

Syria and Russia have long used disinformation to deflect attention from appalling war crimes committed by the Assad regime

Thank you President, and thank you to the High Representative.

There may be one thing that I can agree with my Russian colleague on; that sadly, we heard today no significant new developments in the briefing from the UN. We again heard instead a long list of areas where the Syrian regime continues to refuse to provide adequate information to the OPCW or to complete basic actions in accordance with its international obligations.

But this does not mean we should simply turn a blind eye and give the Syrian regime a free pass.

Syria's refusal to cooperate with the OPCW, to address the outstanding issues with its Chemical Weapons Convention declaration, is inexcusable.

As we have said many times, the 20 outstanding issues are not academic – they include the whereabouts of several hundred tonnes of chemical warfare agents, whose destruction still cannot be verified.

And the history is not in doubt, with at least 8 chemical weapon attacks already independently attributed to the Assad regime against its own people.

Syria and Russia have long used deceit and disinformation in an attempt to deflect attention from appalling war crimes committed by the Assad regime.

Despite all this two things are clear. First, Syria's non-compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention poses a genuine and ongoing threat to international peace and security.

And second, there must be accountability for the Assad regime's historic use of chemical weapons.

This Council must continue to address these issues despite Syrian and Russian efforts to obstruct progress.

We cannot send the signal that we tolerate the use of Chemical weapons, and we cannot allow impunity.

Thank you.

New Attorney General appointed

The Prime Minister has appointed Victoria Prentis as Attorney General of England and Wales and Advocate General for Northern Ireland.

The Attorney General will oversee the work of the Law Officers Departments which include the Crown Prosecution Service and Serious Fraud Office, and the Government Legal Department and HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate.

The Attorney General also carries out a number of functions in the public interest, such as considering unduly lenient sentences, and taking action when there has been a contempt of court. These functions are carried out independently of their role as a Government minister.

Commenting on her appointment, Attorney General Victoria Prentis said:

I am honoured to be appointed as Attorney General for England and Wales and look forward to working with my officials and with the many excellent professionals across the Law Officers' Departments. I am delighted to be returning to the law, having spent seventeen years as a government lawyer before being elected to Parliament.

I want to thank my predecessor Rt Hon Michael Ellis KC MP who twice served in the role and has left me with such a strong record to build upon.

One of my first priorities is to continue the government's work in rebuilding confidence in our justice system, particularly with victims.

I am proud to be joining the Attorney General's Office, a unique and historic government department that makes law and politics work together at the heart of the UK constitution.

Victoria Prentis' biography:

Victoria Prentis was appointed Attorney General on 25 October 2022. Victoria was previously Minister of State at the Department for Work and Pensions from 7 September 2022 to 25 October 2022. Her responsibilities included the labour market and Universal Credit. Previous to that she served as Minister of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs from 16 September 2021 to 7 September 2022, covering fisheries, farming and food.

Before that, she was Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department

for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs from 14 February 2020 to 15 September 2021.

She was elected as the Conservative MP for Banbury in May 2015.

Political career

Victoria served on the Justice Select Committee from 2015 to 2019, the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments from 2015 to 2017, and as a lay member on the Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art from 2019.

Victoria also served as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Attorney General from 2019 to 2020, to the Leader of the House of Commons from 2017 to 2019, and to Junior Ministers at the Department for Transport from 2016 to 2017.

Career outside politics

Victoria was called to the bar in 1995. For seventeen years Victoria was a lawyer for the Treasury Solicitors' Department and headed up the government's Justice and Security team. Her responsibilities included providing advice on military, prisons and national security matters and representing the government in court.

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Visitors from Thailand

News story

Politicians and government officials from Thailand have visited GAD as part of research to accompany a pension reform plan in their country.



Senior politicians and government officials from Thailand have visited the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) to research how an actuarial function can operate within government.

The delegation was made up of more than 20 people. It included the Minister of Labour, the chairs of 2 parliamentary committees and senior officials.

Fact finding visit

The visit was part of research to accompany a pension reform plan. At present Thailand does not have a single department to produce actuarial analysis for the government. Instead, each agency has its own in-house unit to produce reports and analysis.

As part of a 4-year project, the Thai government is considering the creation of an actuarial unit to produce analysis and inputs to policy making and reforms.

GAD's expertise

During the visit, the officials met both the Government Actuary and Deputy Government Actuary. They heard about GAD's historic origins, reporting lines, operating approach and main areas of expertise.

The visiting delegation also learned about GAD's working relationship with other organisations such as HM Treasury, the Department for Work and Pensions and HM Revenue and Customs.

Actuaries from GAD shared information about different projects. These

included GAD's work on the National Insurance Fund and the State Pension Age review.

Decorative plaque from the Thai delegation, marking their visit to GAD.

The Deputy Government Actuary Matt Gurden said: "We were really pleased to have been given the opportunity to host this key event for such an influential group of people.

"The breadth and depth of expertise in GAD means we can offer a range of actuarial services to government and the public sector.

"We hope sharing our extensive experience will be of value to the Thai government in its plans for an actuarial unit."

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[Russian and regime intransigence continues to preclude progress in Syria](#)

Thank you President, and let me thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms Ghelani for their briefing today. I'd like to make three points.

First, the United Kingdom supports the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen to progress the implementation of 2254 through the Step for Step initiative. We welcome the news of his recent discussions in New York, Damascus and elsewhere. But Russian and regime intransigence continues to preclude progress and we call for their participation in good faith. We urge them to de-politicise the Constitutional Committee. We are clear that the Committee should reconvene in Geneva, as agreed, and begin to focus fully on substance rather than process.

Second, the United Kingdom is appalled by the human rights situation in Syria. Tens of thousands of Syrians have been forcibly disappeared, detained and tortured since the beginning of the conflict. Including in the notorious Sednaya prison, where as civil society have told us repeatedly, detainees are tortured and killed on a daily basis.

We strongly condemn these violations. We call for the full implementation of Security Council resolution 2254, which includes release of the arbitrarily detained along with a nationwide ceasefire; unhindered aid access; conditions for safe voluntary and dignified refugee return and free and fair elections

pursuant to a new constitution.

The UK is closely monitoring the escalation of hostilities in north west Syria. It is essential that all parties to the conflict respect the ceasefire.

Finally, President, as we've heard, the spreading cholera outbreak highlights the frankly horrifying humanitarian context, and the need for a sustained response by the humanitarian community. The United Nations is stepping up its cross-line delivery where possible.

But cross-border remains a vital lifeline for many in the north west. We look forward to this Council renewing the cross-border mandate in January, ensuring aid for millions of Syrians during winter months.

Thank you.