

Press release: Statement on Ukrainian political prisoners held by Russian authorities

Three Ukrainian nationals currently in Russian detention are on hunger strike to demand Russia release Ukrainian political prisoners.

The United Kingdom remains deeply concerned about the deteriorating health and welfare of three Ukrainian political prisoners; Oleg Sentsov, Volodymyr Balukh, and Emir-Huseyn Kuku.

The men were detained by the Russian authorities for expressing opposition to the illegal annexation of Crimea. Mr Sentsov and Mr Balukh were given lengthy jail sentences following trials that have fallen well short of international standards. Mr Kuku is currently on trial.

We have seen increasingly worrying reports about the welfare and treatment of these men. Human rights monitoring organisations have been denied access to visit them and up to 70 other political prisoners being held in Crimea and the Russian Federation.

The Ukrainian ombudsman has also been denied access by Russian authorities despite an agreement between the Ukrainian and Russian Presidents.

UK Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan said:

We remain concerned for the welfare of Oleg Sentsov, Volodymyr Balukh, and Emir-Huseyn Kuku, who are on hunger strike to demand Russia release Ukrainian political prisoners.

The imprisonment of these men and many more Ukrainians appears to be politically motivated and we call on the Russian authorities to release them immediately.

It is deplorable that the Russian authorities continue to deny access by International monitoring organisations to the detention facilities, even as the health of these prisoners deteriorates.

Further information

Speech: The Start-Up Games: backing the Western Balkans' Entrepreneurs

Welcome all of you to the Start-Up Games, here in London.

I wanted to thank those of you who have come across from the Western Balkans for coming here and I hope today, you will find, has been an incredibly useful time for you.

I understand you had a launch last night and are raring to go for today.

The innovation we see in the Western Balkans

You should know that everybody here is part of a very special and carefully selected group of people that we have asked to come to take part in today.

What we are looking for around the world are some of the most innovative entrepreneurs, and you have actually been singled out as people that we think fit that bill.

We think that every single one of your businesses has an idea.

We think you have an idea and you have the start of a business acumen that can really transform what is happening in the world, and that's why we're excited that you're here today.

We have for example a company from Serbia that has solar-powered drones.

These drones are expected to stay airborne for months, so another major improvement.

Or a Kosovan company building desktop 3D printers.

A Bosnian company developing smart beehives.

Or one of my personal favourites having come from the education world, earlier in my business career, an EdTech business with the wonderful name "Whoopedu".

And that's just a tip of the iceberg.

Now today really is about hearing from people who've done it before, hearing from investors about what it is that they are looking for in terms of businesses in which to invest – people and ideas in which to invest.

It's about helping you build your networks, because networks in any business line are fundamentally important.

And it's about what we can do to give you some ideas, thoughts, links to bring your ideas and make them a reality.

But before I start and launch the event I just wanted to say a few words, and step back, about why this event is taking place at all.

Building links with Balkan governments and businesses

As you know it's part of a major bigger diplomatic activity: the [Western Balkans Summit](#).

This itself is part of an even bigger project called the Berlin Process. And that was a process that was developed to strengthen the multilateral ties between the 6 Western Balkans nations and the European Union.

In fact, this is the 5th Berlin Summit event.

It was an initiative that was launched by Chancellor Merkel, and which our Prime Minister, Theresa May, is proud to host here today in the UK.

And I think you will see this very much and it represents a sign of our ongoing commitment, to your countries, which I can promise you, will not stop when we leave the EU.

So next time somebody says, "what were you doing here?", you can say you were attending an event which was all part of a diplomatic mission.

But I don't think anyone will think that you'd come to an event quite like this.

But that's actually what makes it so important, because having come from business myself, and I've been in government for just over 9 months, I'm very clear the government's role is to do what we can do to help businesses, but the people who trade, the people with the ideas that take them forward are almost always businesses – businessmen and women.

So for me, it's incredibly important that we don't just have government-to-government links but we have business-to-business links.

And that's especially true in the world of start-ups.

So we have seasoned investors here, as I've said.

We in the UK have one of the largest investor bases, with £1.2 trillion worth of money invested from the UK, abroad.

So we think for you there's a big opportunity to be had.

The UK's commitment to the Western Balkans

And let's make no mistake, the UK is committed to the Western Balkans.

