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**SPEAKING NOTES**

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**OF GHANA TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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**THE SECURITY SITUATION IN WEST AFRICA AND THE SAHEL:**  
**GHANA'S TENURE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL**

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Kings College, London  
United Kingdom

**Prof Linda McKie, Executive Dean for the Faculty of Social and Public Policy,**

**Distinguished Invited Guests**

**Members of the Junior Common Room**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

Let me begin by acknowledging the presence of His Excellency Papa Owusu-Ankomah, Ghana's venerable High Commissioner to the Court of St. James, who has been gracious with his time this afternoon and accompanied me to this lecture.

I bring you the warm greetings of the President of Ghana, His Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, who expressed interest in this lecture when I recently spoke to him and provided for myself and my team, excellent leadership and support during Ghana's successful tenure on the Security Council.

I also thank Dr. Mark Langan who first triggered our interest to come to this College for such a discussion. The presence in this room of many distinguished persons and friends, creates an invigorating atmosphere for this afternoon's lecture and interaction on the security situation in West Africa and the Sahel, within the context of Ghana's recent tenure on the United Nations Security Council.

I am equally grateful for the excellent organisation and arrangements made for this lecture, which reflect the best traditions of this College that has burnished its reputation over its long history as a place for academic excellence and life solutions.

**Ghana: Influence, values and orientation**

As students of international politics, I believe you do not need an elaborate introduction to Ghana. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that as the first African country to obtain independence from colonial rule in what some term as sub-Saharan Africa, my country has always felt a historical responsibility to lead consequential African causes.

As is well known, Ghana led the decolonisation struggles of Africa and fought for the integration of the continent, as well as its development, including most recently through the support it has generously given for hosting the Secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement and the operationalisation of its trading architecture and Pan-African payment system. My country firmly holds that it is important to demonstrate the best capabilities of what modern African States can do for the benefit of their people.

Against this background, it should not be surprising that as early as three (3) years after independence, Ghana in 1960 committed troops to the United Nations Operations in the Congo and subsequently to other United Nations and regional peacekeeping operations. Today, Ghana is one of the 10 largest troop and police contributing countries and, over the years, our resolve to support the maintenance of international peace and security has not diminished and neither has Ghana's support for multilateralism.

Indeed, it is a long-held belief of Ghana that through the pursuit of effective multilateralism lies an opportunity for all of us to prosper, and in the preservation of the collective security architecture organised by the Charter of the United Nations rests the safety and security of all nations.

During Ghana's past membership of the United Nations Security Council (1962 - 63, 1986 – 87 and 2006 - 07), including the most recent (2022 – 23), we have been strengthened in our convictions and reinforced in our resolve to make an even bigger contribution to the peace and stability of our world.

As an African developing country, Ghana has always been deliberate in her international choices and conscious of the connection between the country's global responsibilities and her national aspirations. When Ghana sought to be a member of the United Nations Security Council, therefore, like most countries, we scanned our neighbourhood and updated our assessments of the global security threats, especially for Africa, which accounts for about 60 percent of the agenda of the Security Council.

Our knowledge of our region and the continental needs, led Ghana to prioritise the countering of terrorism and violent extremism, the resolution of the growing incidence of maritime piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea, and the mainstreaming of integrated action for conflict prevention, among its key goals.

## **The Sahel and West Africa**

In looking at West Africa and the Sahel, I will like to underscore that while this part of Africa has always been a beautiful region, that beauty is presently marred by the challenging and difficult circumstances of the Sahel.

In a lecture such as this, I cannot go deeply into the history of the Sahel, but to properly understand the Sahel, a word that is derived from Arabic to mean coast or shore, the historical context is also important.

The Sahel is a particularly complicated place. It comprises the 2,200 miles corridor stretching from Southern Mauritania, through the southern parts of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad right through to Sudan and Eritrea. Even as it connects the Atlantic to the Red Sea, it is also the transition zone between the Sahara Desert and North Africa, and the rest of Africa. The region reflects the legacy of the ancient interactions between the caravans of the Arabic and Islamic world and Africans, as well as the boundary of the northward advancement of European colonialism and Christian influence from the South.

