

Impact of HIV/AIDS on International Peace and Security

07 June 2011, United Nations Security Council Chamber

***Statement by Sir Mark Lyall Grant, Permanent Representative of the UK Mission to the UN at the Security Council***

Thank you Mr President,

I congratulate you and the Gabonese delegation for bringing this issue to the Security Council today and I also salute the presence of their Excellencies the President of Nigeria, the Deputy President of South Africa and the Foreign Minister of France earlier today. I also want to thank the Secretary General and Michel Sidibe for their informative briefings. We warmly welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 1983; this resolution and today's debate sends a strong message that the HIV epidemic still has a serious impact on international peace and security. Taking action on HIV and AIDS remains a key priority for the United Kingdom. We look forward to agreeing a strong statement of commitment at this week's General Assembly High Level Meeting. The United Kingdom welcomes concerted action across the United Nations system taken to combat the HIV epidemic. We are committed to the vision of a world with zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. In support of our collective efforts to achieve targets set out in the Millennium Development Goals, the United Kingdom warmly welcomes the leadership and guidance shown by UNAIDS, including in its Outcome Framework for 2009 to 2011. The Security Council has in the past focused on minimising the chances of transmission from UN peacekeepers to local populations. And we have called for greater focus on implementing HIV and AIDS awareness programmes within national militaries. We have seen how Member States providing troops to UN Peacekeeping operations have in the past decade made concerted efforts to provide sufficient prevention, treatment, care and support to their personnel. We should be proud of significant improvements, but we should also remain concerned at the high number of fatalities and repatriations from HIV- and AIDS-related illnesses among UN peacekeepers deployed overseas – today UN peacekeepers are more likely to die from illness than from activities undertaken to fulfil their mandate. We owe it to these men and women who risk their lives in the pursuit of international peace to understand why this should be the case, and then to do something about it.

Mr President,

Tackling HIV and AIDS among peacekeeping personnel is essential. But both peacekeepers and the communities they are protecting are susceptible to HIV and AIDS. As our understanding of the HIV epidemic has developed, so we have together seen considerable improvements in the methods we use to tackle it. We used to fear that during the fog of war itself, the unchecked spread of HIV and AIDS could have a debilitating effect on peace and security. We now understand that the risk of infection can be even greater in communities emerging from violent conflict. United Nations peacekeeping operations — with their military, police and civilian elements — are well placed to engage with vulnerable communities that have been affected by conflict in order to ensure that the epidemic does not gain a foothold among them. We believe that we should see UN peacekeepers as positive agents of change in our efforts to combat the spread of HIV and AIDS in post-conflict societies. We encourage peacekeeping operations to incorporate HIV awareness in the execution of their mandates; such activity might involve awareness training for demobilised combatants, or HIV education programmes pursued in tandem with initiatives combating sexual and gender-based violence. The United Kingdom welcomes the outreach to local communities already seen in a number of UN peacekeeping operations. Peacekeeping Operations can affect real change on the ground.

Mr President,

In recent months we have discussed in this Chamber ways to combat the disturbing incidence of sexual violence used as a weapon against vulnerable communities. We have heard how sexual exploitation and abuse has the ability to prey on those parts of the community most vital for longer term peace and stability. The risk of HIV infection - the burden the disease can place on the very fabric of local communities - is an additional horror from which these communities require protection. We have discussed at length whether the spread of HIV and AIDS constitutes a threat to international peace and security. The United Kingdom believes that we have an obligation to such communities to consider, from time to time, whether the Security Council has a

complementary contribution to make in our overall efforts to combat the spread of HIV and AIDS. And it's for this reason that we thank you Mr President for bringing this important issue to the attention of the Council today. I thank you.