We may be leaving the EU, but we are not leaving Europe.

We support the prosperity, the stability and the security of Europe, and we always will.

So my government, and the department I represent – the Department of International Trade – are determined that we will take a leading role in the Western Balkans.

And we are here, as I said earlier, to help you achieve your full potential.

The Global Entrepreneur Programme

We believe we have one of the world's best business environments.

The World Bank will independently measure the UK as the Number 7 in terms of ease of doing business.

So what we're doing now to build on that is to develop a fellowship programme to give entrepreneurs and investors or future investors direct exposure to our innovative environment in the UK.

And to set up a link – a network – between Britain and Western Balkans, entrepreneurs and the tech incubators.

And this today is the first time you will have heard it officially from a government minister: we are extending the Global Entrepreneur Programme, which helps tech entrepreneurs scale and flourish, from a UK base – we're [extending the Global Entrepreneur Programme, or the GEP, to the Western Balkans](#).

I was lucky enough last week to meet one of the founders, Eric van der Kleij.

In fact, I met him in Seoul, in Korea, where he was there doing what he, obviously he and his colleagues had done, scouring the world for the best ideas to bring them to the UK for events such as this.

We hope that this day will help you.

It will help you build your business plans.

It will provide you with assistance for any relocation you might need, including access to the Entrepreneur Visa.

We hope it will be the start of helping secure new investment, to begin some mentoring options and mentoring opportunities and to give you advice about how to grow.

Conclusion

I really hope that some of you here today, while enjoying today, I hope it will be helpful and I hope you will look back and think this was a fundamental change in the way you took on your business.

And I hope you will take advantage of this programme to help both the Western Balkans and the UK – and Europe as a whole – to reach that high-tech, high-growth future that we all want to see.

And I'm very clear it will be you and people like you that will do it.

Let's make a start today.

I officially open the Western Balkans Games.

Let the games begin.

News story: Minister urges UK fishermen to sign up for safety improvements

Transport Minister Nusrat Ghani met with coastal MPs in the Houses of Parliament on Wednesday (11 July 2018) to discuss how the fishing industry can improve safety for its workers.

Representatives from the Fishing Industry Safety Group (FISG), Seafish and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency also attended the roundtable event.

Transport Minister Nusrat Ghani commented:

Fishing remains one of the most dangerous industries in the UK, with 43 people sadly losing their lives since 2012.

A lot of work has already been done to encourage fishermen to be safer at sea and last year we saw the fewest fishing vessels lost ever, but more can be done.

This meeting was very positive, with MPs promising to further promote the use of personal locator beacons by fishermen in their constituencies.

The new [safety management code](#) aims to improve onboard safety by addressing the day-to-day risks that fishing involves.

Much has already been done in recent years to help the fishing industry become safer, including the provision of free personal flotation devices to fishermen, free training courses for the industry and new codes of practice and guidance to help avoid crew going overboard.

The Fishing Industry Safety Group has also developed a strategy to eliminate preventable deaths by 2027.

In addition, the FISG will promote the use of the 'Safety management system' to improve onboard safety, continue to encourage the use of funding for personal locator beacons and electronic position indicating radio beacons and develop stability standards for small fishing vessels.

It is hoped that this combined focus from key organisations with an interest in fishing safety and from MPs of coastal constituencies will make a real difference to the safety of fishermen at sea.

[News story: HMRC publishes more information on Making Tax Digital](#)

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has today published further information on Making Tax Digital (MTD) to support businesses and agents in the run up to start of the mandatory MTD VAT service from April 2019.

This includes:

Together, these provide additional clarity that businesses and their representatives have been asking for.

As part of MTD, businesses registered for VAT with a taxable turnover above the VAT registration threshold of £85,000 will need to keep VAT records digitally and file their VAT returns using MTD compatible software. This will start from their first VAT period starting on or after 1 April 2019.

Businesses with a taxable turnover below the VAT threshold will not have to operate MTD, but can still choose to do so voluntarily.

