

Press release: FCO Minister welcomes release of Ilmi Umerov and Akhtem Chiygoz

Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan has welcomed the release of the Crimean Tatar leaders and drawn attention to the considerable number of Ukrainian political prisoners who continue to be detained by Russia.

I welcome the fact that the Crimean Tatar leaders Ilmi Umerov and Akhtem Chiygoz were freed yesterday, 25 October. They were both arrested and sentenced by Russia for their opposition to the illegal annexation of Crimea. The UK had previously called for their release, and appreciates the efforts of all those who worked for this outcome.

Nevertheless we must not lose sight of the many others, including other Crimean Tatars, who have been detained by the de-facto Russian authorities for their opposition to the illegal annexation of Crimea. I call once again for the immediate release of all Ukrainian political prisoners on the Crimean Peninsula and in Russia. The UK remains clear that Crimea is part of Ukraine, and that its annexation by Russia is a breach of international law.

Press release: Charity Commission welcomes publication of the UK's National Risk Assessment

The Charity Commission for England and Wales welcomes today's publication of the UK's National Risk Assessment (NRA 2017) of money laundering and terrorist financing and in particular the chapter on non profit organisations (NPO) – which includes charities.

The NRA 2017 published today assesses the terrorist financing risk of the NPO sector in its entirety to be low, whilst recognising that certain parts of the sector – particularly charities working internationally in certain countries – face significantly higher risks. The Commission welcomes this distinction and emphasises that the risks that charities face will vary depending on what they do and where they operate. In 2015, the UK's first NRA assessed the terrorist financing risk to the NPO sector as medium-high.

The Commission is pleased to have worked with the Home Office and HM Treasury on the NRA 2017 and to have contributed, along with law enforcement agencies

and other government departments, to their understanding of the charity sector in England and Wales and the risks relating to terrorist financing and money laundering that it faces.

The Commission encourages trustees to read the NRA 2017 and to consider the risks to their charity, particularly if their charity works internationally in a country that the NRA 2017 has identified as being at greater risk. The Commission has published guidance for trustees on these issues, such as its [Compliance Toolkit](#). It also undertakes outreach work with the sector and publishes regulatory alerts and messages to assist trustees in understanding the risks of terrorist financing and how to manage them.

Michelle Russell, Director of Investigations, Monitoring and Enforcement at the Charity Commission, said:

We welcome today's publication of the NRA 2017 and the updated assessment on the risks to the charity sector from terrorist financing and money laundering. The risks to the sector of such abuse are not shared equally. It is essential that those charities that are at greater risk take steps to protect themselves so that charitable funds are not abused.

Any trace of terrorist financing within the sector corrodes public confidence in charities and cannot be tolerated. One case is one too many, which is why we continue to work proactively with the subsection of the sector that remains at high risk. In response to today's publication we are reminding those charities to review our Compliance Toolkit and ensure that they have strong financial, due diligence and monitoring controls in place to prevent exploitation by terrorist groups.

Notes to editors

1. The Charity Commission is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see our [annual report](#).
2. Search for charities on our [check charity](#) tool.
3. Addressing the abuse of charities for money laundering or terrorist financing are two of the [Commission's strategic priorities for 2015 – 2018](#).
4. The [Compliance Toolkit](#) offers comprehensive guidance on how charity trustees, staff and volunteers can protect their charities from abuse by anyone encouraging or condoning extremism, terrorism or illegal activity, including by:
 - ensuring that a charity's premises, assets, staff, volunteers or other resources cannot be used for activities that may support or condone terrorism
 - reporting a belief or suspicion of offences connected to terrorist

- financing using the Anti-Terrorist Hotline on 0800 789 321
 - reporting to the Commission if their charity (including any individual staff, trustees or volunteers) has any known or alleged link to a proscribed organisation or to terrorist or other unlawful activity as soon as they become aware of it, under the Commission's Reporting Serious Incidents regime
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News story: New stats reveal veterans' contribution to society, as Ministerial Board steps up support to Armed Forces

The stats show that, contrary to common misconceptions, veterans are as likely to be in employment as the general population, with 78% of veterans in employment, compared to 79% in the general population.

