

Foreign Secretary update to Parliament on Harry Dunn case

Today, I want to update the House on the tragic case of the death of the 19 year old Harry Dunn in a car accident in Northamptonshire, and what we are doing to support his family in their search for justice.

As the father of two young boys myself, I can only begin to imagine the grief and suffering of losing a child. It's every family's worst nightmare. I'm sure the whole House will join with me in expressing my deepest sympathies to Harry's family for their unbearable loss.

Mr Speaker, let me start with the facts of this case, and the steps that the Government has taken in recent weeks to support the police investigation.

On 27 August, Harry Dunn was killed in a road traffic collision while riding his motorbike in Croughton, Northamptonshire. The suspect in the police investigation is an American woman.

As it has been widely reported, at the time of the accident, the American involved had diplomatic immunity. The UK Government had been notified of the family's arrival in the UK in July 2019.

This diplomatic immunity was the result of the arrangements agreed between the UK Government and the US Government in 1995. Under those arrangements, US staff at RAF Croughton and their families were accepted as part of the US Embassy in the UK.

Pursuant to these arrangements, the staff and their families were entitled to immunity under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

Under the exchange of notes in relation to the Croughton Annex, these arrangements waived immunity for employees, but the waiver did not cover spouses.

Returning to the specific case of Harry Dunn. On 28 August of this year, the US Embassy notified us that the spouse of a member of staff at RAF Croughton had been involved in an accident.

On 30 August, the US asserted that the spouse was covered by immunity, so a waiver was needed.

To enable the police investigation to follow its proper course, on 5 September, the FC0 formally requested the US Embassy to waive immunity. Given the seriousness of the incident, our view was -and remains – that justice needs to be done.

If her immunity had been waived, Northamptonshire Police would then have been able to compel her to cooperate fully with their investigation.

However, on 13 September, the FCO was informed by the US Embassy that they would not waive immunity, and that the individual would be leaving the country imminently, unless the UK had strong objections.

We duly and immediately objected in clear and strong terms and have done since. Nevertheless, under the Vienna Convention, UK police could not have lawfully prevented the individual from leaving the UK.

When the FCO followed up with the US Embassy on 16 September, they informed us that the individual had departed the day before.

We immediately informed Northants Police.

When FCO's views were sought on timing, officials asked the police to delay telling the family by a day or two, so that they could inform me and other Ministers and agree the next course of action.

I am aware that the police did not tell the family until 26 September, which was 11 days after the family had left.

As the primary point of family liaison, the decision as to when to tell the family was properly a matter for the police.

Turning to the issue of waiver, I can reassure the House that representations have been made to the US government at every level of the administration. The Head of the Diplomatic Service summoned the US Deputy Ambassador.

I raised this case twice with the US Ambassador, in order to express my disappointment with their decision not to waive immunity, and to request that the decision be reversed.

I spoke to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the same terms on 7 October, and the Prime Minister raised the case with President Trump on 9 October.

The scope of immunity is a complex area of law, because in some circumstances there may be a residual immunity that can continue once an individual returns home, depending on their status and the particular facts of the case.

Our position, in this case, is that immunity clearly ended when the individual concerned left the UK.

The US government in turn stated on 8 October that since the individual had returned to the US, in their view, immunity was 'no longer pertinent'.

We took time and we took care to resolve this point, because of its relevance to the case.

We also wanted to be fully confident in the legal position, before we communicated it to the family, given their anguish and frustration with the obstacles to the investigation. Once the position was clear, I conveyed it directly to the family by letter on 12 October.

We continue to urge the US authorities and the individual in question to

fully cooperate with the investigation.

The case is now with Northamptonshire Police and the Crown Prosecution Service, and it is for them to consider next steps as part of their criminal investigation.

At every stage in this process, we have sought to clear away any obstacles to justice being done.

At the same time, I have been mindful of the need to avoid anything that could be construed as political interference, in case that might later be argued to prejudice the proper and fair course of the investigation, and thereby prevent justice being done.