The Sahel also has one of the harshest climatic conditions anywhere around the world, and many of its large swathes of land, particularly those closest to the Sahara, have had little State control for decades and suffer the worst incidence of the failing economic performance that most of the countries of the Sahel endure

due to depressed growth, adverse demographic dynamics, and governance deficits among others.

In recent times, fuelled by climate change and conflict, there have been massive displacements in the Sahel with very dire humanitarian consequences. As reported by the UNHCR, 4.2 million people have been displaced across the region, 3.7 are internally displaced, and, in 2022, 10 million children in the Sahel were in dire need of humanitarian assistance. One would therefore be right in saying that the challenges of the Sahel have come about as a result of interconnected and cascading crises in governance, security and development.

Notably, in recent times, what has headlined the challenges of the Sahel has been the surge and persistence of terrorism and insurgency, especially in the epicentres of Liptako-Gourma and the Lake Chad Basin. In Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger we have witnessed the existential fight against terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen, Ansar Dine and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara that have global affiliation with Al Qaeda and ISIS, and who seek occasionally, but deliberately, to test their leverage in littoral States such as Cote d'Ivoire, Togo and Benin. In North East Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, Boko Haram, the purveyors of death and destruction are another notorious group. In 2022, the Sahel alone accounted for 43% of global terrorism-related deaths and this situation is unacceptable!!!

While some place strong emphasis on the ill-advised approach of the Western nations that overthrew the regime of the late Colonel Gaddafi of Libya in 2011, as a proximate trigger for the instability in the Sahel, it is by no means the only driver. However, the importance of this factor is that it unravelled a delicate web of influence and contradictions that were held together in a very opaque but effective manner while the Gaddafi regime existed.

As we surmise from the operations of insurgents and terrorists in the Sahel and indeed, several parts of Africa, behind the façade of their religious or ideological aims, lies the brutal reality of their transnational criminal enterprise and the looting of natural resources.

In the midst of the growing influence of terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel, ad hoc regional responses have been quick but not always effective, as initiatives such as the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the MNJTF have demonstrated commitment and resolve but lacked the finances and logistics required to be able to sustain robust responses to the threats posed by insurgents. The Accra Initiative, which is spearheaded by Ghana, is an additional effort to preserve the stability of the West African littoral States through the regular exchange of intelligence and the simultaneous staging of periodic joint military exercises around the borders of the member countries to serve as a disruption and deterrence to terrorist networks, based on intelligence-led detections.

In reviewing what has gone wrong in resolving the challenges of the Sahel, one cannot ignore the emergence of *coup d'états* in West Africa. Since the first Malian coup in May 2020, West Africa's solidarity has been breached. The subsequent coup in August 2021, followed by Guinea in September 2021, Burkina Faso in January 2022, and Niger in July 2023 has destroyed the painstaking efforts that were being made to find a common regional response to the insecurity in West Africa. This has particularly affected the fight against terrorism in the Sahel region, which, in Africa, has the highest number of countries under military rule since 2020. This speaks to the peculiar challenges of the region and the special risk it poses for the continent of Africa and global peace and stability.

Unfortunately despite external security assistance from the European Union and the robust support of the French government for the Sahelian region since 2014, through operation Serval and then Barkhane, such efforts have not always been appreciated or always trusted and the only United Nations peace operation in the Sahel, MINUSMA (the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali), was also seen by the new leaders of Mali as unhelpful following decades of gaps between the expectations of the population and the mandate. Constrained by its tools, MINUSMA until its closure in June last year, focused on intermediate goals, including the protection of civilians and the preservation of the space for dialogue, even in the face of asymmetric attacks by terrorist groups and insurgents who increasingly resorted to improvised explosive devices and other non-conventional warfare tactics.



