

Press release: Commonwealth unites to end scourge of plastic

Prime Minister Theresa May announced today that New Zealand, Sri Lanka and Ghana have joined the UK and Vanuatu-led Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance – an agreement between member states to join forces in the fight against plastic pollution.

The group has pledged to ban microbeads in rinse-off cosmetics and personal care products and cut plastic bag use by 2021, and will work with NGOs and businesses from across the Commonwealth to push for global change and protect the environment for future generations.

To drive this forward, the Prime Minister has also announced a £61.4 million package of funding to boost global research and help countries across the Commonwealth stop plastic waste from entering the oceans in the first place.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

When it comes to our seas and oceans, the challenge is global so the answer must be too.

Through this ambitious alliance we will build on the UK's world-leading microbeads ban and 5p plastic bag charge to harness the full power of the Commonwealth in pushing for global change and safeguarding our marine environment for future generations.

Developing countries signed up to the Alliance will also be eligible to bid for partnership support to improve waste management systems and implement other initiatives to stop plastic waste from reaching oceans.

In recognition of the passionate response of the UK public to the issue, from later this year the Department for International Development will also match pound-for-pound public donations to tackle the issue of plastic waste in the world's oceans and rivers.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

The scourge of plastics is a global environmental challenge – and one that overwhelmingly impacts the livelihoods and health of the world's poorest people.

We are joining forces with our Commonwealth partners, bringing together global expertise to stop plastics waste from entering oceans – and by matching pound-for-pound the UK public's passionate response to the issue, we can make our shared ambition for clean oceans a reality.

The Department for International Development will also support research into solutions to reduce manufacturing pollution, and carry out waste management pilot programmes to help tackle the waste from cities that too often ends up in the world's oceans and rivers. This will protect the livelihoods and health of those that are affected by plastic pollution – while also providing new jobs in some of the world's poorest countries.

Furthermore, the UK will commit £25 million to help researchers approach the scourge of marine plastic waste from a scientific, technical, economic and social perspective. It will also put £20 million to prevent plastic and other environmental pollution from manufacturing in developing countries.

To further support the work of the CCOA, £16.4 million will be used to improve waste management at a national and a city level.

The Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance will work in partnership with businesses and NGOs, including the World Economic Forum, Sky, Fauna and Flora International, the Coca-Cola Company and WWF to share expertise and experience and push for global change.

Jeremy Darroch, Chief Executive of Sky, said:

In January 2017 we launched Sky Ocean Rescue to raise awareness of ocean health and to encourage the public to remove single-use plastic from their lives by making simple, everyday changes.

We strive to be a responsible business and believe through our own behaviours that we can affect real change. So I am delighted to support the UK and Vanuatu Governments' launch of the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance and we look forward to working together to find innovative solutions that will make a significant difference to the health of our oceans for current and future generations.

Welcoming the announcement, Mark Rose, Chief Executive of Fauna & Flora International said:

Urgent and collective action is now needed to reduce the levels of plastic reaching our oceans. Fauna & Flora International applauds the leadership of the UK and Vanuatu and other Commonwealth nations in committing to act together to reduce these threats under the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance.

We are committed to actively support this initiative, and to help to achieve these ambitious aims, building on our long-standing programme of work on marine plastics and our networks across more than 20 Commonwealth countries

The Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance will drive action in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 14 to conserve and sustainably use the oceans,

and will also sign up to and implement a number of international agreements to protect our oceans, such as the UN Clean Seas campaign, the Global Ghost Gear Initiative and the London Protocol.

Notes to Editors:

Supporting the Clean Oceans Alliance

Poor waste management is a leading cause of plastics in the ocean. This is why the Prime Minister has announced that all developing country members of the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance can bid for DFID partnership support from a new £5 million facility to improve waste management systems and implement other initiatives to reduce plastics waste.

Up to five developing countries will be supported to help them meet the ambitious political commitments they have made by signing up to the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance.

Defra will also be investing £2.4m to support the development of a new public-private delivery platform to help advance the ambitions set out by the CCOA.

Commonwealth waste management pilots

The Prime Minister has also announced today that DFID will provide up to £3m to support pilot programmes in 2-3 Commonwealth developing countries, to help tackle the waste from cities that too often ends up in the world's oceans and rivers.

This will focus on how to reduce the waste that ends up in the oceans and protect the livelihoods and health of those that are affected by plastic pollution – while also providing new jobs.

