

News story: UK calls on Russia to allow ships access to Ukraine's ports

The UK has joined calls for Russia to stop delaying or preventing access for ships to the Sea of Azov, following a discussion at the EU Foreign Affairs Council.

Russia's continued disruption of ships attempting to access Ukrainian ports in the Sea of Azov is destabilising the regional economy. Restrictions on freedom of passage have been accompanied by an increase in Russia's military presence in the sea.

Russia and its security forces continue to disrupt Ukrainian and international shipping calling at Ukrainian ports in the Sea of Azov. In March, Russia opened an unlawfully constructed bridge across the Kerch Strait connecting Russia to the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula.

Since then, Russia has been conducting stop and search operations for cargo ships arriving at, and leaving from, Ukraine's ports in the Azov Sea. This is causing delays, significant increases in shipping costs, and a reduction in income to Ukraine's ports. So far, more than 200 vessels have been affected, in a policy which is damaging Ukraine's economy and undermining its sovereignty.

We are also concerned by Russia's growing military presence in the Sea of Azov. The UK supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and territorial waters. We call on Russia to allow unhindered access for merchant vessels through the Kerch Strait and in the Sea of Azov.

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Speech: DFID Ghana Country Director's speech at Fleming Fund's evening reception of the AMR Call to Action summit

Good evening everyone. My name is Philip Smith and I am Country Director for the UK's Department for International Development in Ghana and Liberia.

It is with great pleasure that, on behalf of the UK Government present here in Ghana, and as co-host of the Call to Action Event, I welcome you to this Fleming Fund reception this evening.

I want to first thank our hosts – His Excellency the President Nana Danqua Akufo Addo and the Health Minister for Ghana, Honourable Kwaku Agyeman for hosting this event. I'm sure you'll agree it has been a highly successful first day.

I'd like to thank our co-hosts – the Royal Thai Government and the United Nations.

Thanks also to the Wellcome Trust in supporting the organisation of this event – a great example of your expanding global policy and research work on AMR.

My main message of thanks though is to the Government of Ghana for leading the global response to AMR. As we have heard today, AMR is one of the greatest threats to human health globally. There is much work to be done.

AMR is a poignant example, if one were needed, of a global problem where only a collective response, across governments and between peoples, will make a difference.

If we don't take sufficient action, 10 million people will die annually from AMR-associated causes by 2050, and the majority of these deaths will occur in Africa and Asia.

In Ghana – as the Vice-President pointed out this morning – AMR could de-rail efforts to tackle the Sustainable Development Goals.

We are very pleased that the AMR Call to Action Conference is taking place here in Accra. Ghana is a development success story. It made huge progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the precursor to the SDGs: including halving extreme poverty, establishing a social safety net system and a National Health Service – all of which will contribute towards mitigating the impact of AMR.

You will have heard today the phrase "Ghana Beyond Aid". His Excellency the President's vision for a self-reliant Ghana is truly inspiring and is

applauded by the UK and all development partners. In the long term, economic development with investment and jobs is the sustainable pathway to self-reliance.

But “Ghana Beyond Aid” must address the issue of why, despite record economic growth, inequality in Ghana is rising. Ghana Beyond Aid can’t just be about Ghana’s “self-reliance” through industrialization. It has to address the “self-reliance” of the poorest and most marginalized Ghanaians.

We must all maintain concerted efforts to address these inequalities not just in Ghana but across the world. It is, after all, the poorest and most vulnerable who are likely to be most affected by AMR. We bear them a huge responsibility for urgent, effective and collective action.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are delighted to have with us the UK Government’s Chief Medical Officer, Professor Dame Sally Davies, the UK’s AMR global champion.

I’d like to acknowledge her incredible work: without Dame Sally’s efforts to highlight AMR as a global public health threat and the work she has done to help build the international frameworks needed to take action, we would not be here today.

Dame Sally will announce new UK support to AMR in Ghana through the Fleming Fund.

So – as I welcome to the podium Dame Sally – thank you Ghana for your action on AMR. We are proud to be working in partnership with the Government of Ghana on this global issue.

It’s a great example of the UK and Ghana’s shared values and the ongoing and enduring UK-Ghana partnership.

Thank you.

Speech: Allowing peace and stability to prevail in the Middle East

Thank you Mr President, and thank you to Special Coordinator Mladenov for your briefing.

Mr President, the UK is deeply concerned by recent violence in Gaza and southern Israel, including civilian casualties. We must do everything we can to avoid another devastating war, which would compound the already awful humanitarian and security conditions faced by ordinary Gazans, and further threaten the security of Israeli border communities.

We urge restraint from all parties and welcome the return to calm in recent days. We strongly support the mediation efforts of the international community led by Egypt and the UN and urge continued talks aimed at finding an enduring peace in Gaza under the control of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr President, we strongly condemn the firing of projectiles from Gaza towards Israel. Our Ambassador to Israel visited communities affected by the rocket fire on Tuesday. Hamas and other factions must end such attacks immediately. The recent deaths on both sides of the conflict are alarming.

In order to protect civilians it is crucial a ceasefire is agreed and maintained as part of a political process that sees the Palestinian Authority return to Gaza and the lifting of restrictions on the Gazan people and economy. As Mr Mladenov has made clear today, no effort must be spared to reverse the spiral of violence.

Mr President, the cycle of conflict in Gaza has gone on for too long, and the civilian populations in Gaza and Israel have suffered the consequences. We call on Hamas, the Palestinian Authority and Israel not to take any action that could lead to a further deterioration.

We remain deeply concerned about humanitarian situation in Gaza and have frequent discussions with the Government of Israel about the need to ease restrictions on Gaza. The UK welcomes the recent efforts to improve the humanitarian situation. In particular, we welcome the increase in electricity supply from 4-6 hours a day to 12 hours a day, and Palestinian Authorities' continued payment of salaries and other costs. We likewise welcome, as others have done, recent contributions to close the funding gap of UNRWA and reiterate the UK's support for the agency.

Political resolve is required to improve the situation in Gaza. The reconciliation agreement of October 2017 was a good start, but now all the Palestinian factions must work together to implement an agreement. We strongly support the efforts of Egypt, the UN Special Coordinator and the wider international community to achieve this.

The UK will continue to urge the parties to prioritise progress towards reaching a durable solution for Gaza and to take the necessary practical steps to ensure Gaza's reconstruction and economic recovery. Such a durable solution is the only way to improve the living standards of ordinary Palestinians in Gaza and guarantee Israel's long-term security.

Mr President, in conclusion, the people of Israel and Gaza have the right to live without constant fear for their security. Both peoples have the right to live safely in peace. Urgent steps must be taken now to address the underlying causes of the conflict. It is in everyone's interest for peace and stability to prevail in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Now more than ever, we need a political process that delivers a two-state solution.

Thank you Mr President.

Speech: Allowing peace and stability to prevail in the Middle East

Statement by David Clay, UK Deputy Political Coordinator at the United Nations, at the Security Council Briefing on the Middle East