focus on a solid result, rather than impose arbitrary deadlines.

These efforts and this political courage must also extend to the Agreement's other key provisions, despite the fact, of which I am aware, that the problems and obstacles are often significant. I am thinking in particular of DDR, territorial reform and the creation of a reconstituted army as a result of an SSR process. I would like to stress the fact that this responsibility lies with the three signatory parties and I urge them to make this their urgent priority.

It is also essential to ensure that these measures, taken to implement the Peace Agreement, are long-term and therefore receive the resources required to make them sustainable.

Finally, given the key role of the Peace Agreement, which I have mentioned, I would like to stress that Belgium believes it should be possible to use all Council measures against those who impede peace. Sanctions have already been imposed and this Council should be prepared to impose more if necessary.

Mr President,

How could I not mention the situation in the centre of the country, in the regions of Koulikoro, Ségou and especially Mopti, which are experiencing violence on a daily basis?

We welcome Mali's efforts, particularly the launch of the Integrated Security Plan for the Central Regions (PSIRC) in 2017 at your initiative, Mr Prime Minister, and we also welcome your visits to the region to promote peace and reconciliation.

However, it must be noted that the situation has not improved despite all these efforts.

In addition to terrorist acts, intra-community violence has led to an alarming spiral of violence since last year. This phenomenon is worrying in a country like Mali, a historical land of diversity and peaceful coexistence between ethnic groups.

Terrorists and aggressive militias cannot be allowed to take root. I therefore encourage the Government to exercise its sovereign authority by guaranteeing the security of its population, with the strictest respect for human rights, as Mali undertook to do in January 2018 during its universal periodic review before the Human Rights Council.

In this respect, Belgium believes that the future mandate of MINUSMA should strengthen the focus on protecting civilians, particularly in the Centre and in support of the authorities.

More generally, as this Council regularly points out, the solution cannot be only security-based, although this element is essential.

The aspirations expressed regarding governance, justice, basic services and the fight against corruption deserve to be heard. Living together and refusing to stigmatise a specific ethnic group, local mediation and the fight against impunity are essential parameters for the return of State authority throughout the country.

Only Malians have the key, and the United Nations must support them in these efforts.

Mr President,

Belgium welcomes the development of an Integrated Strategic Framework by MINUSMA and the United Nations country team. It is essential that the resources available to the United Nations as a whole in Mali be used to the full, with efficiency and synergy where possible.

Similarly, Belgium remains attentive to the integrated nature of MINUSMA and encourages all pillars to work closely together.

Belgium also calls for continued close cooperation between MINUSMA and the other security presences, such as the Barkhane force, the EUTM and EUCAP missions and the G5 Sahel Joint Force. Greater operational cooperation should be considered wherever possible.

Finally, allow me to commend the efforts of all Mission personnel, in particular Special Representative Annadif, in often difficult circumstances.

Thank you.