

Foreign Secretary statement on the situation in Ukraine

Mr Speaker, with permission I will update the House about the situation in Ukraine.

This morning Russian missiles again struck Kyiv and other cities, destroying critical national infrastructure and depriving Ukrainians of water and electricity.

Earlier today I spoke to our Ambassador in Kyiv and I heard again of the extraordinary resilience of Ukraine's people in the face of Russian aggression.

At the weekend, Russia suspended its participation in the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which has allowed the export of 100,000 tonnes of food every day, including to some of the least developed countries in the world.

Putin is exacting vengeance for his military failures on the civilians of Ukraine by cutting off their power and their water supply, and on the poorest people in the world by threatening their food supplies.

Over 60 percent of the wheat exported under the Black Sea Grain Initiative has gone to low and middle income countries, including Ethiopia, Yemen, and Afghanistan.

It would be unconscionable for those lands to be made to suffer because of Putin's setbacks on the battlefield in Ukraine.

I urge Russia to stop impeding this vital initiative that is helping feed the hungry across the world and agree to its extension.

Meanwhile, Russia's suicide drones and cruise missiles are killing Ukrainian civilians, obliterating their homes, and even destroying a children's playground.

A third of the country's power stations were put out of operation in a single week.

None of this achieves any military purpose.

Putin's only aim is to spread terror and to deprive Ukrainian families of shelter, light, and heat as harsh winter approaches.

I'm sure the House will join me in condemning his breaches of international humanitarian law.

I'm sure every Honourable and Right Honourable member will share my conviction that Putin will never break the spirit of the Ukrainian people.

And the House will share my incredulity over the glaring contradictions in Putin's thinking.

He claims that Ukraine is part of Russia and Ukrainians are Russians but at the same time he calls them Nazis who must be bombed without mercy.

When he launched his invasion, he convinced himself that Russian forces would be welcomed into Kyiv and they would either support him or be too craven to stand in his way.

He could not have been more wrong.

The last eight months have shown the scale of his miscalculation.

They have shown the barbarity of his onslaught, including the mass rape committed by Russian soldiers in Ukraine.

The UK's campaign to prevent sexual violence in conflict is more urgent than ever and I will host a conference on this vital subject next month.

And now the Kremlin is resorting to peddling false claims, churning out invented stories that say more about the fractures within the Russian government than they do about us.

It is also reprehensible that Iran should have supplied Russia with the Shahed drones that are bringing destruction to Ukraine, in violation of UN Resolution 2231.

On 20 October, the Government imposed sanctions on three Iranian commanders involved in supplying weaponry to Russia, along with the company that manufactures Shahed drones.

Earlier, Putin announced on 30 September that Russia had annexed four regions of Ukraine spanning 40,000 square miles – the biggest land grab in Europe since the Second World War.

Once again, this exposes his self-delusion.

Putin has declared the annexation of territory he has not captured – and what he had managed to seize he is in the process of losing.

On 12 October, 143 countries – three quarters of the entire membership of the United Nations – voted in the General Assembly to condemn the annexation.

Russia had just four supporters – Syria, Belarus, Nicaragua, North Korea – and when those regimes are your only friends, you know you really are isolated.

When 141 countries denounced Putin's invasion back in March, some speculated if that was the ceiling of the international support for Ukraine.

The latest vote showed even more nations are now ready to condemn Russia.

But Putin still thinks that by forcing up food and energy prices, we will

lose our resolve.

Our task is to prove him wrong.

We will not waver in our support for Ukraine's right to self-defence.

I delivered that emphatic message when I spoke to my Ukrainian counterpart on Tuesday and my Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister said the same to President Zelenskyy, when they spoke on the phone, the first foreign leader he called upon his appointment as Prime Minister.

On Thursday I will attend a meeting of G7 Foreign Ministers in Germany, where I will send a unified signal of our shared determination.

This year Britain has given Ukraine £2.3 billion of military support – more than any country in the world apart from the United States of America.

We will provide Ukraine with more support to repair its energy infrastructure and we have committed £220 million of humanitarian aid.

The House will have noted Putin's irresponsible talk about nuclear weapons, and an absurd claim that Ukraine plans to detonate a radiological "dirty bomb" on its own territory.

No other country is talking about nuclear use. No country is threatening Russia or threatening President Putin. He should be clear that for the UK and our Allies, any use at all of nuclear weapons would fundamentally change the nature of this conflict. There would be severe consequences for Russia.

And how counter-productive would it be for Russia to break a norm against nuclear use that has held since 1945 and has underpinned global security.

Nothing will alter our conviction that the Ukrainians have a right to live in peace and freedom in their own lands.

If Putin were to succeed, every expansionist tyrant would be emboldened to do their worst and no country would be safe.

That is why we stand and will continue to stand alongside our Ukrainian friends until the day comes – as it inevitably will – that they prevail.

