Position Paper for the United Nations Security Council

The topics before the United Nations Security Council (SC) are I. Impact of COVID-19 on Peace and Security and II. Protection of Civilians (POC) in Armed Conflict. The United Kingdom (UK) recognizes the importance of these two topics to the international community and looks forward to discussing them at the next meeting of the SC.

I.   Impact of COVID-19 on Peace and Security

SARS-CoV-2 which has started a global pandemic in 2020 has turned out to be one of the most contagious lethal viruses since at least the Spanish Flu from the 1920s. Till now COVID-19 killed at least about 4 million people and infected a lot more. Additionally, the virus affected not only people's health but also exacerbated already existing challenges such as domestic violence, global inequality, and terrorism. Many of these consequences are at least partly connected to the fact that governments, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), and even the UNs capacities to fight them were either not fully available due to restrictions or were used to contain the pandemic situation. While the containment of the pandemic is important, we cannot ignore the side effects coming with these efforts. Following this assessment, we have sought since the beginning of the pandemic to alleviate these challenges by working on possible resolutions on the national, regional, and international levels.

These efforts began with WHO resolution *COVID-19 Response* (WHA73.1) from May 2020, which stressed the importance of ensuring safe corridors for humanitarian aid. Following in June 2020 the *UN Comprehensive Response to COVID-19* was published by the Secretary-General. The document demanded affordable access to medicines, vaccines, and treatment as well as providing humanitarian aid to those areas burdened by conflicts. Accordingly, SC resolution 2532 (2020) on *The maintenance of international peace and security* called for an international ceasefire to all ongoing conflicts. If it had been implemented more rigorously this ceasefire would have enabled Member States, NGOs, and the UN to properly focus on the fight against SARS-CoV-2 in these areas. Regarding the equal distribution of vaccines, the UN and its Member States successfully implemented the *COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access* (COVAX) campaign, which managed to deliver 1 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines to middle- and low-income countries until the 15th January of 2022.

On the regional level, we can take the cooperation within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a good example of the multilateral cooperation needed in such dire times of crisis. The organization has so far carried out over 100 missions connected to the pandemic. These include for instance the transport of much-needed medical personnel or medical supplies between members of NATO.

The UK itself has so far worked tirelessly to enable equal access to vaccines. A good instance for these efforts is our big contribution to COVAX, which includes financial support of about 700 million USD and several million vaccine doses. Furthermore, we have given more than 88 million pounds in funding to the British-Swedish pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca. The vaccine producer was consequently able to rapidly develop and produce AstraZeneca, the by far most used vaccine by COVAX. Accordingly, unlike other vaccine producers, AstraZeneca sells its vaccine at production cost and licensed its patents to producers from the developing world to ramp up production.

While the increasement in the production of vaccines and other medical supplies as well as their more equal distribution seems straightforward, we also need to find ways to deliver those supplies to regions ravaged by conflicts. As already mentioned above, the ceasefire proclaimed by the SC in July 2020 was only insufficiently implemented. Additionally, sanctions may hinder humanitarian aid connected to the fight against the pandemic (such as vaccines) from getting to affected regions in the needed amount. We therefore call for a second and at least 3 months long international ceasefire. As an inducement, the sanctions for those conflict-affected regions in which all major parties of the given conflict (excluding UN-classified terrorist groups) are implementing the ceasefire shall be adapted. The adaptions need to allow all humanitarian aid missions of the UN connected to the fight against the pandemic in conflict-affected regions to access the defined areas. Accordingly, the sanction committees of the SC shall be instructed to observe the implementation of the ceasefire and report to the SC as soon as they detect violations. To make the detection more efficient, UN Funds and Programmes supplying aid in the mentioned areas shall be instructed to provide information to the sanction committees. The Secretary-General shall furthermore be invited to negotiate with parties of conflicts to encourage them to participate in the ceasefire. Ultimately, we do wish for harmonic cooperation between them and the SC.

II.   Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

For the year 2020, the UN reported over 20,000 civilians being killed or injured in conflict. These numbers are continuously high and are a big concern to the UK. Adding to the problem, in 2017 in the Republic of the Congo two UN Experts investigating alleged human rights violations against civilians

were killed. This not only shows that even UN staff is not safe but also the risks attached to trying to hold POC's mandate violators responsible. Following this assessment, the UK calls upon all members of the SC to amplify the efforts for the Protection of Civilians during times of conflict.

