

Speech: Preventing Hunger as a Weapon of War

Thank you Madam President.

Our briefers today have sounded the alarm and warned us of the surging levels of acute hunger, which are largely attributable to conflict. But this is not for the first time.

Over a year ago, the Secretary General drew this Council's attention to the change in the long-term trend in global hunger: it was now rising for the first time in a decade. The situation was critical, he said; the UN predicted four simultaneous famines, threatening the lives of 20 million people.

Through the generosity of donors and the actions of humanitarian and development organisations, international financial institutions and regional governments, famine itself was prevented, or at least contained.

But let's be clear. Over the past year, suffering and hunger has increased. In the world today, one out of every nine people is undernourished. That is 815 million people, an increase of 38 million in the last year.

Conflict is the main reason for this increase in hunger. 60 percent of hungry and malnourished people live in countries affected by conflict.

Almost 75% of the world's 155 million stunted children under the age of five live in countries affected by conflict. It is the most vulnerable – particularly women and children – who are most affected by hunger. These figures indicate that the actions we have taken in the past year to reduce hunger have not been enough. As so clearly put by our briefers, we must examine and address the root causes of this severe hunger crisis if we hope to put an end to it.

Madam President,

Last August, this Council adopted a Presidential Statement that, for the first time, acknowledged that hunger and conflict are linked. That was a step forward, but it only gives us half the picture. In the statement, the Security Council emphasized with deep concern (and I quote), "that ongoing conflicts and violence have devastating humanitarian consequences and hinder an effective humanitarian response ...and are therefore a major cause of famine."

This reads as if hunger is just an inevitable consequence of war, or a by-product of the changing nature of conflict. That is clearly not the case. Hunger does not need to be a product of war, and I hope we can make that clear in future Council products.

We must understand and acknowledge the true nature of the problem to take the necessary collective actions to break the deadly links between conflict and

hunger. In this regard, we see three key areas of responsibility for this Council:

First, to redouble efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts, and build and sustain peace.

Second, we must uphold international humanitarian and human rights law. We are fast approaching a new normal where warring parties think it is acceptable to destroy crops, interrupt markets, and attack water points, hospitals, and schools. Too often there is a lack of accountability for the state actors and other parties to conflict who are responsible for increasing hunger.

Third, we must actively safeguard humanitarian access. In almost all of the crises before this Council, people are denied or unable to access essential aid, often with the most vulnerable people being the worst affected. The Security Council can and must play a key role to enable the safe, unhindered and rapid access of populations to humanitarian assistance. We must engage with national and regional authorities to apply diplomatic pressure and insist on the removal of access constraints, and we should pursue accountability for any violations.

Madam President,

We must think creatively when responding to this crisis. For example, to identify the most serious cases of obstructed access objectively, we could use a model that articulates access in terms of needs met by the delivery of health care, protection, and education, rather than simply by numbers of aid convoys. We could also factor in denial of access to the design of sanctions mandated by this Council more routinely.

Madam President,

We are extremely grateful to you and to the Kingdom of the Netherlands for calling this meeting because it is a subject about which the UK deeply cares and is deeply engaged as the third largest humanitarian donor.

The scale of the challenge we are facing is clear. The threat of famine remains. In a world of abundance, 815 million people are still hungry. Their hunger is used as a weapon of war. We must act and use the tools at our disposal to show the world that this is not acceptable and that we do not accept it. We must seek accountability and we must make the consequences of these appalling actions clear.

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Updated: World location not added.

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Thank you.

Speech: Lord Ahmad welcomes conclusions of the 37th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

As I mentioned in my [speech](#) at the opening of the session, this year marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and now, more than ever, is the time to stand up for human rights, protect and uphold the rights of individuals and promote equality and freedom. I am pleased to see that resolutions on Syria, Iran, DRPK, Burma, South Sudan, Libya and Georgia were adopted, as well as a UK-led cross-regional statement on [the Maldives](#) and an urgent debate on Eastern Ghouta that was [requested by the UK](#). It is essential we work together with other Member States to hold the perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses to account.

I welcome the mandate renewals on Mali, DPRK, Iran, Burma, Syria, Human Rights and the Environment, The Right to Food, and Human Rights and Privacy. I also welcome the renewal of the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan. The Government of South Sudan must now establish the Hybrid Court, to ensure that those responsible for human rights violations are held to account.

