

Mr President,

We would like to thank Equatorial Guinea for organising this debate on maritime security that we believe is important and urgent. Maritime trade is vital to the development of the global economy and all countries and, for this reason, it must be protected and secured.

With regard to Belgium, the importance of ensuring maritime security cannot be overstated. Our country has always been a hub for international maritime trade.

Several Belgian shipping and dredging companies operate all over the world and are particularly exposed to maritime crime. Equally, the importance of the Belgian ports must not be forgotten, in particular the port of Antwerp which is the largest port for commercial transactions between the European Union and the African continent. This is why the increase in piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is of serious concern.

Transnational maritime crime is a complex phenomenon with multiple facets. It relates to shortcomings in the international law of the sea and security in international waters, along with the abuse of porous coasts, a lack of regional cooperation and the perpetual roots of organised crime and terrorism. This is why Belgium is promising a comprehensive approach that takes account of the multi-dimensional nature of the phenomenon. International organised maritime crime requires measures in the fields of defence, security and justice.

In terms of the aspects of defence and security, Belgium has committed itself to several important international efforts:

- BE is involved in the ATALANTA operation which fights maritime piracy around the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the

Arabian Sea. Our country has sent a frigate four times, each time for a deployment of more than three months. Our country has also taken part in the command of this operation.

- In addition, BE has contributed to the creation of the “Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa” which sees intensive cooperation between the navy and commercial shipping.
- Every year since 2013, our country has sent a ship for logistical support in the Gulf of Guinea with a maritime capacity development mission, including for Benin, Equatorial Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands.

Belgium has also deployed many efforts in the field of justice:

- Through mutual legal assistance, new legislation and the proactive efforts of our police and legal services, several pirate leaders have been convicted in Belgium. The most well-known case is probably the conviction of Mohamed Abdi Hassan in 2013, who was behind the 2009 attack on the Belgian dredging ship, Pompei.
- Belgium was also one of the first countries to implement the “United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea” (UNCLOS) in its national legislation; very progressive legislation which provides flexible options for interrogating, arresting and detaining those involved in piracy, with close cooperation between legal personnel, the police and the navy. In addition, Belgium has developed a legal framework for the deployment of private armed guards to protect merchant vessels.

All these efforts are particularly important given the persistent impunity for maritime crimes and the lack of prosecutions against the perpetrators.

Mr President,

It is extremely important to consider the root causes of maritime crime and especially the recent upward trend in the Gulf of Guinea. The causes are as complex and varied as the phenomenon of maritime crime itself; the worsening economic conditions of a large swathe of the population and the lack of future prospects can be referred to in this context.

Furthermore, the lack of regional cooperation is often at the root of the problem. This is not just a question of political will; it is important for Member States in the regions where the risk of capacity development is highest.

Belgium is calling upon the UN and its members in the fight against illicit trafficking and asking for its support to build regional and national navies, coast guards and maritime police.

Fortunately, we are not starting from scratch. The UN and various United Nations' agencies have already made many efforts to develop the capacities of Member States who have requested assistance. For example, the UNODC has set up maritime police units in Somalia to fight piracy, illegal fishing and human trafficking and to disrupt the illegal trade in charcoal, a significant revenue source for the Al-Shabaab terrorist movement. These experiences and good practices can be used as inspiration. Belgium wants to see these efforts continued and extended to the regions that need them most.

Thank you, Mr President.