

**STATEMENT BY ZAHIR TANIN, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
SECRETARY-GENERAL AND HEAD OF UNMIK**

SECURITY COUNCIL BRIEFING ON UNMIK

NEW YORK, 21 OCTOBER 2020

Mr. President,

Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

During these past seven months, Kosovo has persevered through multiple and overlapping challenges, starting with the ongoing worldwide pandemic. Since it first began in Kosovo in March, the COVID-19 crisis has moved through different phases. The initial response involved stringent measures and lockdowns, but later moved toward a more relaxed approach prioritising economic recovery. The pandemic itself has had severe spikes as well as stable periods, and its spread is now again increasing. While the government of Prime Minister Kurti maintained very strict lockdown measures for most of its short tenure during the pandemic, these were relaxed during his government's last days. The succeeding government led by Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti continued this approach, relaxing many of the strict measures previously in force, focusing in particular on economic recovery. Both governments faced the reality that the public health infrastructure in Kosovo was insufficient and underequipped to respond to the rapidly spreading pandemic.

This affected all aspects of the response, from hospitalisation to treatment, from testing to tracing, and the implementation of any other preventive measures.

However, it is important to emphasise that the health care system, and front line health workers in particular, have worked heroically to make the best use of limited resources.

The socio-economic consequences have been severe and are not limited to the measurable macro-economy. Both Kosovo's formal and informal economic sectors have undergone a severe shock, particularly affecting youth and their education, as well as women and vulnerable communities. The psychological fallout is also widely felt across society.

Certainly, Kosovo was not left alone in its battle against the pandemic. The international community came forward to strengthen Kosovo's professional and institutional capacity, and to mitigate the pandemic's social and economic impact. During September, the European Commission approved a EUR 138 million financial assistance package, of which EUR 50 million was specifically directed to the COVID-19 response. These funds have augmented other material support, financial aid, loans, and expertise which have been extended to Kosovo by the European Union, the World Bank, the World Health Organization, and bilaterally.

We in UNMIK, alongside the UN Kosovo Team of Agencies, Funds and Programmes, have also significantly adapted our activities to help meet the unprecedented challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our focus has been on providing direct support to people, institutions and communities in the framework of the Mission's strategic support for dialogue and trust-building in Kosovo. Projects have been tailored to contribute to the response to COVID-19. The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on already vulnerable populations is of particular concern. There has been an increase in the number of security incidents reported against vulnerable and non-majority communities during the period of pandemic restrictions. Significant increases in cases of domestic violence and violence against children have also been reported.

Mr. President,

The removal of the reciprocity measures upon goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina by the government of Prime Minister Hoti created an impetus for restarting the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. This was accompanied by the appointment of the European Union's new dedicated Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák, and a high-level meeting hosted by the President of France and the Chancellor of Germany on 10 July, leading to the official resumption of the

EU-facilitated dialogue. The US government also launched new initiatives for improving Pristina-Belgrade relations, which culminated in a meeting hosted by the President of the United States in September, during which agreements were signed in the economic and other spheres. I commend Belgrade and Pristina for resuming the negotiation process and call on them to maintain, despite challenges and differences of views, a constructive dialogue process. The recent meetings in Brussels and Washington demonstrate the potential for progress when international resources are combined with leadership on the ground to move difficult issues forward.

Of course, the most important conditions to be met in order for negotiations to succeed are political unity, strong commitment and good will among leaders, both in Pristina and in Belgrade, and sustained international support. We welcome the renewed engagement and encourage both sides to find common ground to overcome disputed issues and reach a comprehensive normalization agreement.

Mr. President,

Alongside the UN's 75th anniversary, this year we also mark the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and

Security. I stress again the importance of women's meaningful participation in the peace process at all levels, particularly in the ongoing dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, as part of ensuring the broader representation of different sectors of society, including youth and communities. Such an approach is central to achieving results and helps to ensure that they correspond to the real needs of people.

Mr. President,

Since my last briefing to the Council, important steps were made to advance the investigative and judicial processes of the Kosovo Specialist Prosecutor's Office and Kosovo Specialist Chambers. In June, the Special Prosecutor's Office announced the filing of indictments against President Hashim Thaçi, and against the leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo, Kadri Veseli, alongside others whose names were not made public. President Thaçi has indicated his intention to step down from office if and when his indictment is publicly confirmed by pre-trial judges. In September, arrests were carried out pursuant to warrants and transfer orders issued by the Chambers. Three individuals concerned are now in pre-trial detention, with one facing war crimes charges. The two others are being held on suspicion of intimidation, retaliation, violating the secrecy of proceedings, and unlawful disclosure of protected information. Their arrests followed publication of

allegedly leaked prosecution-related documents, which also were claimed to have included some names of possible witnesses.

Some of the public reactions in Kosovo to the June announcement of the higher profile indictments have been concerning, including attempts to question the legitimacy of the Specialist Chambers and accusations that it is politically motivated. Unfortunately, some political leaders have not always helped to rectify these false narratives.

As is evident to all members of this Chamber and the international community, the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Prosecutor's Office are integral parts of the Kosovo justice system, with mandates crucial to Kosovo's rule of law aspirations, and to Kosovo's future. I therefore take the opportunity to urge the leaders to redouble their efforts to counter misinformation, and to ensure that the Prosecution and Chambers proceedings receive unambiguous institutional and political support essential for strengthening the rule of law and long-term stability in Kosovo.

Mr. President,

Ruling by a slim majority, the current government led by Prime Minister Hoti is contending with significant parliamentary opposition, as well as widely diverging priorities among coalition partners. Having been in office for barely over 100 days, constant disagreements among its constituent parties, and difficulty reaching compromises, have hampered and delayed its responses in the critical areas that I have highlighted.

Mr. President,

In the now 75-year history of the United Nations, never has the need for global solidarity and international cooperation been as clearly demonstrated as today. The COVID-19 pandemic, the geo-political and ethnic tensions expressed in conflicts across the globe, as well as globally increasing inequality, are mutually and negatively reinforcing trends. For places such as Kosovo – still suffering the consequences of past conflict – **cooperation; unity of political voice and vision; dialogue and preventing extreme polarization; should be highest order priorities.** This solidarity, especially during the current pandemic, should focus intensively on attaining the difficult balance between public health, economic

recovery, and human rights; a conundrum presently defying governments the world over.

In this same spirit, I wish to close by reiterating UNMIK's unqualified commitment to supporting the EU-facilitated dialogue, and indeed for the efforts by leaders on both sides to move decisively towards a comprehensive agreement and long-term peace and reconciliation.

I thank all members of the Council for their kind attention today, and for their continuing support of UNMIK.

Thank you.