The human rights situation in Syria has, if anything, worsened in recent months and the death toll continues to rise. I therefore welcome the resolution extending the mandate of the UN Commission of Inquiry. This, along with the urgent debate the UK called for earlier in the session, which adopted a resolution condemning the horrific starvation siege and bombardment of [Eastern Ghouta](#) conveyed a strong message of support and solidarity to all Syrians.

As we have seen recently, the Russian State has been more than willing to ignore the rules-based international system and deny the rights of its citizens. These events have led the UK to focus our [item 4 statement](#) (human rights situations that require the Council's attention) largely on Russia. The UK welcomes expressions of support from the EU and others. The human rights situation in Russia remains of deep concern, particularly around freedoms of expression and assembly, freedom of religion or belief and LGBT rights. We welcome the Council's unity in condemning such violations and abuses.

I welcome the latest resolution on Libya, which underlines the need for greater accountability for those who commit human rights violations and abuses, including unlawful killings. We will continue to work with the Government of National Accord, the UN and other partners to implement the resolution and address these crimes.

I welcome the increased support for the resolution on access for the OHCHR and human rights mechanisms to the Georgian breakaway territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. I hope that this expression of international concern is

heeded and access granted so that vital human rights protection work can be undertaken in these isolated regions.'

I welcome the adoption of the resolution on Burma, extending the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and calling for the allocation of necessary resources to ensure the UN Fact Finding Mission can fulfil its mandate. We will continue to urge Burma to grant access to the Special Rapporteur and the Fact-Finding Mission and cooperate fully with their respective mandates, and to call upon the Burmese authorities and military to ensure the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of the refugees.

Turning to Iran, I would like to pay tribute to Ms. Asma Jahangir, an inspiration to human rights defenders around the world. Her courage and commitment will be sorely missed. In this spirit, I hope that Iran will work constructively with the new mandate holder when appointed and allow them access to the country.

I welcome the adoption of the resolution on terrorism and human rights, a merger of the separate resolutions traditionally led by Mexico and by Egypt on which we worked hard to balance condemnation of terrorism with the need for States, in their efforts to counter terrorism, to ensure respect for human rights.

The UK abstained on the Chinese resolution on 'mutually beneficial cooperation'. We believe that international cooperation plays an important role in promoting and protecting human rights, but it is important to hold perpetrators to account and to speak up when rights are being violated.

I welcome the resolution on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted by consensus and with the widest number of co-sponsors. The UK is playing an active part in the global push towards the provision of quality education and learning for girls, including the most marginalised and vulnerable. In line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, we will work with partners to achieve 12 years of quality education for all children by 2030 and continue to push for gender equality.

The UK has pledged £50 million over five years to tackle violence against children globally, including £10m on a global programme to tackle child sexual exploitation in 17 countries. The UK's £35 million five-year programme to end Female Genital Mutilation by 2030 is the largest contribution of any single country.

Defending religious freedom and promoting tolerance remains a priority for the UK government and we therefore welcome the adoption of both the EU's 'Freedom of Religion or Belief' resolution and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's text on combating religious intolerance resolution.

During the last week of this session we delivered a [statement](#) to the Council to mark the International day of elimination of racial discrimination. The Prime Minister has announced a [£90 million programme](#) to help tackle inequalities in youth unemployment highlighted by the [Race Disparity Audit](#).

Today, after four weeks of intense effort to protect and strengthen the promotion of human rights, the Council session draws to an end. The Human Rights Council is a vital forum, enabling Member States to work together to support and uphold universal rights around the world. In the face of adversity, we must continue to strive towards a world that stands unified in holding those that commit human rights violations and abuses to account.

Further information

[Speech: Rt Hon Mark Field MP speech at Global FinTech Investor Forum](#)

Thank you Nikhil and thanks to your team here at the London Stock Exchange for the opportunity to address so many Fintech pioneers.

FinTech sits at a crossroads of my professional responsibilities and my personal interests:

As Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister, I have responsibility not only for nurturing our relationships with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region, but also for international economic diplomacy, including the financial services sector. As MP for the constituency of the Cities of London and Westminster for the last 17 years, I know better than most just how important the City is for this country's economy, and just how important innovation is to maintaining the UK's global prominence in financial services.

And as a politician and father, I am very conscious that the success and prosperity of our children's generation will in large part be determined by how we seize the opportunities that new technologies offer, and how we adapt to the disruption they cause.

