

Addressing COVID-19 in Syria

Thank you very much, Mr President. Thank you, also, Mark, for your briefing today.

Mr President, the United Kingdom remains deeply concerned about the potentially catastrophic impact of COVID-19 in Syria. We've heard today there are 43 confirmed cases and likely already many more – unknown because of the lack of testing capacity. The 6.2 million internally displaced Syrians face a particularly severe risk. Almost 940,000 of those are living in appalling conditions in the northwest.

The United Kingdom is committed to playing its part to tackle the spread and impact of coronavirus in Syria and other vulnerable countries across the globe. So far we have pledged over \$900 million to the international response to help end the pandemic. \$350 million of this funding is helping to reduce mass infections in vulnerable countries. Our money would install new hand washing stations, isolation and treatment centres in refugee camps and increase access to clean water for those living in areas of armed conflict. As the third largest bilateral humanitarian donor to the Syrian response, with over \$4 billion spent since the conflict began, we are urgently working to ensure our significant humanitarian programme across Syria, including, of course, in those areas under regime control, can most effectively address the direct and indirect consequences of the pandemic. And we welcome the recent increase in cross-border aid into northwest Syria and the maintenance of the ceasefire agreed between Russia and Turkey on the 5th of March. This is helping humanitarian agencies to meet huge needs in Idlib and to focus on the threat of COVID-19. The evidence is clear that the UN cross-border mandate must continue past July.

Colleagues, coronavirus knows no borders. It knows no front lines. It is a threat to all in Syria and beyond. Preventing it is a matter of humanity, not of politics. We must ensure that no part of Syria is neglected in the effort to prevent and prepare for the potential spread of the virus.

And that's why we're so concerned about the northeast of Syria. Both OCHA and the World Health Organisation have highlighted a dangerous void. The World Health Organisation has confirmed the first death from COVID-19 in that area. And we know from what we've learned everywhere else in the world that community transmission is surely ongoing. Yet there are apparently only 35 ICU beds in the whole of the region.

As OCHA told us in this Council on the 24th of April, humanitarian assistance delivered by land or air has only reached 31% of the health facilities previously supplied cross-border via Yaroubiya. That means 69% of health facilities are not receiving the supplies that they need. Moreover, the urgency to address the pandemic is not reflected in the pace of approvals for cross-line assistance. As noted in the SG's report, the authorities in Damascus continue to take three to four months to respond to medical delivery requests to the northeast.

Colleagues, with a need so pressing, we must work together. We must put aside previous political differences. We must enable the United Nations to use all modalities for the specific purpose of preventing a health disaster for as long as coronavirus poses such a threat.

The United Kingdom is proud to stand with many others around this Council table as part of a decisive and coordinated action to tackle the spread and impact of coronavirus in vulnerable countries across the globe. We must work together to do the same for Syria. We must give the United Nations and its humanitarian partners the best chance of being able to respond to the outbreak in all areas via all necessary modalities. Tackling this global pandemic invokes our common humanity. We should all think carefully about the actions and decisions that we can take.

Thank you, Mr President.

Major home testing programme for coronavirus will track levels of infection in the community

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

Charter flight from Guyana for stranded British nationals

Press release

A Government charter flight to bring home around 100 Britons stranded in Guyana has been announced – with booking open today.



The flight will depart from Georgetown Cheddi Jagan International Airport for London Gatwick on 7 May. It will come via Buenos Aires, with around 200 British nationals already on board, returning from Argentina.

British travellers in Guyana should visit FCO Travel Advice pages for further information on how to register. Priority is initially being given to vulnerable passengers – those over 70 and others who have medical requirements.

Once this flight is completed the number of British travellers who have returned from South America on Government charter flights will be to over 3,000.

Minister for the Caribbean, Baroness Sugg said:

This is our latest flight from South America and the Caribbean, with around 300 more British travellers being able to get back to the UK to be with their families. Our staff will continue to support those Britons who remain in Guyana and Argentina throughout this crisis.

Greg Quinn, High Commissioner to Guyana, said:

Providing support to British travellers who are in Guyana and want to return home is our number one priority. I encourage all those with an interest to register now as it is unlikely that there will be any further charter flights. I'd also like to thank the Guyanese authorities and Air Europa for helping to make this happen.

The UK Government is working with the airline industry and host governments across the world to bring back British travellers to the UK as part of the plan announced by the Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab (30 March) – with up to £75 million available for special charter flights to priority countries, focused on helping the most vulnerable travellers.

1. The charter flights are for UK travellers who normally reside in the UK and their direct dependents. A number of seats will be reserved for

those deemed vulnerable.

