

Speech: The humanitarian situation in Rukban

Thank you Mr President. First, let me thank Reena Ghelani for her briefing and also pay tribute through you to all the UN staff doing such important humanitarian work in Syria.

Mr President, Ms Ghelani today has reminded us that the humanitarian situation in Syria remains grave. We can not afford to lose sight of the 12 million people suffering daily. Eighty percent of Syrians live below the poverty line and one third of the population does not have reliable access to affordable food. This Council must therefore step up its efforts to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those who need it throughout Syria. And also we must do much more to support UN-led efforts to end this conflict through a political process.

Mr President, I agree with all the remarks made today by Belgium on behalf of the three humanitarian co-penholders but I wanted to highlight three points: the situation in Rukban, the situation in regime-held areas and Idlib.

First, on Rukban: the UK welcomes the news that an urgently needed humanitarian convoy finally reached Rukban on 6 February delivering assistance to thousands of people in desperate need. This situation of over 41,000 people sheltering in Rukban remains a serious concern. We must not see the same repeated delays before the next convoy, which the UN has now requested. The UN-conducted intentions survey in Rukban shows that the majority of residents wish to leave the camp but it also highlights their fears and concerns about doing so. Many are worried about their safety and security if they choose to return to their homes. Lack of civil documentation and concerns about access to their property were also reported. These concerns need to be addressed before people move.

The UN is therefore right, as are our humanitarian penholders, to call for certain conditions to be in place beforehand and any return or relocation must be safe, voluntary and dignified. Any effort to assist in the relocation of the population of Rukban must be in line with international protection standards. UN humanitarian staff should be granted access to the population before, during and after any movement. Children, women, the elderly and persons with disabilities must be afforded special protection during all phases of relocation. Screening procedures must be conducted in accordance with international law.

Mr President, turning to my second point about the situation in regime-held areas. The UK remains deeply concerned at conditions in former opposition held areas that the regime now controls. The Russian ambassador spoke of steps by the regime to welcome back refugees to areas under regime control. But Mr President, you don't welcome back refugees by arbitrarily detaining them in conditions in which torture is systematic and rife. You do not welcome back refugees by forcing them to join the army and to fight in a

conflict which they have fled. And you don't welcome back refugees by threatening to seize their properties under Law Number 10.

Mr President, all of these reasons were cited by Syrians themselves, under the UN's recent survey, as reasons for why they are not returning to regime-held areas. This is clearly not an environment for safe, dignified and voluntary refugee return. And it clearly falls short of this Council's call in Resolution 2254 for the establishment of inclusive and non-sectarian governance in Syria. Three quarters of those communities that came under regime control in 2018 are considered hard to reach areas for aid.

Let us be clear: they are only hard to reach because the regime chooses not to allow necessary aid to reach those that need it. We therefore join our French colleagues in calling on the regime to allow unfettered humanitarian access to all of those people in areas which it controls.

Third, Mr President, on the situation in Idlib, we remain deeply concerned for the 3 million people in northwest Syria – over 2 million of whom are entirely reliant on cross-border aid. And we should remember when we talk about the threat from terrorism in Idlib that there remain more babies than terrorists in Idlib. Fifty per cent of the population have been displaced from their homes, sometimes multiple times, stretching scarce resources beyond their limits and putting further strain on host communities. We've heard today from Ms Ghelani that military escalation in Idlib Province would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences. We therefore call on all parties, but in particular the regime and Russia, to respect the ceasefire and facilitate humanitarian access to Idlib.

Mr President, finally I would like to echo the points made by my South African colleague, humanitarian co-penholders and almost all other speakers today about how we will only tackle this humanitarian crisis in Syria in the long term through a political solution in accordance with Resolution 2254. This means in practice: a political transition. It means the establishment of a credible, inclusive, non-sectarian governance, which we know is so sorely absent in Syria today. And as my Belgian and Polish colleagues have emphasized, it also means accountability for the war crimes and crimes against humanity that have been carried out by this conflict – in particular by the regime and by Daesh.

Thank you Mr. President.

[**News story: D-Day 75: Légion d'Honneur presented to D-Day veterans on HMS**](#)

Belfast

Four British Royal Navy veterans were awarded France's highest honour today for their service in helping to liberate France almost 75 years ago.

