

**STATEMENT BY THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
SECRETARY-GENERAL AND HEAD OF UNMIK
TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL**

New York

7 February 2019

Mr President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

1. As reflected in the Secretary-General's report, this past period was characterised by action and rhetoric that overall did not improve the atmosphere for a swift resumption of the political dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. Antagonistic gestures and accusations continue to be far more prominent than efforts to return to the new phase of dialogue, which has been widely discussed over many months now.

2. No doubt, the leaders on both sides are facing serious challenges. However, the minimum requirement for a continuation of dialogue is to find the means to steady - rather than agitate - the atmosphere. Instead, there has been a tendency to disrupt rather than de-escalate the situation. The absence, in Pristina, of a unified stance on the conditions for the resumption of the dialogue with Belgrade has reached a critical point in the days since the close of the reporting period, raising concerns about the continued viability of the current government coalition in Kosovo.

3. Where does this leave the prospect for a constructive political engagement? Much attention has focussed upon the 100 per cent tariff introduced by the Pristina authorities on goods originating from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, beginning in November last year. This measure has

been challenged by many quarters and Belgrade has made the resumption of the dialogue contingent on Pristina revoking the tariff. Pristina has linked the lifting of the tariff to a number of conditions. This is not the only example of a position by the parties that complicates efforts to return to the negotiating table.

4. A responsible and forward-looking approach is essential to remove obstacles to restarting the political negotiations. In Pristina, an expanded negotiating team for the dialogue, which includes members of the Assembly of Kosovo, was established in December. However, internal discussions on the key principles to guide Pristina's position in future negotiations are still ongoing. At the same time, more needs to be done on both sides to prepare the ground for any agreement that might be reached between the parties. This would require a more active engagement with and support by a wide array of stakeholders, including through pursuing full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the dialogue-related processes, and taking gender perspectives into account.

Mr President,

5. In December, the Kosovo Assembly passed three laws which relate to the comporment and activities of the Kosovo Security Force. The laws were not supported by the Serb caucus and were heavily criticised from Belgrade. Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) provides the sole legal framework for the international security presence, the Kosovo Force (KFOR), entrusted with the responsibility to ensure a safe and secure environment in Kosovo. KFOR has reiterated this stance, stressing that any adjustments must be transparent and inclusive, and that all previous commitments by Pristina regarding KSF continue to be honoured.

6. Recent developments in the relations between Pristina and Belgrade have complicated efforts to create an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and good-faith compromise. This is a reminder that, as much as top-level commitment remains central, so is the dedication toward building up mutual confidence and trust across the communities on the ground.

7. In order to contribute effectively to this important aspect of normalisation and reconciliation, UNMIK's work has focused on facilitating people-to-people engagement in Kosovo. Together with the United Nations Kosovo team and other international partners, UNMIK advances the implementation of the joint recommendations of the United Nations Kosovo Trust-building Forum held in May 2018 in Ljubljana, focusing on supporting activities across different sectors and layers of society. These include cross-community dialogue, promotion of language rights and equality under the law, youth empowerment and gender equality. In collaboration with the UN Kosovo team, the Mission has also engaged Kosovo civil society to help reduce gender-based and ethnic-based discrimination. UNMIK has leveraged its limited resources by combining efforts with our international partners.

8. UNMIK also continued to support the implementation of human rights-related initiatives and legislation, which are often made harder by inadequate financial and other resource commitments. Important progress was made in the work of the "Working Group on missing persons". This work should be unimpeded by political influences in order to maintain the momentum on this issue, which is vital to long-term reconciliation. More needs to be done to effectively guarantee the rights of the non-majority communities, including Ashkali, Egyptian and Roma, as well as returnees and internally displaced persons.

9. Promoting genuine gender equality in Kosovo is another area that deserves particular attention. I have already mentioned the need for gender perspectives in the dialogue. For its part, UNMIK supports initiatives building women's entrepreneurial skills and supporting women starting new businesses. I have been engaged directly with women leaders at central and local levels to promote such initiatives, and I believe there is a growing sense of empowerment. UNMIK, in partnership with other UN actors, supports local-level Kosovo institutions in rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of domestic violence. The Mission has contributed to a series of advocacy initiatives aimed at preventing violence against women and girls, within the framework of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence. During the campaign, the UNMIK-produced documentary "Not Your Property" was launched in Pristina, followed by screenings in ten municipalities of Kosovo, organised in collaboration with UN-Women and led by local authorities and civil society partners. The documentary features stories of survivors from across Kosovo's communities, and interviews with experts on how the exceptionally low property ownership by women due to customary norms leaves women vulnerable to domestic violence.

10. In supporting inter-community trust building, UNMIK has placed special focus on youth empowerment. In recent months, UNMIK has partnered with two youth-led non-governmental organizations to implement projects aimed at fostering sustainable reconciliation through human rights education. UNMIK continued to support multi-ethnic teams of young leaders in organizing various activities that bring positive change to their communities. UNMIK also supports youth advisory boards in enhancing their capacity to engage in cross-community dialogue. In January, the UN Kosovo team, supported by the UN

Peacebuilding Fund, launched a project in coordination with UNMIK to empower youth for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable future in Kosovo.

Mr President,

11. The European perspective remains an important incentive for peace and stability in the region. It is important for Kosovo leaders to maintain focus on advancing initiatives that are essential for the people of Kosovo, particularly in the areas of rule of law and anti-corruption, human rights, strengthening the independence of the judiciary and bringing legislation in line with the EU *acquis* and other international standards.

Mr President,

12. Let me underline the importance of the support by all members of this Council for the engagement between Belgrade and Pristina. Reducing tensions, enhancing mutual trust, and removing obstacles to the dialogue, are crucial to stability in the region.

13. I have committed UNMIK's resources toward promoting trust building at all levels of Kosovo society, and we will continue to focus on this process in close coordination with all our partner organisations on the ground. I thank you for your support to our Mission.

Thank you.