The UK will also be supporting six countries across the Commonwealth to develop national litter action plans focusing on plastics entering the oceans, through Defra's £6m Commonwealth Litter programme.

Tackling manufacturing pollution

The Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Pollution programme will tackle the problem of pollution and environmental degradation generated by manufacturing processes in DFID priority countries across Africa and Asia.

Over five years (2018-2023) DFID will back a £20 million research programme to generate evidence and practical solutions to address the problem of environmental pollution including plastics from manufacturing sources – a major contributor to waste creation.

Aid Match

The UK public has shown passion and energy in the fight against global plastic waste – which is why from later this year, the UK Government will match pound-for-pound public donations on helping developing countries to

reduce plastic waste.

Open to bids from charities from 30 April 2018, the latest £20 million round of UK Aid Match funding will be focused on the priorities agreed by our Commonwealth partners: disability; health; women's empowerment; youth employment; prosperity; modern slavery; girls' education; and oceans and plastics.

For the first time, the public will be able to double their donations to charities tackling the scourge of plastics waste in the world's oceans.

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Speech: Our action will degrade the Syrian regime's chemical weapons use

Thank you Mr President.

Mr President, these are uncertain times and today we deal with exceptional circumstance. Acting with our American and French allies in the early hours of this morning, the United Kingdom conducted coordinated, targeted and precise strikes to degrade Assad's chemical weapons capability and deter their future use.

The British Royal Air Force launched Storm Shadow missiles at a military facility some 15 miles west of Homs where the regime is assessed to keep chemical weapons in breach of Syria's obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Full assessment has not yet been completed but we believe the strikes to be successful.

Furthermore, none of the British, US or French aircraft or missiles involved in this operation were successfully engaged by Syrian air defences and there is also no indication that Russian air defence systems were employed.

Our action was a limited, targeted and effective strike. There were clear boundaries that expressly sought to avoid escalation and we did everything

possible, including rigorous planning, before any action was undertaken to ensure that we mitigated and minimised the impact on civilians. Together our action will significantly degrade the Syrian regime's ability to research, develop and deploy chemical weapons and deter their future use.

The UK Prime Minister has said we are clear about who is responsible for the atrocity of the use of chemical weapons. A significant body of information including intelligence indicates the Syrian regime is responsible for the attack we saw last Saturday. Some of the evidence that leads us to this conclusion is as follows:

There are open source accounts alleging that a barrel bomb was used to deliver the chemicals;

Multiple open source reports claim a regime helicopter was observed above the city of Douma on the evening of 7th April. The opposition does not operate helicopters nor does it use barrel bombs;

And reliable intelligence indicates that Syrian military officials coordinated what appears to be the use of chlorine in Douma on 7th April. Mr President, no other group could have carried out this attack. Indeed Da'esh, for example, does not even have a presence in Douma.

The Syrian regime has been killing its own people for seven years. Its use of chemical weapons, which has exacerbated the human suffering, is a serious crime of international concern as a breach of the customary international law prohibition on the use of chemical weapons and this amounts to a war crime and a crime against humanity. Any state is permitted under international law, on an exceptional basis, to take measures in order to alleviate overwhelming humanitarian suffering. The legal basis for the use of force for the United Kingdom is humanitarian intervention which requires three conditions to be met.

Number one, that there is convincing evidence, generally accepted by the international community as a whole, of extreme humanitarian distress on a large scale requiring immediate and urgent relief. I think the debates in this Council and the briefings we have had from OCHA and others have proved that.

Secondly, it must be objectively clear that there is no practicable alternative to the use of force if lives are to be saved. I think the vetoes have shown us that.

And thirdly, the proposed use of force must be necessary and proportionate to the aim of relief of humanitarian suffering. It must be strictly limited in time and in scope to this aim. And I think we have heard both in my intervention in Ambassador Haley's how that has also been met.

The history of the Syrian conflict is a litany of threats to peace and violations of international law. The Security Council has met 113 times since the Syrian war started. It was therefore not for want of international diplomatic effort that we find ourselves in this position today.