The stats come on the day of the inaugural meeting of a new Ministerial Board, co-chaired by Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon and First Secretary of State Damien Green, which discussed the Government's support to the Armed Forces, their families and veterans.

The new Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Board will drive forward and coordinate better Government support to the Armed Forces, their families and veterans.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Veterans and their families have given so much to this country to help keep us safe. We need all of Government working together to deliver a better deal for Veterans during and after their move to civilian life. We will examine new ways to repay our armed forces for the bravery, honour and sacrifice they demonstrate when defending this country.

A number of other statistics released today by the Office of National Statistics also outline how prevalent myths around the employment, education and health of veterans are untrue. The statistics found that:

- There were no differences between veterans' and non-veteran's self-reported general health and health conditions. 35% of veterans aged between 16-64 reported their general health as very good, compared to 36% of non-veterans. 18% of over 65 veterans also reported very good

general health, compared to 19% of non-veterans.

- Working age veterans were as likely to have a qualification as non-veterans, (92% and 89% respectively) and more likely to have gained qualifications through work (63%) and leisure (17%) than non-veterans (45% and 10% respectively). This is likely a result of the training opportunities offered by the MOD to support service personnel in their military career and during transition out of the services.
- Veterans were as likely to have bought their own home (outright or with a mortgage) (75%) as non-veterans (77%). The MOD's Armed Forces Help to Buy scheme recently revealed that over 11,000 service personnel had been assisted in buying or renovating their own home through the scheme. Forces Help to Buy is just one of the initiatives under the Armed Forces Covenant to support Armed Forces personnel and veterans.

On Tuesday the Defence Secretary called on businesses to do more to promote the positive role veterans play in the workplace. Speaking at an Armed Forces charity dinner he said that veterans play an important part in the nation's economy, contrary to prevalent misconceptions surrounding those who have served.

Research published last week by Lord Ashcroft, the Prime Minister's Special Representative for Veterans' Transition, found that while people on the whole were positive about veterans, some 54% of the general public estimated that service leavers had some kind of physical, emotional or mental health problem as a result of their time in the military

Lord Ashcroft's report highlighted the pervasive nature of myths surrounding public perception of veterans, pointing towards research which debunks a number of these:

- The employment rate for veterans six months after leaving the military is higher than in the UK workforce as a whole
- The vast majority of former service personnel go on to lead normal, healthy, productive lives
- Suicide is less common among the military population than the general public
- Veterans are less likely to go to prison, not more.

The new Ministerial Board which met for the first time today will have a specific focus on the priority area of healthcare, including mental health, but will also look at housing, education, and employment opportunities.

The new Board comes just weeks after the MOD established a new partnership with the Royal Foundation, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry's charity, on improving mental fitness. The partnership delivers on a commitment made in the MOD's recently launched Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Press release: Eleven arrests from investigation into suspected international people smuggling

The UK element of the operation was led by officers from Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation and all the individuals were arrested on suspicion of assisting illegal immigration.

The individuals are believed to be part of an organised criminal network that transported individuals, predominantly from Afghanistan, across Europe and into the UK. The smuggling attempts often involved migrants being concealed in specially adapted vehicles.

Today's arrest operation, which forms part of a wider international law enforcement joint investigation, was supported by officers from the National Crime Agency (NCA) and international partners from Europol and Eurojust (the EU agency tasked with strengthening judicial co-ordination on serious cross-border organised crime).

A breakdown of the arrests is as follows:

Seven individuals in London, two in Birmingham and two in Gateshead on suspicion of assisting illegal immigration. A further individual was arrested in London for suspected immigration offences.

There were also 7 arrests in Bulgaria and 8 in Belgium on suspicion of assisting illegal immigration.

