

Speech: Jeremy Hunt's opening remarks at press conference with Mike Pompeo

The Foreign Secretary was speaking in London on 8 May alongside the US Secretary of State.

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Good afternoon.

I'm delighted to welcome Secretary Mike Pompeo to the Foreign Office for his first bilateral visit to Britain.

And it's a privilege to reaffirm the strength of the friendship between our two countries.

The Anglo-American alliance was forged in the greatest struggle against tyranny the world has ever known.

We will soon commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Normandy Landings, when Britain and America joined forces with our Allies to begin the liberation of Europe.

We look forward to welcoming President Trump to mark that occasion – and it's fitting that Secretary Pompeo should be our guest on VE Day.

I'm proud to say that in defence and security, Britain and America cooperate more closely than any two countries in the world. We keep our people safe; we entrust one another with intelligence that saves lives on both sides of the Atlantic.

Just last year, when the Russian state used a chemical weapon in Salisbury, America responded by expelling 60 Russian officials – more than any other country – an act of friendship for which I repeat my thanks.

We stand together in defence of the values upon which our nations were founded.

Joint press conference between Jeremy Hunt and Mike Pompeo

Today Secretary Pompeo and I met faith leaders, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, to discuss how we can better protect freedom of religion in a world where people of all faiths – including 245 million Christians – face

persecution for practising their beliefs.

This is an issue close to both our hearts. The recent atrocities in New Zealand and Sri Lanka remind us just why.

And I am thankful that today we have a glimmer of light with the news that Asia Bibi will be able to embark on a new chapter in her life.

I welcome the government of Pakistan's commitment to uphold the rule of law following the decision of its Supreme Court to confirm her acquittal.

Britain's primary concern has always been the safety of Asia Bibi and her family; we have been in contact with our partners to help ensure that she gets the freedom and security she deserves.

Today, the Prime Minister and I have had excellent discussions with Secretary Pompeo on a range of global challenges, including China and the situations in Yemen and Iran.

Let me focus on two of those issues.

First, Iran.

The UK and US work incredibly closely on Iran, including to counter Iran's destabilising activity in the Middle East.

Whilst we both agree that Iran must never be able to acquire a nuclear weapon, it is no secret that we have a different approach on how best to achieve that.

The UK has continued to support the nuclear deal, which is a key achievement of the global non-proliferation architecture, because we believe it is in our shared security interests.

But today's announcement from Tehran about its commitments under the deal is an unwelcome step. I urge Iran not to take further escalatory steps and to stand by its commitments.

Sanctions were lifted in exchange for restrictions on Iran's nuclear programme. Should Iran cease to observe its nuclear commitments, there would of course be consequences. For as long as Iran keeps its commitments, then so too will the United Kingdom.

Turning to Venezuela, I am deeply concerned by the plight of the Venezuelan people who have suffered so much at the hands of Maduro.

We must intensify pressure on the regime, including through potential further sanctions,

and condemn those who are propping up Maduro, particularly Russia whose deployment of military personnel in Caracas will achieve nothing except prolong the suffering of the Venezuelan people.

That's why earlier today the Foreign Office expressed our deep concern about the Kremlin's actions to the Russian Chargé d'Affaires.

As we respond to these challenges, Britain and America are united by the values that have always been at the heart of our alliance.

Our countries cherish the same beliefs in liberty, democracy and the rule of law. The anniversary of D-Day reminds us how the valour and sacrifice of a previous generation saved those values from tyranny.

Our duty is to follow in this great tradition.

Let me close by repeating my welcome to Mike, who is a great friend of the United Kingdom. We are proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with the United States to defend our values.

Speech: Lord Ashton's speech at the British Pavilion opening event

Ladies and Gentlemen, good afternoon.

I am delighted to be here today, as the representative of Her Majesty's Government, for the opening of the British Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale.

I am very grateful to the British Council for inviting me to this auspicious event and allowing me to say a few words.

May I begin by congratulating the artist, Cathy Wilkes, for creating the incredible works on show inside this building, and Dr Zoé Whitley, for so skillfully curating the exhibition.

I had the pleasure of touring the pavilion this morning and I must say I was awed by the visually striking and thought-provoking display. I am sure that everyone here today and the many thousands of people who will visit the pavilion over the next 6 months will have the same experience.

On behalf of the UK Government I would like to thank the British Council for successfully managing the British Pavilion programme, which, together with their wider work around the globe, has promoted the best of the UK's arts and culture on the world stage.

And may I also express my deep gratitude to the many sponsors, supporters and patrons of the British Pavilion, whose kind and generous support is so vital to its continued success. Thank you very much.

Ladies and gentlemen, we cannot underestimate the power of art and culture to

bring people together from different places around the world. Often it is our cultural links which are right at the heart of cooperation between different nations, even when we may disagree in other areas.

As the world's preeminent arts festival, the Venice Biennale exemplifies the value of international cultural collaboration and exchange.

The British Pavilion holds a particularly special place within this magnificent festival, as one of the permanent national pavilions. And of course, it is also one of the longest-standing, having been established in 1909.

Therefore, I hope, you will forgive my lack of modesty when I say that the British Pavilion truly is a 'must see' for any visitor to the Biennale. And this year's exhibition truly lives up to its 'must see' status.

I am also delighted to say that, beyond the Pavilion itself, the festival this year has an incredibly strong showing of talent from the UK, not least of course with Ralph Rugoff, director of the Hayward Gallery in London, as Artistic Director of the festival, becoming the first UK-based curator to hold the coveted title.