[VAT Notice 700/22: Making Tax Digital for VAT](#) provides information to customers and adds to amendments to the VAT Regulations made earlier this year. The notice also gives guidance on the digital record keeping and return requirements of MTD for VAT including:

- Who needs to follow the MTD rules and from when.
- The digital records businesses must keep, and a series of HMRC directions that relax these requirements in certain circumstances (such as where a mixed rate supply is made, where a third party agent makes or receives supplies on behalf of a business, and where a business uses a special VAT scheme such as a retail scheme or the Flat Rate Scheme).
- How businesses must use software to keep digital records and file their returns from those digital records, including information on when programs do and do not need to be digitally linked in situations where a combination of software programs is used. Given VAT registered businesses and their tax agents already use a wide variety of different systems and programs to produce their VAT returns, the notice includes a

number of illustrated examples to show customers how to ensure their specific set up will be compliant with the regulations from April 2019.

HMRC has been working closely with software providers to help them to bring a wide range of MTD products to market, and [has published a list on GOV.UK](#) of those that are already at the stage of having demonstrated a prototype product ready to start testing with businesses and/or agents.

HMRC has also produced [a communication pack](#) to support our partnership working arrangements with stakeholders who can use the contents to inform their own communications activity and key messages for their clients, customers or members. The pack is intended to provide source material and information which can be used to support any letters, articles, presentations, social media activity, or web content planned by stakeholders.

Businesses above the VAT threshold are not required to use MTD for their VAT returns until April 2019 but HMRC has already started piloting the changes with small numbers of invited businesses and agents. This will be widened out to allow more to join later this year. In the meantime, businesses can start to prepare now by ensuring they are keeping their records digitally and in accordance with the rules set out in the notice.

Speech: UK and Kenya on Disability Summit: Nothing about us, without us

Cabinet Secretary Yatani, Ladies and Gentleman

Good afternoon

I am delighted to see so many of you here this afternoon ahead of the first, yes the first, Global Disability Summit in London on 24th July.

The Summit which the UK, Kenya and the International Disability Alliance will co-host, will raise global attention and focus on a long neglected area. It will mobilise new global and national commitments on disability and showcase good practice and innovation from across the world.

The UK was thrilled when the Government of Kenya agreed to co-host the Summit. Kenya is rightly recognized as a leader on disability inclusion and there is much that the UK and other countries can learn from you. But, as is the case in my own country, true equality remains a work in progress.

Today I would like to acknowledge the dedication of [everybody here](#) to making the Summit a great success. It will be your passion, energy and drive that will help realise true equality for people with disabilities here in Kenya.

CS Yatani, as you head to London, I want to thank you and your team at the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection for our long-standing partnership. Together we have helped assist the most vulnerable and the most neglected people in Kenya.

Today, we are committed more than ever to ensuring that people with disabilities are not left behind, that they are supported to contribute their full potential to, and benefit from, Kenya's prosperity.

The UK is already working to promote disability inclusion here in Kenya, in partnership with many of you:

- From the support we're providing to Sightsavers through the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust to tackle blinding trachoma;
- To our partnership with Leonard Cheshire supporting disability inclusion in schools through the Girls Education Challenge;
- To our work with Sense International to support childhood screening of sensory disabilities; and
- During last year's election, our support through Humanity and Inclusion to help ensure persons with disabilities were able to cast their votes.

This is a good starting point, but we must continue to work together to push for change, challenge stigma and move things forward, both as individuals, but also as Governments.

For too long, people with disabilities have been excluded from conversations on policies and actions that affect them. But that is changing. Your mini-disability summit here, which brought together disabled people, organisations, carers, the private sector and governments on 24th May was a fantastic example that there should be Nothing About Us, Without Us.

The commitments which came out of that event, combined with the Summit outcomes, will deliver real action, helping achieve progress on the rights of people with disabilities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to conclude by thanking each and every one of you for your work, and by wishing those heading to London a successful trip. We look forward to working with you on return to further support people with disabilities in Kenya.

Before I invite my fellow speakers: i) Mr Anderson Gitonga, CEO of the United Disabled Persons of Kenya; ii) Ms Alice Wairimu, an inspiring young lady living with a disability; and iii) His Excellency, Cabinet Secretary Yatani to say a few words – I would like to play a short video message from the UK's Secretary of State for International Development, Penny Morduant.

As many of you will know, our Development Secretary is a long standing champion of people with disabilities, and the driving force behind the Global Disability Summit.

Thank you