After pattern of chemical weapons use since the outbreak of the conflict, Assad defied the international community in 2013 by launching a sarin gas attack on Eastern Ghouta which left more than 800 people dead. Despite the adoption of Resolution 2118, despite four years of patient engagement, Syria continues to use chemical weapons against its people and has failed to answer a long list of serious questions. The only conclusion we can reach is that Syria had not declared or destroyed all of its chemical weapons despite its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

This is not assertion on our part but a matter of record and I draw the Russian Ambassador's attention to his points about Barazan and Jimrya. The OPCW still has unanswered questions and discrepancies. He knows this. We all know this. The Council was briefed by the OPCW Director General.

Resolution 2118 decides in the event of non-compliance to impose measures under Chapter 7 of the Charter. Yet on 28th February last year when the UK, together with France, proposed a Resolution taking measures under Chapter 7, short of the use of force, Russia vetoed. The very least this Council should have been able to do Mr President, was to follow up on the findings of the JIM report by extending its mandate. Yet four times Russia has vetoed different proposals from different Council Members to do just that.

The Syrian regime and its supporters are responsible for the gravest violations of international humanitarian law in modern history. They have used indiscriminate weapons, notably barrel bombs and cluster munitions, against civilians and they have deliberately targeted medical facilities and schools as well as humanitarian personnel and civilian objects. They have used sieges and starvation as methods of warfare accompanied by attacks on opposition-held civilian areas.

The regime has persistently obstructed humanitarian aid and medical evacuations. Tens of thousands of people have been illegally detained, tortured and executed by the regime. This is one of the most serious challenges to the international non-proliferation regime we have ever faced. A State party has violated the Chemical Weapons Convention. It has defied the Security Council and it has broken international law.

Repeated attempts over several years to hold them to account have been met with Russian obstruction and resistance. We have repeatedly, in this Council, attempted to overcome this obstruction without success. Mr President, we are faced with the litany of violations, no sense of guilt, no sense of regret, no sense of responsibility, a shameful record, wrapped in a mix of denial, deceit and disinformation.

Mr President, I would invite those like the Russian Ambassador who speak about the Charter to consider the following: It is hard to believe that it is in line with the principles and purposes of the Charter to use or condone the use of chemical weapons and in the United Kingdom's view, it cannot be illegal to use force to prevent the killing of such numbers of innocent people. I will take no lessons, Mr. President, in international law from Russia.

Despite all this Mr. President we would like to look forward. The United Kingdom, together with France and the US, will continue to pursue a diplomatic resolution to the Syrian crisis. My French colleague will say more about our work in a few moments. We believe it must comprise four elements.

One, Syria's chemical weapons program must be ended and the chemical weapons stockpiles destroyed once and for all.

Two, there must be an immediate cessation of hostilities and compliance with all Security Council Resolutions and these include those which mandate humanitarian access.

Three, the regime must return to the Geneva talks and agree to engage on the substantial agenda put forward by the UN Special Envoy Stefan de Mistura,

Four, finally, there must be accountability for the use of chemical weapons and other war crimes in Syria.

Mr. President, the Secretary-General rightly highlighted the political process. We propose that as the Security Council will all be together next weekend in the retreat with the Secretary-General, very kindly hosted by Sweden, that we should use that opportunity to reflect on next steps and the way back to the political process.

And with our allies, we stand ready to work with all members on the Security Council towards this end.

Thank you.

Press release: PM calls with world leaders: 14 April 2018

PM calls with world leaders: 14 April 2018 – GOV.UK

Prime Minister Theresa May spoke with a number of world leaders about the strikes made by the UK, France and the United States in Syria.



A Downing Street spokesperson said:

Following the successful strikes made against the Syrian Regime's chemical weapons sites earlier today by the UK, France and United States, Prime Minister Theresa May is speaking to a number of her fellow world leaders.

Those who she has spoken to so far are Mohammad Bin Salman Al Saud; King Abdullah of Jordan; Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia; President Erdogan of Turkey; President Anastasiades of Cyprus; Prime Minister Gentiloni of Italy; Chancellor Merkel of Germany; EU President Donald Tusk; Prime Minister Turnbull of Australia and Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada.

The PM explained that the action the UK has taken with our American and French allies was limited, carefully targeted and designed to alleviate humanitarian suffering, degrade the Syrian Regime's chemical weapons capability and deter their use in the future. The response was not just to the Douma attack but to a series of devastating assaults on the Syrian people by their government.

All of the leaders agreed with the Prime Minister on the importance of restoring the international norm that the use of chemical weapons is never acceptable.

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