2. To book flights and register their details, British nationals should check the FCO [Travel Advice pages](#)
 - Movement within Guyana is currently very restricted due to a 6pm to 6am national curfew. The British High Commission will contact those who have confirmed seats on the flight with further details regarding transport.
 - Those who are eligible to fly will be sent information on getting to airports and flight itineraries directly when their seat is confirmed.
 - Details regarding luggage allowance, flight costs and carriers will be available on the booking portal.
1. The British High Commission continues to provide consular support to any British nationals who remain in Guyana.
2. These UK Government chartered flights follow flights from Bolivia, Columbia, Ecuador and Peru, meaning we will have brought back over 2500 British travellers from South America and helped hundreds more return through commercial routes.

Published 29 April 2020

20,000 stranded Brits returning to the UK from South Asia on UK charter flights

Press release

More than 20,000 British travellers, on 83 Government charter flights, will return to the UK from across South Asia by 7 May.



In recent days, 28 further charter flights from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan have been announced, with the capacity to carry around 7,000 passengers:

- 14 from India, running between 28 April and 4 May
- 9 from Pakistan, running between 30 April and 7 May
- 5 from Bangladesh, running between 29 April and 7 May

These flights are in addition to 55 charters that have already departed from across South Asia in previous weeks.

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth, said:

We have been working round the clock to ensure British people in the region can return to the UK and we have already chartered 55 flights, helping more than 12,000 Brits. These 28 additional flights will mean 8,000 more people are brought back to the UK from across South Asia.

We know British travellers remain concerned about getting home to their friends and families, and we continue to do all we can to bring them back to the UK.

British travellers should continue to monitor our travel advice for the latest information on flights and can contact our Embassies and High Commissions if they require urgent consular support.

The addition of 28 flights will mean the UK Government has facilitated the return of more than 20,000 British travellers on 83 flights from across the region since the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis began.

When completed, the 20,000 British travellers on Government charter flights includes:

- More than 13,000 people will have returned to the UK from India on 52 flights by 4 May.
- Almost 5,000 people will have flown to the UK on 19 charter flights from Pakistan by 7 May.
- More than 2,100 British travellers will have returned to the UK from

Bangladesh by 7 May on nine charter flights.

- More than 700 passengers have returned to the UK on 3 charter flights from Nepal between 8-17 April.

The UK Government is working with the airline industry and host governments across the world to help bring back British travellers to the UK as part of the plan announced by the Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on 30 March – with up to £75 million available for special charter flights to priority countries, focused on helping the most vulnerable travellers.

The UK has worked closely with governments in the region to keep commercial flights running and airports open. It has also chartered flights where commercial options are not available, and to help those who are most vulnerable to get back home.

Notes to Editors

Details of previously announced flights are available here:

Published 29 April 2020

[Foreign Secretary's statement on coronavirus \(COVID-19\): 29 April 2020](#)

Welcome to today's Downing Street Press Conference.

I'm pleased to be joined by Professor Jonathan Van Tam, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, and also Professor Yvonne Doyle, Medical Director at Public Health England.

Let me just start by saying, I think on behalf of us all, huge congratulations to the Prime Minister and to Carrie on the wonderful news of the birth of their baby boy. I've spoken to the Prime Minister and I can tell you that both mum and son are doing really well.

Next, let me give an update on the latest data on coronavirus from our COBR data file.

I can report that, through the Government's ongoing monitoring and testing programme, as of today, there have now been:

818,539 tests for the virus across the UK, including 52,429 tests that took place yesterday.

165,221 people have tested positive, and that's an increase of 4,076 cases on yesterday's number.

As the Health Secretary announced yesterday, from today, we are moving to an improved daily reporting system for deaths, so that deaths in all settings are included, wherever the individual has tested positive for COVID-19, rather than just those in hospitals.

And those figures show that, up to yesterday, on the new measure, we have recorded an additional 3,811 deaths in total and I think it is just important to say that those additional deaths were spread over the period from the 2nd March to 28th April, so they don't represent a sudden surge in the number of deaths.

Sadly today's figures show an additional 765 deaths compared to yesterday. I will let Professor Doyle talk us through the data in detail. I think we must never lose sight of the fact that behind every statistic, there are many human lives that have been tragically lost before their time.

We also pay tribute, of course, to those caring for the sick, and yesterday at 11am the whole country observed a minute's silence, a moment to reflect on the sacrifice of all of our frontline workers who have died whilst dedicating themselves to caring for others and serving others.

On 16 April, I set out five principles that would guide our approach to the transition away from the current set of social distancing measures in place, and into a second phase.

We continue to see evidence in the data of a flattening of the peak of the virus, which is only happening because we have delivered on two of the central pillars of our strategic approach to defeating coronavirus.

First, we reinforced our NHS capacity, through the Nightingale hospitals, extra critical care capacity, more ventilator beds and extra doctors and nurses on the frontline.

And, second, we introduced social distancing measures, at the right time, guided by the scientific and medical evidence.