Mr Speaker I commend this statement to the House.

[Honorary fellowship for Dstl menopause awareness advocate](#)

Nicola, who is a senior principal systems consultant in Exploration Division,

has been awarded an Honorary Fellowship at the University of Winchester for her actions as a passionate advocate for menopause awareness at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl).

Inspired by her own personal experience, Nicola has become a champion for menopause awareness amongst staff at Dstl. It was for this, and her broader commitment to diversity and inclusion, that she received the accolade.

The Honorary Fellowship is awarded to someone that embodies the University's qualities and values and is a role model for their students.

Nicola said:

Having gone through a painful early menopause I couldn't quite believe that there wasn't more information out there about it.

It seemed so strange that there wasn't an open conversation about something that is likely to impact so many of us, some in a profound way.

It made me determined to make sure we have an environment at Dstl where people feel able to talk openly about the menopause and are supported.

Working with other colleagues, Nicola formed groups where anyone affected by the menopause could come for support and to connect with others. She started Menopause Café events to encourage people to share lived experiences and for supporters to come together and she continues to raise awareness of the menopause, for example with blogs and events. The groups now have over 150 members and around 140 people joined a recent online event with an external menopause expert.

Ed Rothead, who works for Dstl and is a Governor at the University of Winchester, nominated Nicola for the prestigious award.

Nicola added:

I'm really proud of the progress we've made. We're seeing more and more people coming forward to learn about the menopause, to share their experiences and to normalise the conversation. And to receive an Honorary Fellowship, well I feel really honoured and humbled – for once, I am speechless!

Linda Knutsen, Dstl's Exploration Division Head, joined Nicola at the graduation ceremony. She said:

My heartfelt congratulations go out to Nicola on this fantastic achievement. I'm so pleased that her passion and dedication to improving the experience of colleagues has been recognised in this

way.

I'm fully supportive of her efforts – it's so important that we continue to raise awareness of the menopause and break down the stigma that can surround it.

Find out more about [working at Dstl](#).

Over 19 million households have received their council tax rebate

- 99% of eligible households have received £150 council tax rebate
- The government is extending the deadline for councils to ensure as many eligible households as possible receive the payment
- Council tax rebate forms part of £37 billion package rolled out across the year to help people with cost of living

Over 99% of eligible households have received the government's £150 core council tax rebate to help with the cost of living.

Figures published today show more than 19 million households in England were handed payments by the end of September with many councils reporting that 100% of eligible households in their area have now received their payment.

Today's figures show a total of £2.87 billion of the core council tax rebate has gone to households under the scheme, an increase of £217 million from the previous month.

To ensure as many eligible households as possible receive the payment, the government is today extending the deadline for claims, helping councils support the most hard to reach households such as those that moved and did not provide any payment information.

Eligible households have until 30 November to claim the £150 payment, which does not have to be paid back. Anyone who is yet to receive their rebate is urged to check their local council for more information and make a claim.

Councils are being urged to do everything they can to encourage the remaining households to claim their rebate and ensure as many eligible households as possible get the money that they are owed.

Levelling Up Minister Dehenna Davison said:

Thanks to the tireless work of councils, more than 99% of eligible

households up and down the country have received their council tax rebate.

We are now extending the deadline to claim the £150 payment to ensure as many eligible households as possible receive this payment – I urge everyone to check their eligibility and contact their local council if they have not already.

The rebate is part of £37 billion of government support being targeted at those most in need to help with the cost of living. This includes at least £1,200 of extra support for millions of the most vulnerable households this year, with all domestic electricity customers receiving at least £400 towards their bills.

The rebate is available to most households living in council tax bands A to D on 1 April. This includes those who receive Local Council Tax Support, even if their council tax bill for the year is less than £150.

Since announcing the rebate in April, the government has provided £28 million for councils to set up software and recruit staff and will top this up as necessary to cover all reasonable delivery costs. Councils have been given a host of options to make payments quickly and securely including bank account transfers, council tax account credits or a voucher-based system.

Local authorities must also make arrangements for those who cannot access the internet.

The actions of the Belarusian state endangered the safety and security of a commercial passenger aircraft and the lives of all those onboard

Thank you, President.

When we discussed this issue immediately after the incident, many Council members emphasised the importance of an international independent investigation. We therefore thank Mr Sciacchitano, the President of the Council of ICAO, for attending the Security Council today to relate the findings of the Fact-Finding Investigation Team, and the subsequent decisions of the ICAO Council and Assembly.

President, it is clear from the investigation that on 23 May 2021, the Belarus authorities deliberately communicated a false bomb threat to Ryanair

flight FR4978, before manipulating circumstances to influence the aircraft to land at Minsk airport. That the threat was communicated to the aircraft before the so-called bomb threat email was even sent to Minsk airport, leaves little room for doubt.

