

OSCE Ministerial Council: joint statement on Belarus

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the following 37 participating States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Iceland, Malta, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, as well as my own country Finland.

For the past several months, we have witnessed serious and ongoing violations and abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Belarus since the fraudulent Presidential election of 9 August 2020. Moscow Mechanism Rapporteur Professor Wolfgang Benedek's report provided us with a large number of evidence-based accounts of peaceful protesters who were violently attacked and tortured by the authorities, simply for insisting on free and fair elections and a better, democratic future for their country.

According to credible reports, the number of arrests of peaceful protesters, journalists and human rights defenders is estimated at 30,000 since the Presidential election. The number of politically motivated criminal cases is reaching 900. The list of political prisoners continues to grow and contains more than 100 names. There is no indication that the authorities are investigating the thousands of well-documented reports of police brutality and torture filed since mid-August or the killings of protesters. We condemn the use of force against Belarusians exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

As the report by the OSCE Rapporteur states, it appears that no professional or social group in Belarus has been spared by the Belarusian authorities' efforts to suppress peaceful dissent. Pressure on the medical, academic, and media communities has been especially harsh. Critics of the government and opposition figures have faced forced expulsion.

Respect for human rights and human dignity have been at the heart of this organization since the Helsinki Final Act was signed forty-five years ago. At this meeting, many Ministers have addressed the situation in Belarus, which is in clear violation of OSCE principles and commitments on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and democratic principles of government. The OSCE's comprehensive concept of security recognizes that respect for human rights within States is essential to lasting peace, prosperity and cooperation among States. Upholding respect for human rights in the OSCE area is the responsibility of all participating States. As reaffirmed at the 2010 Astana Summit, commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.

For the sake of the people of Belarus, we highlight as particularly

noteworthy the following recommendations from the Moscow Mechanism report. The report recommends that Belarusian authorities should:

- Cancel the results of the presidential elections of 9 August 2020 due to irregularities at all stages of the process
- Organize new genuine presidential elections based on international standards, inviting OSCE/ODIHR observation as well as other international and domestic observers
- Bring the electoral law into conformity with international standards as recommended by OSCE/ODIHR and the United Nations
- Immediately cease all violence, in particular torture and ill-treatment against peaceful protestors and opponents
- Immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners held for political reasons
- Ensure that the standards of fair trial are respected
- Ensure the freedom of peaceful assembly in line with international standards
- Ensure the safety of all journalists and provide an enabling environment for the work of journalists and the media
- Refrain from interference with the access to the Internet, and terminate censorship and blocking of webpages
- Ensure that an independent and impartial body promptly investigates all allegations of torture, ill-treatment, sexual violence, disappearance and killing by security forces.

We urge Belarus to engage in dialogue within the OSCE and lend our full support to the current and incoming OSCE Chairs and their efforts to facilitate a national dialogue in Belarus. We stand ready to support and facilitate an inclusive national dialogue in order to resolve the present crisis in a sustainable way, safeguarding Belarus's sovereignty and independence, as well as its safe, democratic and prosperous future.

Mr. Chairperson, I would be grateful if you could attach this statement to the journal of today's meeting.

[UK response to the release of three human rights workers in Egypt](#)

Press release

The UK welcomes the release of three staff members from the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights: Gasser Abdel Razek, Karim Ennarah and Mohamed Basheer.



A Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office spokesperson said:

“The release of Gasser Abdel Razek, Karim Ennarah and Mohamed Basheer is a welcome step.

“We will continue to monitor their situation closely and stand up for human rights defenders across the world.”

Published 4 December 2020

[Change of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Argentina: Kirsty Hayes](#)

Press release

Mrs Kirsty Hayes has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Argentine Republic in succession to Mr Mark Kent CMG.



Mrs Kirsty Hayes has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Argentine Republic in succession to Mr Mark Kent CMG. Mrs Hayes will take up her appointment in September 2021.

Full name: Kirsty Isobel Hayes

Marriage status: Married

Children: One daughter, one son

Dates	Role
2018 to present	Home Office, International Director
2014 to 2018	Lisbon, Her Majesty's Ambassador
2014	Full-time language training (Portuguese)
2011 to 2013	FCO, Head, International Organisations Department
2011	FCO, Head, Corporate Communications Department
2009 to 2010	Special Unpaid Leave
2008 to 2009	Colombo, International Contractor to UN Development Programme Regional Centre
2007 to 2008	FCO, Deputy Head, Human Resources, Training, Recruitment and Development Section
2006 to 2007	FCO, Head, Human Resources, Diversity and Development Team
2006	Maternity Leave
2005 to 2006	FCO, Head, Institutions/France Team, Common Foreign and Security Policy Group
2004 to 2005	Maternity Leave then Special Unpaid Leave
2002 to 2004	Washington DC, Private Secretary to Her Majesty's Ambassador
2001 to 2002	Washington DC, Temporary Second Secretary – Economic
2000 to 2001	Hong Kong, Vice-Consul – Political/Economic
1999 to 2000	FCO, Desk Officer, Environment Policy Department
1999	Joined FCO

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Published 4 December 2020

[UK Export Finance receives major budget boost to enhance export support](#)

Press release

UKEF's resource budget has increased after the latest government Spending

Review.



The Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced that UK Export Finance (UKEF) will receive an £18 million increase to its resource budget in the government's latest Spending Review.

This boost, a 32% increase from 2019-20, will greatly enhance UKEF's ability to support UK companies with an international focus. It will be spent on:

- strengthening UKEF's COVID-19 response
- enhancing its climate change and renewable energy teams
- expanding its domestic team and international network
- increasing engagement with UK businesses
- improving internal operations

The increase will be funded out of the premium income that UKEF generates for the taxpayer, which last year totalled £177 million, and is underpinned by strong risk management.

Louis Taylor, CEO of UK Export Finance said:

Throughout the pandemic, UKEF has remained resolute in its focus on the needs of UK exporters and their businesses. This budget increase will allow us to continue delivering for UK exporters, and ensure we have the right resources in place to deliver on the government's priorities.

UKEF is growing rapidly and has issued record levels of support for exporters since its operating budget was last increased by 29% in the 2019 Spending Review. In this time, UKEF has supported thousands of UK jobs and contributed an estimated £2.8 billion of gross value added to the UK economy each year by helping businesses win, fulfil and get paid for exports.

Since the start of the pandemic, UKEF has provided over £2 billion in extra financing for customers affected by the economic disruption caused by COVID-19, protecting an estimated 100,000 UK jobs. It has also seen a doubling in demand for export credit insurance, helping UK exporters to continue selling internationally.

UK Export Finance is the UK's export credit agency. It exists to ensure that

no viable UK export lacks for finance or insurance from the private market, providing finance and insurance to help exporters win, fulfil and get paid for export contracts.

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[New UK Government Covid testing site opens in Elgin](#)

The UK Government has today, Friday 4 December, opened a new walk-through coronavirus testing centre at Lossie Green Car Park in Elgin (IV30 1UF). The centre is easily accessible for people without a car.

The test centre is part of the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities created in British history. In Scotland, this comprises of six drive through sites, 18 walk-through sites, 24 mobile units, plus the Glasgow Lighthouse Lab which is working round the clock to process samples.

In Scotland, the UK Government is providing all Covid testing and test processing outside of the NHS. Around two thirds of all daily tests are provided by the UK Government, in support of Scotland's health services.

Tests must be booked in advance at [NHS Inform](#) or by calling 0800 028 2816. People should only book at test if they have coronavirus symptoms (a high temperature, a new and continuous cough, or a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste).

Health Minister, Lord Bethell, said:

To respond to the coronavirus, we have built a major testing and tracing system from scratch. We are constantly working to expand and improve it with new technologies and innovations so everyone with symptoms can get a test.

New walk-in sites like this one makes it even easier to get a test no matter where you live. If you have symptoms of coronavirus, I urge you to book a test today and follow the advice of NHS Test and Protect if you are contacted to protect others and stop the spread of the virus.

Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection, Baroness Dido Harding, said:

Walk through sites offer communities better access to coronavirus testing, so everyone with symptoms can get a test. This new site is part of our ongoing work to expand our testing network across the UK which now has the capacity to process more than 500,000 tests a day. We will continue to expand capacity to improve test turnaround times and push forward testing innovations to make sure anyone who needs a test can get one.

Please book a test if you have coronavirus symptoms: a new continuous cough, a high temperature and a loss or change in sense of smell or taste, and follow the advice of NHS Test and Protect if you are contacted.

UK Government Minister for Scotland, Iain Stewart, said:

The UK Government is helping all parts of the UK fight the coronavirus pandemic.

Testing is vital, helping to manage local outbreaks and protecting people's livelihoods. The UK Government is providing the bulk of Covid testing in Scotland, and this new walk-through centre is just the latest in our extensive testing network.

We are pleased to be working with local and commercial partners. These sites are not possible without the hard work of many people. I would like to thank everyone involved for their incredible efforts for the good of the country at this difficult time.

Mitie Chief Government & Strategy Officer, Simon Venn, said:

Our priority during the pandemic is to support the nation's efforts to fight COVID-19 and help keep the country running. Testing is a critical part of the UK's strategy to combat coronavirus and we're proud to support the UK Government with this vital task. A big thank you to all the NHS staff, Mitie employees and other frontline heroes in Elgin, who are working tirelessly to keep us all safe.