At the same time that insecurity in the Sahel has been increasing, the maritime domain of the coastal States of West Africa has also been turbulent. For instance, while there has been growing incidents of insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea for some period now, the surge of piracy and armed robbery at sea between 2020 and 2022 made it the most dangerous shipping route and led to substantial economic loss (of almost US\$1.9 billion) and a disruptive influence on trade that significantly hurt the interest of the coastal States.

Moreover, the crimes at sea portend risks of a convergence of interest between the sea-based pirates and the land-based terrorists who have always had an avowed interest in establishing a caliphate from the Sahara to the coast and seeking direct access for logistical supplies for their nefarious activities.

### **Ghana's tenure on the UNSC**

Against the backdrop of the dire situation that I have recounted, it was clear to Ghana that our membership of the Security Council should be an important opportunity to impress upon my colleagues and the Council at large, the need for the United Nations to change its approach to peace operations in Africa if it were to retain relevance and credibility. We also deemed it important to ensure that the Council fully embraced, on the basis of mutual respect, a closer working relationship with the African Union and the sub-regional organisations such as ECOWAS, SADC and others that have always demonstrated a willingness to take on the heavy burden required to deploy troops for enforcement operations in resolving the intractable conflicts on the continent.

As most of you would know, United Nations peacekeeping cannot be deployed for peace enforcement because by its principles, peacekeeping requires the consent of the parties, peacekeepers must be impartial, and there is no scope for the use of force, except in the limited instance of defending the mandate and the protection of civilians. African Union peace support operations on the other hand do not have similar limitations and moreover have doctrinal adaptability to addressing the complex challenges on the ground.

In this respect, Ghana took the position that to achieve our goal of assisting the African Union and its regional economic communities to have the resources required to undertake robust peace enforcement operations against terrorists and insurgents, it was important to mobilise the support and understanding of all Member States.

Accordingly, we undertook an informal discussion with members of the Security Council and others using an Arria Formula meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2022, on the topic “Collective Security through burden-sharing: Strengthening Regional Arrangements for the Maintenance of international Peace and Security”. That meeting showed that while there was broad support within the United Nations for adequate, predictable, and sustainable financing for African-led Peace Support Operations, there were still significant reservations from some important members of the Council. We gave high-level political orientation to this priority, when during Ghana’s Presidency of the Security Council in November 2022, President Akufo-

Addo chaired a debate on 10<sup>th</sup> November on “Counterterrorism in Africa – An imperative for Peace, Security and Development”.

The consensual adoption of a Presidential Statement during China’s Presidency of the Security Council in August 2022, deepened the space for further engagements, when the Council in its Statement requested the United Nations Secretary-General to present a report by 30 April 2023 on options for the financing of AU peace support operations, including through UN assessed contributions. I must perforce at this stage acknowledge the support of Mr. Antonio Guterres, who has been a strong advocate of adequate and predictable funding to support robust African peace enforcement operations. Of course, the 2015 HIPPO report had also signalled the need for peace enforcement but turning a huge ship at sea, as peacekeeping is, is no easy task.

When the Security Council met on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023 to consider the Secretary-General’s report on the options of support for African peace support operations, at a time that the African Union had also that February endorsed its Consensus Paper on AU PSO Financing, it was clear to Ghana that we were closer to achieving what had not been possible for many years. Working closely with our African colleagues on the Council, Gabon and Mozambique, we set out an internal roadmap for the ultimate ambition.

Despite many distractions, challenges, and setbacks, as well as the fears of some, on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2023, Ghana, leading the A3, delivered what many have described as the most consequential resolution that affects the way peace operations would be carried out on the African continent.

Resolution 2719 established the framework by which the Security Council would consider on a case-by-case basis requests from the African Union for mandates for African-led Peace Support Operations under Chapter VII and VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, using United Nations assessed contributions.

What resolution 2719 delivered were three (3) key changes:

- First, for the first time, the UN has committed itself to provide funding on a systematic basis for up to 75% of the budget of AU led-Peace Support Operations with the requirement that they conform with agreed human rights compliance frameworks, financial standards, and oversight mechanisms.
- Secondly, that the era of peace enforcement, essentially for countering insurgencies and terrorism, has arrived, and this would be commanded and controlled by Africa to resolve the evolving, complex and asymmetric conflicts we are witnessing in the difficult operating environments on our continent.

