

Speech: Belfast Partners launch event

Thank you for inviting me to speak at the inaugural Belfast-London Network event, I am very grateful for the invitation.

Belfast Partners is an exciting initiative aiming to showcase all that Belfast has to offer across the globe.

And it makes sense for it to begin in London, reinforcing and strengthening already established links between these two great cities.

Belfast has a long and illustrious economic history, from the turn of the 19th Century, when it was the largest linen producing country in the world, or from when it housed the world's largest shipyard.

And today Belfast has a significant role to play in growing the economy across Northern Ireland.

Of course there are already significant trades from the City that flow through Belfast.

In finance, Citi Bank, which established a Belfast presence in 2004 to support its London offices, now employs around 2000 people in a range of activities.

And last year, Tullett Prebon, one of the world's leading interdealer brokers, announced plans to create 300 new Belfast-based IT jobs. In legal services, Allen & Overy, one of the world's largest international law firms, has pledged to create over 48 jobs in Belfast by 2019, building on the success of the operation it has built there since 2011.

While Herbert Smith Freehills, one of the oldest and most established firms in the City of London, has over 200 staff in Belfast, including qualified lawyers and legal assistants.

I could go on.

It is clear Belfast is already providing important and valuable support to established London businesses.

And there is much too London can learn from Belfast, where the city is already a world leader in areas such as cyber security.

Belfast, and Northern Ireland more generally – ably led by its Universities – also has much to offer in the field of science, research and innovation, a key pillar of the Industrial Strategy.

And this has already been recognised by Government.

In a clear example of the potential this Government sees in Northern Ireland, Innovate UK, the UK's innovation agency, has embedded a business manager within Invest NI in Belfast, to help find and drive the scientific and

technological innovations that will help to grow the NI, and UK, economy.

This Government is serious about developing the economy across the country.

We now have the highest number of people in employment on record and the UK's economic deficit is down by almost two thirds.

In 2016, the UK economy grew faster than any other major advanced economy across the globe and the Bank of England has positively revised its economic projections for this year.

And this growth is reflected across the county.

In Northern Ireland, there are now almost 54,000 more people in work than in 2010 and the number of people in receipt of unemployment benefit is almost 50% lower than at its peak, and has now fallen for nine months in a row.

But this is not enough.

Much more remains to be done to realise the Prime Minister's vision of an economy that works for everyone and not just a privileged elite.

For businesses, and I know many of you will have a vested interest here, the National Productivity Investment Fund will add £23 billion in high value investment, including bringing significant benefits to Northern Ireland.

And the modern Industrial Strategy, currently out to consultation, aims to build an economy that will grow from strength to strength, not just for years but for decades to come, increasing productivity and improving living standards across the country as a whole.

I am already engaging with my Business Advisory Group to ensure the interests of Northern Ireland are best represented, and I encourage everyone here to respond to the Green Paper to make your voice heard.

The Government also remains committed to the devolution of corporation tax to the Northern Ireland Executive.

The legislation is ready and waiting, on the statute books, but it can only be activated if there is a stable, functioning government that is demonstrating sustainable finances.

That is why making politics work in Northern Ireland so important.

Belfast City Council is the cornerstone sponsor of Belfast Partners, and I know the Council's CEO Suzanne Wylie, who will be speaking shortly, has ambitious plans for the City.

I will let Suzanne say more, but the Council has a vision for growing Belfast economically and boosting the quality of its public services.

However, many of the levers for realising this vision sit with the devolved Executive.

That is why it is so important for political leaders to come together after the election this week and work for the good of everyone in Northern Ireland.

I remain in no doubt that Northern Ireland is best served by strong, accountable and effective devolved government.

This is a message that I hope can be echoed from here tonight.

On the topic of our withdrawal from the EU, I fully understand that businesses need certainty to prosper.

That is why we are moving as quickly as possible to trigger Article 50 no later than the end of March.

The Prime Minister recognises the impact uncertainty can have, and has moved to very clearly set out the UK's key objectives for the upcoming negotiations:

To control our own laws and end the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice;

To strengthen the precious Union between the four countries of our United Kingdom;

To maintain the Common Travel Area with Ireland;

To control immigration from Europe while continuing to attract the brightest and best to study and work here;

To guarantee rights for British nationals in the EU and EU nationals living here;

To protect workers' rights;

To pursuing an ambitious free trade agreement with the EU, outside the single market but allowing for the freest possible trade in goods and services between Britain and EU member states;

To strike new trade agreements with other countries around the world;

To keep the UK as the best place for science and innovation;

To continue to co-operate in the fight against crime and terrorism;

And finally, to ensure a smooth, orderly Brexit with an agreement about our future partnership by the time the two year Article 50 process has concluded, followed by a phased process of implementation.

Leaving the EU now offers us an opportunity to forge a new role for ourselves in the world: to negotiate our own trade agreements and to be a positive and powerful force for free trade.

We will continue to promote the wonderful exports that Northern Ireland has to offer and highlight that Northern Ireland has great potential as a base

for exports to the EU.