It appears the purpose of this brazen and dangerous operation was to arrest and detain a journalist, Mr Roman Protasevich, and his partner Sofia Sapega, who with their fellow passengers happened to be flying over Belarus on their way from Athens to Vilnius.

As the ICAO Council and the Assembly made clear, the actions of the Belarusian state endangered the safety and security of a commercial passenger aircraft and the lives of all those on board. And they were a flagrant violation of the Chicago and Montreal Conventions.

But not only this. As we said last year, the use of a spurious terrorist threat to divert an airliner also served to undermine measures put in place by the international community to counter real aviation terror threats, including those this Council addressed in resolution 2309 in 2016.

So the Lukashenko regime has broken international law, created a major risk to the safety of innocent passengers, and undermined aviation safety more broadly – proving itself to be entirely irresponsible on the issue of international peace and security. And for what? All to silence an opposition journalist, further stifling any semblance of free speech left in Belarus.

This has only been compounded further by its role as a staging-ground and facilitator of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, through which it continues to show reckless contempt for international law and the UN Charter. We call on Belarus to hold accountable those responsible for this incident, desist from any further such unlawful actions, and end its support for Russia's illegal war on Ukraine.

Thank you.

Avian influenza: Housing order to be introduced across England

Mandatory housing measures for all poultry and captive birds are to be introduced to all areas of England from 00:01 on Monday 7 November, following a decision by the United Kingdom's Chief Veterinary Officer.

The housing measures legally require all bird keepers to keep their birds indoors and to follow stringent biosecurity measures to help protect their flocks from the disease, regardless of type or size.

The order will extend the mandatory housing measures already in force in the

hot spot area of Suffolk, Norfolk and parts of Essex to the whole of England following an increase in the national risk of bird flu in wild birds to very high.

Over the last year, the United Kingdom has faced its largest ever outbreak of avian influenza with over 200 cases confirmed since late October 2021. The introduction of the housing measures comes after the disease was detected at over 70 premises since the beginning of October, as well as multiple reports in wild birds.

The Chief Veterinary Officer is now encouraging all bird keepers across England to use the week to prepare, including taking steps to safeguard animal welfare, consult their private vet and expand housing where necessary.

The United Kingdom's Chief Veterinary Officer Christine Middlemiss said:

We are now facing this year, the largest ever outbreak of bird flu and are seeing rapid escalation in the number of cases on commercial farms and in backyard birds across England. The risk of kept birds being exposed to disease has reached a point where it is now necessary for all birds to be housed until further notice.

Scrupulous biosecurity and separating flocks in all ways, from wild birds remain the best form of defence. Whether you keep just a few birds or thousands, from Monday 7 November onwards you must keep your indoors. This decision has not been taken lightly, but is the best way to protect your birds from this highly infectious disease.

Evidence shows that housing birds reduces the risk of kept birds being infected with bird flu. However, housing alone will not protect birds and all keepers must still follow the other enhanced biosecurity measures mandated by the AIPZ at all times to protect their flocks and prevent the risk of future outbreaks which is circulating in wild birds. Housing combined with stringent biosecurity measures can provide even greater reduction in risk.

The new housing measures build on the strengthened biosecurity measures that were brought in as part of the Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) earlier this month. The AIPZ means that all bird keepers need to take extra precautions, such as restricting access for non-essential people on site, ensuring workers change clothing and footwear before entering bird enclosures and cleaning and disinfecting vehicles regularly to limit the risk of the disease spreading.

The UK Health Security Agency continue to advise that the risk to public health from the virus is very low and the Food Standards Agency advice remains unchanged, that avian influenzas pose a very low food safety risk for UK consumers. Properly cooked poultry and poultry products, including eggs, are safe to eat.

Further Information:

- Biosecurity guidance and a biosecurity self-assessment checklist have been published by Defra to assist all bird keepers in instigating and maintaining good biosecurity, which together with further updates on the latest avian influenza situation, can be found via [GOV.UK/bird-flu](https://gov.uk/bird-flu)

The addition of housing measures to the AIPZ already in force across England means all bird keepers across England must:

- housing or netting all poultry and captive birds
- cleanse and disinfect clothing, footwear, equipment and vehicles before and after contact with poultry and captive birds – if practical, use disposable protective clothing
- reduce the movement of people, vehicles or equipment to and from areas where poultry and captive birds are kept, to minimise contamination from manure, slurry and other products, and use effective vermin control
- keep records of mortality, movement of poultry and poultry products and any changes in production
- thoroughly cleanse and disinfect housing on a continuous basis
- keep fresh disinfectant at the right concentration at all farm and poultry housing entry and exit points
- minimise direct and indirect contact between poultry and captive birds and wild birds, including making sure all feed and water is not accessible to wild birds
- prevent access by poultry to ponds and watercourses and ensure that birds are kept in fenced or enclosed areas