- Thirdly, that the United Nations and African Union would work more closely together to jointly plan, analyse, assess, and mandate peace support operations on the African continent based on the principle of subsidiarity and complementarity.

What is now required is the further elaboration of modalities by the United Nations and the African Union for the implementation of the framework resolution and the actualisation of a mandate for a specific mission.

On the part of the African Union, we still need to do more work to consolidate its capacity for the management of peace support operations now that there is greater likelihood of more African Union PSOs coming up rather than new UN Peace operations, and refining the working arrangements between the AU and the RECs to establish clear responsibilities and the allocation expected actions for peace support operations on the continent of Africa, within the framework of the African Peace and Security Architecture. An MoU is already under discussion between the AU and the RECs in this regard.

The engagement with the RECs is particularly important because they dominate the 10 AU PSOs and ad hoc security initiatives on the continent of Africa and possess a strong leverage and experience in dealing with some of the prevailing crises. They have been effective as first responders and have agency as we see in the MNJTF, the Accra Initiative and the erstwhile G5 Sahel Joint Force or the SADC Mission in

DRC or even SAMIM in Mozambique. The AU on its part has been prominent with AMISOM/ ATMIS and UNAMID prior to that.

We therefore hope that with the framework resolution in place and despite the three (3) Sahelian Alliance States indicating their strong intention to leave ECOWAS, because of their disagreement with the long-standing values of the Community, the space for working together on shared interests would be preserved to defeat the growing incidence of terrorism and insurgencies in the Sahel using the new resources that resolution 2719 brings to the table.

While serving on the Council, Ghana also remained mindful of the need to instigate enhanced action on conflict prevention especially with the Sahel as our guiding reference. We did our best to highlight this priority through our signature event chaired by Honourable Shirley Ayokor Botchwey on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022 and organised an informal Arria Formula meeting on “Reinforcing the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda for a peaceful and stable Africa”. In our national statements at Security Council, both for formal and informal meetings we took every opportunity to highlight this priority.

When it comes to the situation of the youth in Africa, we believe that the demographic dynamics on the continent should compel all of us to make the youth a part of the solution and not exclude them to become victims of radicalised and extremist groups. The choices of the youth in the Sahel have usually been bleak –

one can either stay and suffer the dire consequences of insecurity and hunger, traverse the Sahara and the Mediterranean to Europe with all its attendant risks, or join the terrorist groups and see how best one can survive until the State security apparatus gets you. None of these choices are good and we should offer the youth a better option.

We must therefore mobilise support to address the legitimate needs of the youth for skills development, innovation and employment. We are particularly happy that at the instance of Ghana, the Security Council agreed to include the Youth, Peace and Security agenda as a standing item during the annual consultations it undertakes with the African Union Peace and Security Council. This new prioritisation of the youth has the potential to attract resources towards policy proposals and actions for addressing the concerns of the youth in Africa including those in the Sahel.

In the ongoing discussions of the Summit of the Future in New York Ghana would continue to negotiate strongly for a responsible youth focus in the Pact for the Future, and the provision of ample space for the full range of elements necessary for conflict prevention, which rightly should be a priority as expressed by the Secretary-General in his policy brief on the New Agenda for Peace. As we often mention in Ghana's statements on peace and security, a dollar spent on prevention equals many millions not spent in resolving violent conflicts. Indeed, with the multilateral order in a state of stress, well-resourced regional early warning mechanisms and the enhancement of the Secretary-General's good Offices as well

as the deployment of Special Political Missions would be critical in sustaining the tenuous stability we enjoy.

One of the difficult moments for Ghana was when the Security Council took the decision in June 2023 to close the United Nations Mission in Mali at the request of the military leaders of that country. Subsequently, through the negative vote of the Russian Federation, the sanctions regime that was supporting the Algiers Peace and Reconciliation agreement between the government and the Movements in the North was also terminated when it was not renewed. As we all know, the transitional authorities of Mali for reasons best known to themselves, early this year denounced the peace agreement and the role of Algeria in the mediation.