And, as we have made clear from the moment the people decided to leave the EU, we will be steadfast in our determination to recognise Northern Ireland's unique economic, social and political context.

One of the central tenets of the Government's Industrial Strategy is driving growth and prosperity from London and the South-East out across the whole country.

I hope this event will spark the conversations and ideas that champion the benefits of Northern Ireland as a place to do business, enhancing partnerships wherever they already exist and igniting new relationships.

I understand that the London-Belfast partnership is just the beginning, and I look forward to partnerships growing between Belfast and other cities across the globe.

We must move to capitalise on the skills available in Northern Ireland, growing science and innovation, boosting further our tourist industry and encouraging the flourishing digital and creative industries.

We know through companies like First Derivatives, with headquarters in Newry and employing 1700 people worldwide, business can grow and prosper in Northern Ireland.

Hopefully you can make the connections here tonight, and at future events, to let others see what we see when we talk about the potential of Northern Ireland and the success story that Northern Ireland can continue to be

Speech: "This is Russia's seventh veto on Syria in five years."

Thank you Mr President.

I am appalled that Russia has vetoed this resolution today and I am surprised and disappointed that China has chosen to join them – at complete odds with the principles of non-proliferation that both China and Russia claim to support so strongly.

As permanent members of this Council and as Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, Russia and China have a clear responsibility to take action against the use and proliferation of chemical weapons. By vetoing this resolution today, they have undermined the credibility of this Council and of the international rules preventing the use of these barbaric weapons.

In Security Council resolution 2118 we all agreed – Russia and China included

– that any use of chemical weapons by anyone in the Syrian Arab Republic will lead to this Council imposing measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Thanks to those vetoes today, we have failed to do so.

This wasn't a political text. It was a technical resolution in response to an impartial and factual report by the Security Council-mandated Joint UN-OPCW Investigative Mechanism. It was a report we all called for. It was an investigation we all supported.

But instead of backing the resolution, we have seen yet again that Russia is prepared to abuse its veto power to stand by a regime that has no regard for its own people. That has no regard for the most basic rules of war or international treaties; a regime that has indiscriminately bombed and besieged its own people. A regime that has turned chemical weapons on its own population, killing six year old children like Mohammed.

This is Russia's seventh veto on Syria in five years. What further evidence do we need that Russia will always prioritise the Asad regime over the protection of the Syrian people? Well, today we have learnt that they will plunge to new depths; that they would rather cover up for Asad then prevent the further use and proliferation of chemical weapons.

The Russians will say this resolution is based on weak or flawed evidence. But the JIM was a fully independent UN mechanism which Russia created. Russia agreed the methodology the JIM would apply. And yet when they came up with an answer Russia didn't like, all of a sudden, there's a problem.

Russia's answer is that Syria should conduct its own investigation. The idea that the guilty party should investigate itself is absurd and it is clearly recorded that the JIM's investigation has been obstructed by the Syrian regime.

Russia will claim the JIM doesn't meet a legal standard of evidence. Well, it was never intended to. As we all agreed in SCR 2235 it was meant to examine the available evidence in an impartial manner and come to a conclusion.

Russia will claim that we should be focusing on Daesh's use of chemical weapons. But we already have robust and comprehensive measures in place to combat Daesh. The draft resolution would have reaffirmed our commitment to those measures and reiterated our condemnation of Daesh.

Russia will say that supporting this resolution will disrupt the Syrian political process. Well, this is simply not true. The United Kingdom remains committed to working with Russia, and everyone else, through the UN to help the Syrian people reach a lasting political settlement.

But not taking action against chemical weapons use undermines confidence in the international community's ability to tackle flagrant violations of international law. It undermines confidence and trust of ordinary Syrians affected by these horrific attacks. This is no way to build the right conditions for successful political talks.

Despite Russia and China's actions Mr President, I want to reiterate our

thanks to the JIM for their work and to international partners who helped the JIM. Because of that tireless work, we know without doubt that the Asad regime and Daesh used toxic chemicals as weapons against civilians in Syria.

Those responsible for such attacks remain free and unpunished to this day. Today we had a chance to step up and begin to end that impunity. Instead, Russia and China have let down the people of Marea, the people of Talamenes, Sarmin and Qaminas, and the wider international community that seeks justice for those horrific attacks.

Without a clear response to these flagrant abuses of international law, the Asad regime is only going to be emboldened to preserve its chemical weapons capabilities and to continue to use those chemical weapons. We should all be concerned by reports of further chemical weapons use in Syria, most recently in Aleppo and East Hama last year.

And in response to these vetoes, Daesh too will surely only be encouraged to continue using chemical weapons – something that Russia claims to oppose. And the longer term credibility and utility of the Chemical Weapons Convention will also suffer.

But the United Kingdom will not let Russia's actions today stop us from working with international partners to see justice for the victims, and to prevent the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere. This includes the international, impartial and independent mechanism on Syria agreed by the General Assembly last year. We must be able to demonstrate that the international system works, and that we are able to bring those responsible for using chemical weapons to account. Anything less is not an option.

Thank you.

