

Speech: Progress towards peace in Colombia

Thank you, Mr President, and thank you to our briefers. And in respect of the briefing, I think it's a very good thing that we've gotten Ms Salamanca here because it's an important reminder of the role that women's organisations have played in the peace process.

I think what we've heard today from the Special Representative shows that the peace accords continue to set a positive example to the rest of the world. The commitment of the government is very welcome, as are the steps taken towards reintegration of former fighters, rural development, crop substitution. And the government is clearly trying very hard to find a national consensus on issues that are deeply polarizing.

Of the three areas we would like to highlight that we believe deserve the government's urgent attention, the first one is a transitional justice system. We agree with the Secretary-General that the special jurisdiction for peace discussion has become more polarized. We hope now that the SJP will get legal and political support to build on the progress it's made. And we also hope there might be a stronger legal footing for it in order to boost public confidence in the peace process and bring about the national consensus that President Duque is rightly committed to.

Secondly, I'd like to echo concerns about human rights defenders and social leaders. The fact that they continue to face killings and threats at the hands of armed criminal groups competing for territory – and this is something the Council has been interested in before – the recent regional sessions of the National Commission on Security guarantees are a positive step forward. But I think we need to see more concrete actions to improve security on the ground. And this might include – and I might be interested in the SRSG's views – on a stronger state presence in rural areas.

Thirdly, we welcome the initial successes of the territorially focused development plans and crop substitution initiative. But I think our overall point is that the pace of implementation of the peace process, we'd like to see that increase across the country. There have been some delays, as set out in the SG report. And I think where everyone is very well aware that the sustainability of peace depends on transforming the Colombian countryside and meeting citizens needs for viable and legal livelihoods. But it's also important that the international community support Colombian efforts.

And finally, I'd like to take the opportunity to commend the SRSG because the areas of progress identified in the Colombian peace process is a very important part of how we view these regular sessions.

For the British government's part, we recognise the progress the government has made and we're fully committed to working alongside the government as they build the sustainable peace. We will continue to support them. The

Foreign Minister was here a few weeks ago and we talked about the recent objections that the President had put down. And I know that there have been developments on that that I am sure His Excellency will update the Council on.

Thank you.

Press release: Homes England appoints Service Design & Transformation Director

Homes England continues to strengthen its senior leadership team with the appointment of Lou Downe as Director of Service Design and Transformation.

Press release: Homes England appoints Service Design & Transformation Director

Lou will take on a critical role, responsible for transforming planning and development across the sector, as well as implementing Homes England's new operating model and designing effective services to support the government's ambitious goal of delivering hundreds of thousands of homes across the country each year.

Lou brings a wealth of experience to the role and is currently the Head of Service Design and Standards for the UK Government at the Government Digital Service.

Homes England Chief Executive Nick Walkley said: "I'm delighted to be appointing Lou to our senior leadership team as the Director of Service Design and Transformation.

"This newly-created role is a key appointment for Homes England, which supports our vision to become a modern, service-led organisation capable of leading the housing sector."

Lou Downe added: "I'm incredibly excited to be taking on this role at such an important time for UK housing, planning and development.

“We have a hugely important challenge ahead to create a world where urban development is both sustainable for people and for the environment and I’m honoured to be given the task of helping this vision become a reality.”

ENDS

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Press release: Export Bar placed on Renaissance casket in a bid to keep it in UK

- One of the earliest known pieces of Kunstkammer furniture in the UK at risk of being lost abroad unless a UK buyer can be found

Arts Minister Michael Ellis has placed a temporary export bar on a 16th century marquetry casket from the historic Newbattle Abbey, Scotland, in a bid to keep it in the country.

The treasure, considered one of the most important early pieces of South German furniture in the country, is at risk of being lost unless a buyer can be found to match the £750,000 asking price.

Created in 1565, the German Renaissance casket features engraved ivory and bone panels and gilded metalwork. It is believed to be one of the earliest known pieces of German ‘Kunstkammer’ furniture in existence.

The concept of the Kunstkammer or ‘cabinet of curiosities’ first emerged in the 16th century to showcase precious, rare and exotic objects to display the owner’s status and scholarship. The casket is a rare, dated example and would have formed part of a prestigious collection.

Arts Minister Michael Ellis said:

Throughout history cabinets of curiosities have been used to hold countless precious treasures. Now it is this incredibly rare casket that is itself the treasure. I hope that we can find a buyer to keep this remarkable piece of furniture in the country.

The intricately decorated stand accompanying this casket is in the style of James Moore, cabinet-maker to the Royal household of King George I from 1714 – 1726.

It is believed that the casket is the only piece of its kind in a British collection. Comparable examples of German Renaissance caskets survive in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

While it is difficult to identify a designer, the expert panel agreed that the work could be associated with the city of Nuremberg and dated to the 1560s. The casket provides important evidence that the Nuremberg cabinet-makers rivalled those of Augsburg in the production of high-quality marquetry furniture in South Germany during this period.

The RCEWA made its recommendation on the grounds of the cabinet's outstanding aesthetic importance and for the opportunities it offers for the study of German renaissance cabinet-making. The Committee noted that the cabinet was exceptionally well crafted.

Committee Member Christopher Rowell said:

This remarkably beautiful and highly wrought small cabinet of architectural design, inlaid with panels of figurative and perspectival marquetry, with elegantly chased gilt bronze mounts, was probably made in Nuremberg around 1565.

It is the sole piece of furniture of its kind in Great Britain and the most elaborate of only a dozen pieces of sixteenth-century German furniture to be decorated with marquetry depicting 3D geometric solids or illusionistic polyhedra. The perspectival wood, ivory, bone and mother-of-pearl marquetry derives from Italian and German engravings. One of the panels is dated 1565.

The cabinet was designed as a repository of precious small works of art. Its British carved walnut cabriole-legged support was made for it around 1730, so it has been in this country since then. It may have descended to the Marquesses of Lothian from Frederick V, Elector Palatine, the so-called 'Winter King' of Bohemia, son-in-law of James VI of Scotland and I of England and brother-in-law of Charles I.

The Newbattle casket was lent to prominent exhibitions in the nineteenth century. It is to be hoped that this great rarity, which has been in the country for nearly 300 years, can be retained in Britain.

The decision on the export licence application for the casket will be deferred until 11 July 2019. This may be extended until 11 October 2019 if a

serious intention to raise funds to purchase the casket is made at the recommended price of £750,000.

Notes to editors

Organisations or individuals interested in purchasing the casket should contact the RCEWA on 0845 300 6200.

Details of the casket are as follows:

1. A 16th century casket from Newbattle Abbey
2. A wooden casket of architectural form with decoration of perspectival geometrical marquetry relating to contemporary treatises, with engraved plaques and carvings; South German (probably Nuremberg), dated 1565; on a separate carved walnut stand with drawer, English, c1730
3. Maker unknown
4. Dimensions (HWD): 34.5 x 53 x 36cm; on stand: 89 x 57.5 x 39cm

The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest is an independent body, serviced by The Arts Council, which advises the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on whether a cultural object, intended for export, is of national importance under specified criteria.

The Arts Council champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. It supports a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections.
www.artscouncil.org.uk.

Press release: Export Bar placed on Renaissance casket in a bid to keep it in UK

Arts Minister Michael Ellis announces temporary export bar so that a buyer can be found for 16th century casket worth £750,000.