Mr Speaker, let me now turn to our next steps.

First, we will continue to do all that we can to support the Police and the CPS during this process. And I can assure this House, as I assured Harry's family when I met with them on 9 October, that we will continue to fight for justice for them.

Second, I have already commissioned a review of the immunity arrangements for US personnel and their families at the Croughton Annex, holding privileges and immunities under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

As this case has demonstrated, I do not believe the current arrangements are right. The review will look at how we make sure the arrangements at Croughton cannot be used in this way again.

Mr Speaker, in one night, a tragic accident took the life of a young man with his whole future ahead of him.

That loss has devastated his family, as it would any of ours.

I can reassure the House that this government will do everything it can to give them the solace of justice being done. Our hearts go out to them, and I commend this statement to the House.

UK and Georgia sign trade continuity and strategic cooperation agreement

The agreement will ensure British businesses and consumers benefit from continued preferential trade with Georgia after we leave the EU.

UK and Georgia sign trade continuity and strategic cooperation agreement

The Foreign Secretary today signed an agreement between the UK and Georgia to ensure that our trade and political relationship remains strong after we leave the EU.

The deal – formally known as the UK-Georgia Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement – is the first continuity trade agreement between the UK and an Eastern European country.

- It replicates the comprehensive market access for trade in goods and services the UK is party to under the EU agreement, further strengthening the trading relationship between the UK and Georgia
- Trading under the terms outlined in the agreement, rather than on World Trade Organization terms, will ensure British businesses and consumers benefit from continued preferential access to Georgia after the UK leaves the European Union

The Foreign Secretary signed the agreement with the Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs David Zalkaliani in London.

The Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

The signing of this agreement gives British exporters and consumers the certainty they need to continue trading freely with Georgia, as the UK prepares to leave the EU. It underlines the significance of our strong ties with Georgia and will ensure that our political and trade relationship continues to flourish.

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said:

The UK Government is committed to developing both our political and trading relationship with Georgia.

This agreement will ensure minimal disruption for businesses and consumers in both our countries as we prepare to leave the EU and usher in a new phase of cooperation between our two nations.

The Foreign Minister of Georgia David Zalkaliani said:

The signing of the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Georgia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will further foster our bilateral cooperation, which has its roots running deep in history and which has been

brought to a particularly high level by the UK-Georgia Wardrop Strategic Dialogue. Partnership between two countries is based upon shared values and common interests, including in promoting rules-based international order, security and stability.

As well as setting out comprehensive free trade arrangements, the new deal frames how our countries will work together in the future. It highlights the UK's support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as both countries' commitment to strengthening fundamental freedoms and human rights and deepening our security relationship.

The agreement pledges that we will continue our cooperation in areas such as financial services, education, transport, industry and environmental protection. It also recognises Georgia's strong commitment to an ambitious reform agenda in key areas such as governance, economic reform, trade and security policy.

- the UK maintains a strategic partnership with Georgia based on our support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders.
- Georgia becomes the 47th country with whom the UK has signed a trade continuity agreement.
- this agreement recognises Georgia's continuing reform of its defence and security sectors, its strong commitment and contribution to international security and the significant progress it has made in realising its Euro-Atlantic aspirations.
- this agreement is designed to take effect when the EU-Georgia agreement ceases to apply to the UK, either following an implementation period or a no-deal Brexit. The agreement will be subject to the domestic parliamentary procedures in both the UK and Georgia before it is brought into force.
- the UK-Georgia Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement replicates the effects of the existing trade and non-trade provisions as far as possible.
- the comprehensive new agreement delivers the same level of liberalisation in trade, services and public procurement currently enjoyed under the original EU-Georgia Association Agreement.
- trade between the UK and Georgia was worth £95 million in 2018 – statistics sourced from ONS 'UK total trade: all countries, non-seasonally adjusted January to March 2019 release'. Figures relate to 2018.
- the UK has now secured agreements with countries that accounted for £100 billion of trade in 2018.