Speech: “Will we take action against those who use chemical weapons in Syria? It's that simple.”

Thank you Mr President.

This Council is about to be asked a simple question. Will we take action against those who use chemical weapons in Syria? It's that simple.

Will we take action on behalf of those whose lives have been destroyed by these senseless weapons?

Will we take action for people like Mohammed Abdul-Razzuk Alhashash?

Thanks to the testimony of those on the ground, we know that Mohammed was admitted to hospital at 1:30 PM on the 21st of April 2014. A couple of hours earlier a Syrian regime helicopter had dropped two containers on his home town of Talmenes, exposing him and many others to a yellow toxic gas.

After the attack Mohammed was unable to breathe. He lost consciousness. On arrival at hospital he was intubated under mechanical ventilation. His face was red. Pink foam poured from his mouth. His pupils were dilated. His lungs were crackling. His heartbeat and breathing stopped. CPR was performed but all attempts to revive him failed. Mohammad died at two o'clock. He was six years old.

Mohammed is why we are here today. We are here in this Chamber to begin to bring justice for him, for his family and for the hundreds, if not thousands of other Syrians whose stories are all too similar to his own.

This isn't about politics. At its core this isn't really about the JIM or the OPCW. Forget the acronyms. This isn't even about Syria. This is about taking a stand when children are poisoned. It's that simple. It's about taking a stand when civilians are maimed and murdered with toxic weapons; weapons used in complete disregard for the international rules and norms that we all claim to uphold.

So in a moment when we are asked to vote on this resolution, I hope that all members of this Council will lift their hands in favour of this text – and do so with Mohammed in their minds.

Thank you.

[News story: Foreign Secretary responds to UNSC vote on chemical weapons use in Syria](#)

It is deeply disappointing that Russia and China have blocked the UN Security Council from taking action in response to the appalling use of chemical weapons in Syria. The Security Council's own investigation has found attacks were committed by the Syrian regime and Daesh on the Syrian people. Despite support from the majority of the Security Council, Russia, along with China, has chosen to prevent action.

Along with our international partners, the UK will continue to seek justice for the victims of these heinous chemical weapons attacks and work to deter the further use of chemical weapons in Syria and elsewhere.

News story: Foreign Secretary announces new Foreign and Commonwealth Office Special Envoy for Gender Equality

Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, yesterday addressed an audience of key policy makers at a reception looking forward to International Women's Day. He announced a new Special Envoy for Gender Equality, Joanna Roper. Joanna will spearhead the UK's efforts to deliver a coherent international approach to ensuring the rights of women and girls, working closely with Whitehall departments, civil society, academics, and other Governments.

The Foreign Secretary spoke of his personal commitment to addressing gender inequality in all its forms. He argued in particular that unequal access to education, itself flowing from gender prejudice and discrimination was a major barrier to women's empowerment.

Speaking at the event, the Foreign Secretary said:

The sombre truth is that today 61 million girls between the ages of 6 and 14 do not have the chance to go to school. They have the same right to an education as anyone else – and at least as much potential and ability – but too many girls in too many countries endure the supreme injustice of being denied the opportunity to attend school.

If you want to increase prosperity; stabilise population growth; improve child nutrition; and reduce child marriage, the single most effective remedy is to ensure that all girls go to school.

I hope that every national leader will wake up to the benefits – and the essential justice – of educating the daughters of their country just as surely as they educate their sons.

The FCO are taking forward the global agenda of equality support projects to increase women's empowerment around the world, challenging gender stereotypes of what a "traditional" women's role is.

Justine Greening, Minister for Women and Equalities, described the continuing efforts to promote gender equality in the UK. By marrying up the domestic and international aspects we showcase UK leadership in this field giving us greater credibility to encourage like-minded partners and to advance action on gender equality in multilateral fora.

Justine Greening, Secretary of State for Education, said:

No woman should be held back in life because of her gender and I'm incredibly proud of this Government's work to help women around the world to fulfil their ambitions. Here in the UK we now have record numbers of women in work, and we have more women than ever before on the boards of the UK's top companies. Internationally, our investment in foreign aid is helping girls in the developing world to get an education.

We have much to celebrate ahead of International Women's Day – but there is still more to do. We are going further to deliver economic empowerment for women by requiring large employers to publish their gender pay gaps for the first time ever. We have pledged to eliminate all violence against women and girls, backed by £80 million funding. And we are supporting girls to take careers in male dominated industries so we have better gender balance in our workplaces.

On her new appointment, Joanna Roper, Special Envoy for Gender Equality said:

I'm delighted to have been appointed as the FC0's first ever Special Envoy for Gender Equality. This is really important work. Gender inequality is still too common. We must break down the barriers that hold women back.

More than 350 people attended the event held at the Foreign Office, including a number of Ministers and Parliamentarians, including Emily Thornberry MP, Dominic Grieve MP and Jess Phillips MP. Civil Society organisations including Stonewall, Womankind Worldwide and Oxfam and senior diplomats also attended were also present.

Joanna Roper, FC0 Special Envoy for Gender Equality

[Introductory video](#)

Further information