The public's overwhelming support for those rules has helped to save lives and protect the NHS from becoming overwhelmed.

We are still coming through the peak, and this, as I have said before, is a delicate and dangerous moment in this crisis.

So, I know that a lot of people have made a lot of sacrifices, which is why it is so important that we don't let up now and risk undoing all of that hard work.

So as we look to the future, our 5 tests remain key.

First, we must continue to boost NHS capacity, preventing it from being overwhelmed.

Second, we need to see a sustained and consistent fall in the number of deaths.

Thirdly, we must see further reductions in the rate of infection to manageable levels, across all the relevant areas and settings.

Fourth, we must be confident that the NHS will be able to cope with future demands, including as a result of any changes to existing measures or new measures we need to take.

Fifth, and this is probably the most critical of all, we need to be confident that any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak of infections that could overwhelm the NHS.

A second spike would be harmful to public health, resulting in many more deaths from Covid-19.

That itself would lead to a second lockdown, inflicting further prolonged economic pain on the country.

And, as the Governor of the Bank of England, Andrew Bailey, said last week, that would not just be economically dangerous, it would inflict a serious blow to public confidence.

This issue of a second spike and the need to avoid it – it's not a theoretical risk, and it is not confined to the UK.

Having relaxed restrictions in Germany over the past week, they have seen a rise in the transmission rate of coronavirus. And Chancellor Merkel has said publically, and she has made it clear, that they might need a second lockdown in Germany if the infection rate continues to rise.

So, this risk is very real, and it is vital that we proceed carefully, guided by the scientific advice, so that our next step through this crisis is a sure-footed one.

We mustn't gamble away the sacrifices and progress we've made.

We must continue to follow the scientific evidence,

And we must continue to take the right decisions at the right moment in time.

We are working on all of the potential options for a second phase.

There is light at the end of the tunnel – whether you are an NHS worker on the front line working tirelessly shift after shift, or a parent at home with young children.

But we need to be patient and careful as we come through this moment of maximum risk.

So, we will wait for SAGE's next review of the data in early May.

We're ramping up the testing, with capacity now at over 73,000 per day, and 52,429 tests carried out per day, and eligibility for those tests has now been expanded further, to include anybody who needs to go to work and can't

work remotely, and who has symptoms.

It also includes anyone over 65 with symptoms and all care home residents, as well as care home staff.

And at the same time as we ramp up the testing capacity, we'll keep working on our tracking and tracing capability which will be a key component in the next phase of the crisis.

We will continue to source ventilators and personal protective equipment at home and abroad.

Paul Deighton is leading the national effort to increase domestic production and supply.

We continue to source PPE from abroad setting ourselves out as the international buyer of choice. In the last 10 days, we have secured over 5 million masks from China, we've had three flights with gowns from Turkey – because we know that every single one of those items of PPE is needed by those working so hard on the front line.

Both in the NHS and also in our care homes.

Our international effort is not confined to procurement.

I can tell you we have also made huge progress in returning UK nationals, who otherwise would have been at risk of being stranded abroad.

Since the outbreak in Wuhan, we have helped and estimated 1,3million Britons return on commercial flights.

And we have done that by working with the airlines and with those governments to make sure that the flights can run and that the airspace is kept open.

And we have brought back over 200,000 Brits back from Spain, 50,000 back from Australia, and over 11,000 from Pakistan. To name but just three countries.

As well as those commercial flights, we have also chartered flights, where commercial options weren't possible,

And we have now reached the stage where we have brought back over 20,000 British nationals on 21 flights.

That includes over 9,000 UK nationals back from India, 2,000 home from South Africa, and 1,200 from Peru.

In terms of repatriations it is worth also just bearing in mind that on the 17th March, when we changed our travel advice for those travelling on cruise ships, there were something like 19,000 British passengers on 60 cruise ships sailing around the world.

And as border restrictions were put in place by country after country, we faced a daunting task in getting our people home.

But, we stuck at it, and 6 weeks later, we have now got all 19,000 British passengers back home safe and sound.

That was an enormous effort, and we recognise that the job is not done yet.

And we will continue this unprecedented effort, with further charter flights from New Zealand, Pakistan and Bangladesh, amongst others, over the next week or so.

So, I must pay tribute to the outstanding work of the consular teams working night and day at the FCO in London and at our Embassies and High Commissions around the world.

Finally, the Health Secretary announced last week that UK trials have started, as we draw on the incredible scientific talent we have in this country to pursue a vaccine.

And that effort too has an international dimension to it.

So, today, we announced that the UK will provide GAVI the international vaccine alliance with the equivalent of £330 million each year over the next 5 years as we seek to develop a vaccine both to protect the British people, but also to help immunise millions of the poorest and most vulnerable people around the world,

Combining the depth of our innovative know-how, with the big-hearted determination that has characterised our national effort to defeat the coronavirus.