The closure of MINUSMA affected the limited support package that the United Nations was providing to the G5 Sahel Joint Force and destroyed its last standing leg as well as its reporting relations with the Security Council. With the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from the G5 Sahel, that operation has been dissolved, although the future of the Sahel Alliance States (AES) that the three (3) countries have formed is also uncertain.

Linked to the concern over the dissolution of the Joint Force has been the presence in the Sahel of Russian military contractors – the Wagner Group, now labelled as the African Corps. This development and its accompanying geopolitical rivalry have placed the counter-terrorism efforts of the Sahel into what I term as “active non-



cooperation” and also opened up spaces for mid-sized powers to play out their influence in the region, some of which do not coincide with the present efforts for peace. On our part as Africans, we have always been very sensitive to foreign military presence on our continent and as the leaders of Africa reiterated during a Summit in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea in May 2022, all such foreign military presence should leave the continent. This holds true for Mali as it does Sudan and Libya.

A good thing however about the adoption of resolution 2719 is that, with the funding to be provided for African peace support operations, the concerns of some of these countries who are desperate to find a solution to their rapidly deteriorating security situation at any cost, including through transactional relationships, as we have seen with private military contractors or mercenaries, can also be resolved.

To address the concerns of insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, as soon as Ghana went onto the Security Council in January 2022, we began work with Norway on getting through a resolution that would once again bring international attention and support for action against piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea. The previous Security Council resolution on the subject, adopted in 2012, resolution 2039, spawned positive consequential effects such as the creation of the Yaoundé architecture, the Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships, and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa.

Ahead of the tenth anniversary of the Code of Conduct, it was therefore important to put the periscope once again on this growing concern. Initially, we made good progress, but by 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022, when the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine, the scope for engagement shrunk and one delegation also raised serious concern over a paragraph relating to the applicability of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in combatting piracy. It took us five (5) months of patient diplomacy and engagement in New York, in capitals and over the phones to gain consensus for the adoption of what became Security Council resolution 2634.

UNSC resolution 2634 emphasises the need to criminalize piracy and armed robbery at sea, and to investigate, prosecute or extradite perpetrators of such crimes, as well as those who finance them. The resolution also encourages bilateral and regional partners to provide help to combat this issue through legal and operational support. It has contributed to the strengthening of international partnerships for addressing the concern of piracy as can be seen from the trending down of the incidents from 2021 when it was described as the world's hotspot to the declining incidents that begun to be seen by late 2022.

Before going into my conclusions, let me quickly circle back to the issue of the epidemic of *coup d'états* in Africa but this time focused on the reaction of the Security Council to such coups. Between 2022 and 2023, while on the Security Council, there were several coups in Africa, some successful and others attempted. What we found out, to our regret, was that while the African Union and most of the RECs have a high normative framework against the incidence of coups, the

Security Council always found it challenging to follow the lead of Ghana and the other A3 members in issuing condemnations against such coups. The dissonance of multipolarity and the prevalence of geopolitical tensions played a role, but it was nonetheless a major area of disappointment. Unfortunately, Ghana run out of time before we were able to facilitate informal discussions on this matter among Council members, but it is a venture that we encourage other African members of the Council to pursue, as military involvement in politics have neither delivered the security promised nor the developments hoped for. The justifications for the military takeovers are flawed and the conditions their governance have created have become a danger to the peace.

We therefore have to continue the engagement to get these countries that have experienced unconstitutional changes of government back to constitutional order and their militaries returned to their Republican role so as to have a better focus to reign in the forces of terror that seek to decimate the populations of the Sahelian region and beyond.

