

**STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON MINUSMA**

**MINISTRY OF DEFENCE**

**9 DECEMBER 2020**

**INTRODUCTION**

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on UK support for the UN stabilisation mission in Mali which supports the peace process, helping to counter the spread of instability in the Sahel. This month 300 UK troops, led by the Light Dragoons, will complete the deployment to the United Nations mission in Mali, MINUSMA.

Over recent years Mali has become one of the most unstable countries on the African continent. Terrorist aggression and conflict between communities has been on the rise and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (known as MINUSMA) is mandated to support the Malian people in their effort to secure sustainable peace, to support the reestablishment of state authority, protect civilians and, to promote and protect human rights in Mali.

By the 22nd December, the majority of our 300 UK Armed Forces will have deployed to MINUSMA, and completed quarantine. Our contingent consists of 250 troops from the Light Dragoons, the Royal Anglian Regiment and other attached personnel, and a further 50 forming a National Support Element. They will soon begin operations in Mali, joining some 60 nations contributing to the UN mission.

The UK has committed to a three-year deployment to MINUSMA, with a review to be held at the 18-month point. UK personnel will deploy on 6-month operational tours. Accordingly, the first deployment, led by the Light Dragoons will be replaced by a second contingent led by the Royal Anglian Regiment in summer 2021.

This government takes its responsibility, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council seriously. Our deployment to MINUSMA reflects our continued commitment and growing leadership in multilateralism and international peace and security. Our nation has a proud peacekeeping track record, as we demonstrate Global Britain in practice. This deployment builds on a successful multi-year commitment to the UN mission in South Sudan where UK peacekeepers were responsible for building hospitals, bridges and roads.

**REGIONAL RATIONALE**

In the Sahel Region, over 15 million people need humanitarian assistance, 11 million are food insecure; and over 3 million are displaced because of the conflict. As with many conflicts around the world, women and girls in Mali are disproportionately affected by the continuing instability. The Sahel is the worst region on earth to be an adolescent girl seeking 12 years of quality education – accounting for an astonishing 7% of the world's population of primary-aged girls who are out of school. By 2030 almost 1 in 5 women (aged 20-39) who have no education in Africa will be in the Sahel.

Mali is at the forefront of countries in the Sahel affected by instability – terrorism and conflict is sharply on the rise. Mali has already registered more deaths due to

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violence this year, than any previous year in the past decade. This violence is costing lives, hindering development across one of the poorest countries in the world, and spreading instability to the wider region.

International action is the right thing to do to from a humanitarian perspective, but history shows us that international efforts to restore law, order and security is also the best way to prevent unstable regions becoming safe-havens for terrorist groups. It is in the UK's interests to act.

Terrorist violence and conflict has risen sharply over recent years and the permissive environment provided by the current instability in Mali and the wider region creates the space for developing threats. This harms UK interests and also those of our allies and partners, especially France and others in Europe. It is in all our interests that we work together to protect civilians and help build a safer, healthier and more prosperous future for the region.

Our contribution will provide critical capabilities to the UN mission at a vital time. We can have genuine impact on the mission's overall approach, to help reduce the spread of conflict and insecurity, contribute to the protection of civilians, and support Mali's pathway to sustainable peace.

This deployment is a vital part of our work in the Sahel to build stability and bolster conflict resolution, improve the humanitarian response and strengthen partnerships between the international community and regional governments in responding to the crisis.

### **THE UK MISSION**

We will be joining a UN Mission led by a civilian Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and an international peacekeeping force of over 60 nations, led by the Swedish UN Mission Force Commander, Lt Gen Dennis Gyllensporre (pronounced GILL-ENN-SPORE).

It is a truly global collaboration with contributions being made by our western allies, including both Germany and France, and with African nations contributing large contingents to support their region's stability.

The initial objective of the first rotation of troops will be to understand the operating environment so that they are best placed to support the UN Mission going forward.

The UK task force will be under the command of the Light Dragoons' Commanding Officer. Armed with cutting edge technology, our troops will provide a specialist reconnaissance capability which aims to improve the mission's overall performance, particularly in protecting civilians. Our contingent will offer crucial support to the mission to better understand threats and to shape the mission's response – enabling intelligence-led operations across the mission's mandate.

Our MINUSMA deployment complements existing commitments we have in the region. This includes helicopter support to Operation BARKHANE, the French-led counter-terrorism initiative in Africa's Sahel Region. Although these two missions are complementary, they are distinct in their objectives and tactics. Our direct experience in Mali will also help develop our world class training for peacekeeping that we provide each year in Africa. We aim for more security challenges to be African-led and mentoring and training others helps us achieve that goal.

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### **UK CONTRIBUTION TO UN PEACEKEEPING**

Mr Speaker, the UK believes in peacekeeping as a way to stabilise and contain conflict. Our contribution to MINUSMA – alongside our enduring commitment to UN peacekeeping operations in Cyprus and Somalia, and the staff officers we have deployed in six other operations – is the UK playing its part in a multinational effort to contain the worst consequences of violent conflict and help build confidence in the political processes underway supporting longer term peace and reconciliation.

UN peacekeeping operations are currently protecting over 125 million of the world's most vulnerable people across 13 different missions, consisting of over 98,000 troops, police and civilians. Combined, they provide a critical tool in containing and reducing conflict in the world's most fragile environments.

To function effectively, UN peacekeeping relies on contributions from its members, especially from more experienced militaries like the UK. Our deployment is a highly capable contingent able to support stronger mission performance and longer-term reform.

The UK's military contribution to UN peacekeeping in Mali is a clear illustration of how our defence and security capabilities can contribute to the UK's role as a force for good in the world, working hand in hand to support this Government's development and diplomatic agenda

### **CONCLUSION**

Mr Speaker, it is important to stress that deploying to MINUSMA does not come without risk. However, our forces are world class, and we have provided them with the right training, equipment and preparation to succeed in a complex operating environment. We have taken steps to mitigate the risks and I am confident that our troops will make the UK proud by having a strong impact on the ground in Mali. They will bolster our standing in the United Nations and will help us in our endeavours to make the UN and its peacekeeping missions as effective as possible.

As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, we are fully committed to supporting the UN's peacekeeping missions around the world, and to encourage these to be as effective as possible. Our MINUSMA deployment is a key part of that commitment. And as the Prime Minister recently noted, our uplift in defence spending should allow the UK to shape international security and provide a stronger contribution to Global Britain.

I commend this statement to the House.

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