Steve Dann, Director, Criminal & Financial Investigation said:

This international investigation is targeting an organised network suspected of being involved in a systematic attempt to evade the UK's immigration controls.

People smuggling is a cruel and dangerous trade in which often vulnerable individuals are treated as commodities. Many are passed into the hands of other crime gangs who would seek to exploit them for modern slavery purposes – including labour exploitation and the

illicit sex trade.

We have been working closely with law enforcement colleagues across Europe and that vital co-operation will continue as the investigation proceeds with the evidence we have seized today.

The NCA's Chris Hogben, deputy head of the Invigor taskforce, said:

Criminal gangs often facilitate the arrival of illegal migrants into the UK by exploiting their desperation without thought for safety and with the sole motive of profit.

We see this through migrants being sent across the channel in unseaworthy small boats or stuffed into the back of cramped lorries, vans and cars.

This operation is a good example of how we can bring together law enforcement from across Europe to work together to take on that threat and disrupt the organised networks involved in people smuggling.

This investigation falls under Project Invigor, the UK's Organised Immigration Crime Taskforce that targets the criminal networks behind people smuggling. Partners include the National Crime Agency, Immigration Enforcement, Border Force and the Crown Prosecution Service, working in the UK and internationally.

Anyone with information about suspected immigration abuse can contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 anonymously or visit <http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org>.

Speech: John Glen's speech on the launch of the Society of Chief Librarian's Culture Offer

I'm sorry I can't join you in person for the launch of the SCL's Culture Offer today in Hull, the UK's City of Culture 2017.

At the end of September I marked 100 days in this post as Libraries Minister – and in this time I have visited a number of libraries across England, including Manchester and Salisbury, to find out about the challenges, successes and possibilities that exist in the sector.

The range of services delivered by public libraries is impressive, as is the contribution the sector makes to local communities and the positive impact it has on so many people's lives.

Libraries bring people together. They provide practical support and guidance. This includes health and social care, digital literacy, jobs and business support, or the enjoyment and wellbeing that literature and cultural activities bring. Libraries offer support at every stage of a person's life.

They are places of aspiration and inspiration as people come to learn, study, write, and research. And many are destinations in their own right, like the amazing library you are in today.

But what role do libraries play in culture? Well, I believe they are uniquely placed to act as hubs of exploration and inspiration. They are able to reach people in rural communities and areas of deprivation where there are few other easily accessible cultural opportunities.

I'll just mention two out of the many brilliant cultural partnerships libraries are forming across England.

The first is the Cultural Hubs project delivered by St. Helens library service. This project is engaging local young people, supporting neighbourhood development and community cohesion, investing in skills and learning opportunities and promoting an environment that supports health and wellbeing. It did this by being creative with its resources and challenging the boundaries of how library spaces can be used.

Then there's Create Gloucestershire's Art of Libraries programme run in partnership with Gloucestershire Libraries, introducing arts and culture to children and young people – particularly those who currently don't take part in this sort of activity. Artists, cultural organisations, library staff, schools and communities are working together in new ways to achieve this. Events so far include a new lego club, illustration and graffiti workshops and a skate film competition.

So these examples show how libraries are using arts and culture to introduce people to new ideas and offer enriching experiences because, as we know, culture takes many diverse forms.

And as well as traditional events held in libraries, such as book talks and reading groups, there is also a rapidly expanding range of digital activities that provide a great option for libraries to engage with new and existing users. This builds on the rich history of libraries championing important programmes and events including World Book Day and the Summer Reading Challenge.

So what's the role of the Cultural Offer?

It complements and builds on the positive work already taking place in libraries. It underlines the importance of libraries as cultural hubs and gateways to wider cultural activities.

And it should help people to develop and express their creativity through cultural experiences and events.

So I look forward to seeing and hearing more about how the Culture Offer will boost all this positive activity through libraries and to seeing the offer being put into practice. Thank you.

Note: John Glen was unable to attend the launch in person, so a video of him giving this speech was shown at the event.

[John Glen launches the SCL Culture Offer](#)