## **Conclusions**

Finally, let me share brief reflections on Ghana's two-year tenure on the Security Council. It was tasking, challenging but worth every minute of the journey. It begun almost, with the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine and the last meeting for 2023 ended with that. Towards the end of our membership also, the intractable situation of Palestine worsened, following the horrific 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023 attacks by Hamas. The response of Israel has however been disproportionate and the civilian

toll, especially on children and women is unacceptable. Both the Ukrainian and Gaza wars, with their heavy civilian casualties and destruction, is deeply worrying and demonstrate in their own unique ways the inadequacy of the Security Council in addressing the most disturbing conflicts around the world. The necessity to make determined and urgent efforts for the reform of the Security Council and other global institutions cannot be emphasised enough.

An area of small regret during our membership of the Security Council was that for two years, working first with Norway, and then with Switzerland, Ghana could not get the Council to unanimously agree to a Presidential Statement to support the work of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel because some delegations recanted previous agreed language relating to Climate, Peace and Security, despite the common understanding of climate change being a threat multiplier and an aggravating factor for instability and conflict in the Sahel.

Despite the inadequacies and regrets, let me assure you that Ghana is satisfied with its recent tenure on the Security Council. We moved the dial on many issues and shifted the narrative on some important areas such as peace operations. However, I can understand if there are some who also say: 'but when you were on the Council no war in Africa was stopped or fully resolved and that conflicts continue in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger as well as in DRC, CAR, Somalia, and Sudan'?

That query is deserving of an answer. Nonetheless, it ignores the reality of life which is that while it may take a day to start a war it takes several days to resolve it. That question also ignores the success of the African-led approach taken on the Security Council, which helped to ameliorate the conflict between Tigray and the Federal Government of Ethiopia. Yes, we believe that while it would have been more desirable to have a concrete outcome of peace while on the Council, it was also necessary to sow powerful seeds that can blossom into peace in the future. The adoption of resolution 2719 and 2634, provide an important basis for effective international responses to the threats posed to peace and security on the African continent by terrorists, insurgents and pirates.

Despite my strong focus on military or kinetic solutions to the challenges of the Sahel, the impression should not be carried away that Ghana believes that all the security concerns in Africa look like nails and require a hammer. Indeed, Ghana remains a strong supporter of the centrality of an African-led political strategy as a key component of any mandate for peace enforcement operations.

We also continue to advocate for the completion of the processes of the High-Level Independent Assessment of the Security, Development and Governance Situation in the Sahel, previously led by former President Issifou of Niger and stalled by his implication in developments in his country. In a previous conversation with the Secretary-General, he has assured me of his own commitment to that process and the nomination of another distinguished African to complete the process.

Finally, let me make a few proposals on how we can go forward with addressing the challenges of the Sahel.

- First, the problems of the Sahel cannot be resolved without the active involvement of the Sahelian countries, but also left on their own, it would be difficult for the insecurity of the Sahel to be addressed. This therefore requires a new partnership driven by the opportunity that an African-led peace enforcement provides to enhance capabilities and renew actions on the ground against the terrorist and insurgents.
- Secondly, the insecurity of the Sahel has been driven by many factors including exclusion, marginalisation, poverty and poor governance among others. Mindful of the tension between sovereign preserves and global expectations and actions, the African Union and ECOWAS should play the important role they only can, in support of the efforts of the struggling States to redress their national situations, relying on regional normative frameworks and arrangements of cooperation that are deemed less intrusive and more friendly by the governments and populations of the Sahelian countries in the spirit of African Solutions for African Problems.
- Thirdly we need to reboot development in the Sahel. The fragilities have always been many in this region, but in the post-COVID period, they have

been laid threadbare, and the erosion of sovereign trust has shown the strong causality between development and stability. We therefore appeal, especially to Western capitals to come around the idea that the billions of dollars spent on peacekeeping missions can be frontloaded in building resilience in these fragile States, in instigating development in poor countries, and in promoting good governance and respect for human rights. While this is a difficult proposition, success at conflict prevention is cheaper for everyone and has the potential to drive shared global prosperity.

- In closing, let me leave you with these words: “The best wars are the ones never fought and the worst peace is the one not strived for”. All of us need to make the extra effort required to prevent conflicts and sustain peace as a global public good.

I thank you all for your attention.