Further information

National Drought Group – EA Chief Executive statement

The NDG met on Tuesday 21 October, chaired by Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency.

National Drought Group – EA Chief Executive statement

The National Drought Group (NDG) met on Monday 21 October, chaired by Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, to assess the impacts of low groundwater levels in parts of the south east and east England and agree actions to reduce impacts now and into 2020.

The NDG, convened since 2016, brings together government departments, water companies, environmental groups and others to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of drought by coordinating action to maintain water supplies and protect the environment.

Current situation

2019 has seen periods of prolonged low rainfall in parts of England; a trend we have been experiencing since 2016. A dry spring and the hottest day on record in July gave way to high rainfall totals causing widespread flooding in the north of England, whilst in the south and east groundwater levels remain well below normal for the time of year, similar to the droughts of the 1990s.

Despite recent heavy rainfall over recent weeks, the river flows in the chalk dominant areas of Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Essex, Suffolk and Hertfordshire are likely to remain below normal unless sustained winter rainfall provides recovery to the groundwater below.

Environmental drought

This year environmental drought is having a damaging impact on the ecology in some vulnerable chalk streams, exacerbated by the cumulative effect of patterns of low rainfall since 2016. Dry weather and sustained low river flows have also significantly limited access to water for farmers and growers this year, particularly in East Anglia. Whilst sections of chalk streams regularly stop flowing during drier periods (ephemeral reaches), low groundwater levels are causing longer stretches than normal to dry up, and for longer periods of time. Another dry winter could lead to longer reaches of dry and fragmented river channel, increased weed and algal growth and a

greater numbers of incidents on fish and wildlife.

Through the National Drought Group, the Environment Agency is working with the water industry, the NFU and environmental organisations to ensure that action is taken now and into 2020 to sustain water resources and protect the environment. This is a difficult task that requires collaborative working across sectors.

Water supplies

Although public water supply has remained relatively resilient in 2019, insufficient groundwater could threaten supplies in some areas next year. Two water companies have highlighted a high risk to their supplies if we receive less than 80% of the expected winter rainfall. Should we not see the level of rainfall needed to sustain supplies this winter, drought measures including drought permits could be needed and temporary restrictions on customer use in spring 2020. The water company actions set out at the NDG include:

- continuing to promote and target water efficiency and metering, including widening campaigns to target specific zones or groups of customers
- targeted action to find and reduce leaks
- optimising and investigating options for bulk transfers to provide support in drought sensitive areas
- engagement with neighbouring companies through regional groups
- taking forward a range of other work to increase the resilience of their networks, including bringing unused sources online and testing water standards
- working with farmers locally to identify ways to sustain and share water supplies
- ensuring that all potential sites are application-ready for drought permits.

Environment Agency

The Environment Agency has committed to:

- continuing its enforcement activity to ensure abstractors comply with their licences to help minimise the impact on the environment
- reviewing local drought interventions with local partners to more actively communicate the environmental situation and responses as part of our preparations for a potential fourth dry winter
- extending flexible abstraction licensing policy into the winter which will include allowing farmers to abstract water in October when there is sufficient environmentally sustainable flow in rivers
- ensuring water companies are following and, where required, updating drought plans in preparation for the managing the impacts of a dry winter
- continuing with our long-term strategic approach to build environmental resilience by reducing pressures at the catchment scale.

Is this climate change?

We are already seeing the effects of the climate emergency including more extreme weather patterns and extended dry and intense wet periods. Through our sector-wide campaign Love Water, the NDG reaffirmed its core message to the public to use water wisely as we all have a role to play in tackling and adapting to the effects of drought.

Action plan and next steps

The National Drought Group has agreed a set of specific actions to mitigate the impacts of dry weather. No one can confidently forecast whether all these actions will be needed next year or in future years, or which sector will see the greatest pressure but we know that we must be ready for whatever scenario plays out.