The current generation of Fintech entrepreneurs in the UK has risen to the challenge; continuing a long-standing tradition of financial innovation in this country. They have come a long way in a very short time. The dynamism and growth of the sector is envied by much of the world.

I would like to think that this Government, through being responsive to the needs of the sector, and by creating the conditions in which the sector can thrive, has also played its part in this success story.

So today I want unashamedly to make the case for London and the UK as a pre-eminent global hub for financial services in this fast evolving digital age; and I want to demonstrate how this Government is backing UK Fintech all the way.

Emergence of Fintech

New technologies are transforming lives in ways that could not have been imagined even a decade ago. They are connecting people who used to be isolated; they are democratising information, education and opportunity; and they are creating jobs and industries that didn't previously exist.

Innovation has been a big part of the success of the UK's financial services industry, ever since it was unleashed by the reforms of Margaret Thatcher's government in the 1980s. Its pioneering of Islamic and Green Finance is a case in point. In 2013, London was the first capital of a non-Muslim majority country to host the World Islamic Economic Forum. Soon after that we became the first Western nation to issue a sovereign sukuk – or Sharia-compliant bond.

Today, this place, the London Stock Exchange, is seen as the global hub for these bonds, with 65 issues to date – worth over \$48 billion dollars. In 2017, the Financial Conduct Authority authorised the first Sharia-compliant FinTech company – Yielders – and more are expected to follow. The City of London is also a natural hub for Green Finance, offering access to unrivalled liquidity and professional services with expertise in the sector.

The falling cost of renewable energy, in part driven by the competitive investment environment, and demand for ethical investments in centres like London, is driving the global shift to a low carbon economy at a faster pace than many had imagined.

That same foresight which made London an early adopter of sukuk and green finance also meant it was quick to identify how new technologies could be used to deliver new financial services, and refine old ones. We have rapidly emerged and grown into a Fintech superpower.

I could not put it better than Deloitte, who last year ranked London as the world's best FinTech hub, and said – I quote:

London has the world's largest financial services sector, supported by a booming tech sector. The ecosystem has the "Fin" of New York, the "Tech" of the US West Coast and the policymakers of Washington, all within a 15 minute journey on public transport. These factors make London one of the greatest connected global cities in the world, with the key ingredients for digital success: capital, talent, regulatory and government support and demographic diversity.

You will have heard my ministerial colleague Robert Jenrick talk about some of these ingredients for success this morning. I am going to focus on two more: first, the regulatory environment, and secondly, what this Government is doing to support UK Fintech thrive beyond these shores.

Regulatory environment

The success of the UK's FinTech industry has been enabled and supported by a policy and regulatory environment which has innovated in almost equal measure to the industry itself.

In the Financial Conduct Authority, we have the first regulator in the world to introduce a regulatory "sandbox" in which businesses can test products and ideas in a live environment. Such was its success that it has been widely replicated elsewhere.

Alongside this inspired regulation, HM Treasury have been on the front foot in promoting an environment here in the UK in which innovative businesses can apply technology to deliver efficiencies and benefits to both business and consumers. The roll-out of the world-leading Open Banking-standard enables the sharing of data making it easier for consumers to use third parties to access their accounts to improve financial information and payment services, allowing greater competition and security.

HMG promotion of UK Fintech

To maintain the UK's position as a world-leader in FinTech, the Government has entered into bespoke agreements with some of the key Fintech early adopters and markets. These agreements will reduce barriers to trade and link companies in both nations with opportunities for international trade and investment. We call these agreements 'FinTech Bridges'.

We began by building bridges eastward, to some of the most dynamic economies on my patch as Minister for Asia and the Pacific. We already have FinTech Bridge agreements in place with Singapore, Hong Kong, China and Republic of Korea. These are soon to be joined by a fifth – with Australia.

Each Bridge is governed by an agreement signed by the Financial Conduct Authority and establishes links between government, regulators and the private sector, with the aim of attracting international capital investment into the UK's FinTech sector and foreign direct investment as international firms choose the UK.

The UK's comparative advantage for investing in FinTech is not just about regulation. As I am sure you know, this country boasts one of the most competitive business environments in the world, and consistently ranks in the top 10 for ease of doing business.