As the *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War* (1949) states, POC includes the humane treatment of civilians and their protection from violence and threats no matter their sex, race, or religion. Accordingly, Security Council resolution 1674 (2006) on *Protection of Civilians* declares "the deliberate targeting of civilians (…) and the commission of systematic, flagrant and widespread violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in situations of armed conflicts" as a threat to international security. Most importantly, the 2005 *World Summit Outcome Document* on states' responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other war crimes and crimes against humanity, reaffirmed by the already mentioned SC resolution 1674 (2006), introduced the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) to avoid future tragedies such as the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. This was important as it recommended integrating POC into the political process. Additionally, while giving the main responsibility to protect its population to the respective Member States, it also holds the UN and therefore the SC responsible by urging it to intervene if a Member States, deliberately or not, falls short of this responsibility. To further sharpen the measures given to the SC by the *UN-Charta* (1945) mandates for peacekeeping missions have been strengthened. More precisely, thanks to SC resolution 2474 (2019) *Protection of civilians in armed conflict – Missing persons in armed conflict* peacekeeping missions are now tasked to protect civilians, impose sanctions, and collect evidence of alleged human rights violations.

On the regional level, NATO published the *NATO Policy for the Protection of Civilians* in 2016. The aim is to implement an "overarching Policy for the Protection of Civilians (…) in NATO and NATO-led operations, missions and other Council-mandated activities". In accordance with such pledges, NATO in the past often actively acted on its principles. A good example of this is the NATO intervention in Kosovo, which stopped Serb paramilitaries from continuing to kill civilians.

We ourselves implemented the *UK Government Strategy on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict* in 2010. The strategy highlights the importance of POC "to the achievement of UK Government policy to prevent, manage and resolve conflict and to improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian system". Furthermore, it recognizes the importance of the R2P and the need for decisive and fast SC reactions to conflicts affecting huge numbers of civilians. To support the SCs efforts the UK is actively contributing to the peacekeeping missions in Somalia and Kongo, deploying a total of 573 military personnel in 2020 alone.

While the achievements of past and still ongoing peacekeeping missions are substantive, we consider it to be our responsibility to further improve their effectiveness. Taking the former *United Nations – African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur* (UNAMID) as an example we have seen that often parties of conflict are pinioning peacekeeping missions – for instance by restricting access to affected areas – to be able to continue fighting their enemies which often includes targeting civilians. This enables them to strengthen their internal sovereignty while still being able to boost their external sovereignty via the acceptance of the peacekeeping mission. Therefore, peacekeeping missions have been misused by those malign actors to consolidate their illegitimate claims through POCs mandate violations while avoiding the costs coming with a loss of external sovereignty (for instance sanctions). Accordingly, the UK wants to reform peacekeeping missions to avoid such unwanted misuse in the future. Ultimately, this reform will make peacekeeping missions more effective and our world a safer place for all of us. The key to this reform will be better communication with the respective conflict parties. If a party of conflict is guilty of pinioning peacekeepers, the SC shall first and foremost seek negotiations with those parties to avoid possible misconceptions. If those negotiations are not sufficient to enable the full functioning of the peacekeeping mission the SC shall then consider implementing additional measures. These shall include asserting public pressure, implementing sanctions, and evaluating the continuation of the respective peacekeeping missions. Sanctions shall first and foremost focus on those responsible for the pinioning and subsequent POC mandate violations (for instance political leaders). Additionally, withdrawing may sound counterproductive to some. However, since we have seen that the responsible parties heavily rely on peacekeeping missions for their external sovereignty this could prove quite effective. To enable the SC to detect if a party of conflict is guilty of pinioning a peacekeeping mission and/or violating POC mandates, the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) shall be instructed to collect relevant information. This information shall be uploaded to a new databank to keep track of the violations and enable scientific research on the topic. Besides the peacekeepers themselves, possible sources for the needed information are the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) and NGOs such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). This is crucial since as said before the goal of pinioning is to be able to continue those violations. To achieve this goal conflict parties, restrict access for peacekeepers to the regions where those violations are being committed. Peacekeepers accordingly do not have much information about those violations which is why we need to access the mentioned other sources of information.