And in addition to this, the Central Exhibition will also feature the work of 5 further artists from the UK, all supported by the British Council.

The 58th Venice Biennale is therefore set to be a great showcase for British arts, demonstrating that the UK is an international cultural powerhouse, not only in our heritage but in our amazing and thought-provoking contemporary art.

So I would like to conclude by wishing the greatest success for the British Pavilion, and the UK artists in this year's festival.

Thank you.

News story: Adults with autism benefit from sports festival

Creating Adventures, which has organised the event, is a charity that enriches the lives of adults with autism and additional needs.

They provide them with access to stimulating unique activities, with a therapeutic outcome to benefit their mental and physical wellbeing and to offer them an improved quality of life.

Its aim is to reinstate the support and social activities that these adults once loved as children, which help to stimulate, as well as escape from the

pressures and anxieties we face every day.

For adults with additional needs and communication difficulties, this is a priority to avoid further health related problems including mental health.

Creating Adventures is leading the festival with the support of Warrington Wolves Foundation coaches who are delivering the sports sessions for 100 adults with autism and learning disabilities.

They will be able to participate in multiple sports delivered by the coaches as well as participating in numerous other activities and will be awarded with a medal and certificate for their participation during the celebration ceremony.

Jenny Allcock, Founding Chief Officer for Creating Adventures said:

Many of these adults are still children at heart, who still want to enjoy the activities they did as children, but are no longer deemed as socially acceptable as an adult.

It has been well documented that adults with autism and additional needs are at a higher risk of obesity and other health-related issues. These can often develop from being socially isolated, not being given the opportunity to express their needs and being unable to access a number of services and activities.

As well as the physical aspect of the day, which will hopefully encourage further interest in sports, we know that the mental stimulation and social interaction will support communication and development skills.

Pauline Deans, Community Liaison Officer, Sellafield Ltd said:

It was great to see so many people getting involved in a range of sporting activities, along with their families and carers.

Autism affects so many people in our communities and families can feel very isolated. Sellafield Ltd set up an autism support network in 2017 for its staff and this is helping to support primary carers of autistic children and employees who have a diagnosis of autism.

Its aim is to provide support to our members at work and home, not only by sharing the information we have gathered from a variety of organisations and independent sources, but to be someone to talk to. Someone that understands.

Press release: Government introduces bill to tackle Palace of Westminster fire risk

Efforts to protect the Palace of Westminster from a catastrophic event like the recent Notre Dame fire reach a major milestone today with the introduction of the [Parliamentary Buildings \(Restoration and Renewal\) Bill](#).

The bill means the governance structure, approved by MPs and peers in 2018, will draw on the best practice of the 2012 London Olympics by establishing:

- a Sponsor Body – made up of parliamentary and external members, which acts as the client on behalf of Parliament and will oversee the delivery of the works
- a Delivery Authority – equipped with the expertise to keep costs down and manage a project of this complexity

A number of financial safeguards are written into the bill, given it is imperative that Parliament keeps total costs down.

- an Estimates Commission, with cross-party involvement, will be established to scrutinise the Sponsor Body's spending plans
- the Estimates Commission will be required to consult the Treasury and take into account any advice it gives
- the National Audit Office will undertake regular audits and value-for-money reviews

The Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP, Leader of the House of Commons, said:

Events like the terrible fire at Notre Dame bring home to us sharply the importance of preserving our historic buildings. The Palace of Westminster, recognised the world over as a symbol of democracy, must be restored for future generations.

This bill ensures the vital work needed to protect its future will happen in the most efficient way – with the expertise we need, proper structures in place, and making sure we deliver the best possible value for taxpayers' money. I have always championed the need for Parliament to get on with this vital work, and am proud to introduce this bill.

The Rt Hon Baroness Evans of Bowes Park, Leader of the House of Lords, said:

This bill is an important step in the restoration and renewal of the Palace. It will establish a Sponsor Board, independent of Parliament, with the expertise to prepare the detailed business

case for R&R and create the Delivery Authority to carry out the works. Both bodies will be subject to financial accountability and Parliamentary oversight. It is imperative that we make progress and protect the Palace of Westminster for future generations.

Interim measures, including 24/7 fire safety patrols, are already in place to protect the historic Palace and ensures it remains compliant with existing fire safety laws. The risks, however, are very great, of a catastrophic failure within the building, and so progress to carrying out the urgent mechanical and engineering work is vital.

At the same time, preparatory work has been undertaken by the shadow Sponsor Board, established in June 2018, including the development of plans for temporary chambers for use during the period of the works.

The bill will require the Sponsor Body to secure parliamentary approval for the design, cost and timing of the works. MPs and Peers will move out of the Palace in the mid-2020s.

1. The Commons passed a motion backing action to safeguard the Palace of Westminster on 31 January 2018. An identical motion was passed by the Lords on 6 February 2018.
2. A shadow Sponsor Body was established in June 2018 to undertake preparatory works.
3. The government published a [draft version of the present bill](#) on 18 October 2018. A Joint Committee of MPs and Peers scrutinised the draft bill and completed its final report on 21 March 2019. [The government response to the Joint Committee's report](#) was published on 7 May 2018.
4. At the same time Parliament has been preparing its Northern Estate Programme, the essential first step that will enable the broader Restoration and Renewal Programme by providing space for MPs' offices – and a temporary chamber for the House of Commons.
5. For media queries relating to the Restoration and Renewal Programme or the Northern Estate Programme, please contact the R&R Programme press office on 02072198716.
6. For media queries relating to the Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill, please contact Alex Stevenson on 07712410865 or alex.stevenson@cabinetoffice.gov.uk