We are a low taxation economy with corporation tax that is the lowest in the G20 at 20% and will be reduced to 17% by 2020. The UK also offers tax incentives for R&D, low social taxation, a competitive location for holding companies and the most flexible labour regulations in Europe.

Conclusion

To conclude ladies and gentlemen, it is not surprising that the FinTech sector is thriving here in the City of London. It has all the right ingredients:

Not only is it a financial capital of the world, the largest exporter of financial services, and an unparalleled centre of excellence, offering stability, predictability, ingenuity and integrity. It also boasts talented software developers, supportive regulators and a reliable supply of investment finance.

That is why we in Government never miss an opportunity to promote the qualities of the City, and the UK's financial services sector more broadly – including its particular FinTech strengths – both at home and overseas.

And that is why I would strongly encourage potential investors here today to come on board. I am confident that the growth we have seen in the sector so far is just the start. London is leading the way: come and join us.

[Press release: Government action on councils failing to plan new homes](#)

Housing Secretary Sajid Javid has today (23 March 2018) [written to 15 local authorities](#) in England to inform them of decisions on intervention following their continued failure to produce a local plan, which are key to setting out how and where they expect to meet residents' needs for new homes, for more than a decade.

In [November 2017](#), the government confirmed it would commence the consideration of intervention in 15 local authorities where there has been a failure to produce a local plan.

Local Plans are a key part of the government's comprehensive programme of planning reform and targeted investment to ensure the homes local communities need are built.

The councils had until 31 January 2018 to explain why they hadn't yet published a plan, providing any exceptional circumstances for why the government shouldn't intervene.

Following their submission, the government is now setting out next steps.

Of the 15 local authorities:

- in Castle Point, Thanet, and Wirral, the government's Chief Planner and a team of experts will be sent in to assess if the government needs to take over the process of producing the local plan
- in Northumberland the government has instructed the council to produce their plan earlier and to make the timetable clearer

- in Basildon, Bolsover, Brentwood, Calderdale, Eastleigh, Mansfield, St Albans, which have all committed to publishing draft plans before the end of September 2018, the government has made clear it will monitor their progress and that any further significant delay to meet this timescale will lead to the case for intervention being reconsidered
- 4 local authorities – Liverpool, North East Derbyshire, Runnymede, York – have since published their plans

Housing Secretary Sajid Javid has written to them to welcome this progress, but has made clear that should there be any further significant delays to their timetable to submit the plan, the government will not hesitate to act.

The government has abolished top-down regional planning. But a locally-led planning system requires elected local representatives to take the lead, listen to local residents and business, and set out a clear framework to build new homes, provide key infrastructure, support the local economy and protect the environment.

Most councils have seized the opportunity that localism presents – however a small minority have not and do not have a local plan in place. This can mean uncertainty for local people, have a negative impact on neighbourhood planning groups, result in piecemeal speculative housing development and communities having no plans in place for crucial local infrastructure and services.

Housing Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Whilst most councils rightly recognise their responsibilities and most have worked hard to meet the housing challenge, some have failed.

I expect those authorities we identified in November to continue to make progress. I'm also stepping it up with 3 councils in particular, sending in a team of experts to make a direct assessment, ensuring they plan properly for the future or we'll have to do it for them.

The department has also commenced preparations to take over plan production so that work can begin as soon as possible, subject to decisions taken after the Chief Planner and his experts report back.

A procurement process is currently underway to secure planning consultants and specialists who will swiftly undertake the work on plan production should these councils not comply in the time required.

The department will also make contact with county councils and combined authorities in the areas concerned about the possibility of inviting those authorities to write plans.

See the [letters sent to the relevant local authorities](#).

The [housing white paper](#) set out how the government would prioritise intervention – where:

- the least progress in plan-making has been made
- policies in plans had not been kept up to date
- there was higher housing pressure
- intervention would have the greatest impact in accelerating local plan production

The strategy also made clear that decisions on intervention will also be informed by the wider planning context in each area (specifically, the extent to which authorities are working cooperatively to put strategic plans in place, and the potential impact that not having a plan has on neighbourhood planning activity).

Planning experts – Castle Point, Thanet, and Wirral

The government's Chief Planner, Steve Quartermain CBE and a team of experts will report back to the Secretary of State who will then take a final decision on formal intervention later this year.

In addition, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will conduct formal discussions with relevant county councils and city regions to see if they could take over plan production on the Secretary of State's behalf.