The French government awarded medals to Denis Haley, Charles Kavanagh, Patrick Reardon and John Nicholls, who all took part in the allied Normandy Landings, as a way of honouring them for risking their lives to secure France's liberation in the Second World War.

Since June 2014, more than six thousand medals have been awarded by the French government.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Today is a reminder of why this June we must show our special generation, that we will never forget the debt we owe for the peace and freedom we now enjoy. I would like to thank the French Embassy for their efforts in honouring these men for helping to liberate Europe 75 years ago.

HMS Belfast is a perfect setting and I would like to commend IWM for an ambitious programme of events across their UK sites that offers people the chance to experience the extraordinary story of D-Day at their doorstep.

Denis Haley, 92, served as a signaller aboard HMS Southward Ho towing parts of the mulberry harbour from Portsmouth to Arromanches. He said:

A lot of the things that occurred at that time are lost to people's memories now especially the relationship between members of a ship's company – you become more than mates, you share things. It was my whole life for nearly 4 years. It's a very, very, very special day today. I'm absolutely overwhelmed.

Patrick Reardon, 93, volunteered for D-Day aboard HMS Sheffield, landing on Omaha Beach on D-Day.

John Nicholls, 93, served on HMS Argonaut, firing on German gun batteries on Normandy and driving landing craft to deliver supplies from ship to shore.

Charles Kavanagh, 92, helped to land tanks on Sword beach on D-Day and then supplies for the American Army on Omaha beach.

One hundred days to D-Day 75

With one hundred days to go until D-Day 75 commemorations in the UK and

France, the event offered the chance for the veterans who took part in the Normandy landings in 1944 to share their stories and experiences.

The medal presentation took place on board the historic landmark HMS Belfast in its Ward Room with the medals presented by French Ambassador Jean-Pierre Jouyet with Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson in attendance.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson toured the vessel alongside the French Ambassador to hear how the Imperial War Museum will retell the magnificent land, air and sea story through its Second World War collection and its three historic sites: HMS Belfast, IWM Duxford and the Churchill War Rooms.

Speech: " There can be no health without mental health" : speech by Jemima Gordon-Duff

Deputy Minister, CEO MHA, Chief Director, Ambassador (s), all protocols observed – I'm delighted to be here today at the launch the WHO Quality Rights Initiative. The roll out of the Initiative represents a new era for Mental Health in Ghana and the UK is proud to be a sponsor and partner of putting quality of care and human rights at the heart of Ghana's approach to mental health.

I'd like to start by congratulating people with mental health conditions and their representative groups here today that have been leading this change for many years. People with mental health conditions must be at front and centre of planning services, holding decision-makers to account and challenging stigma and discrimination. The phrase that best encapsulates this is "nothing about, us without us".

The past year has been monumental for mental health globally – with the launch of new evidence in the Lancet Commission, and commitments from the UN Secretary General and business leaders at the World Economic Forum. The Global Ministerial Mental Health Summit hosted by the UK and attended by Ghana's Deputy Minister of Health, the Honourable Tina Mensah, challenged us to radically rethink mental health – to look after our mental health as we would our physical health.

The message was loud and clear. There can be no health without mental health. Mental health is a fundamental part of being human. Everyone will experience mental distress at some point in their life. Globally, mental health conditions are one of the leading causes of disability and ill health. Experiences of being separated from communities or hidden away, entrenched discrimination, negative attitudes and discrimination – in some cases being abused – remain all too common the world over.

For years, global mental health has remained in the shadows and is one of the most neglected issues of our time. But this is starting to change. And I am heartened to see so many champions in this room leading a wave of change here in Ghana.

DFID has been a proud supporter of mental health in Ghana for more than ten years. We have worked in partnership with the Mental Health Authority, Ghana Health Services, CHAG and Basic Needs – to date, investing £10 million of UK aid to support mental health services across Ghana. Over this time, we have seen considerable change.

- There is now nationwide coverage of Mental Health services. All districts in Ghana now provide mental health services through GHS or CHAG facilities compared to 32 districts just six years ago.
- We've seen a rapid increase in a dedicated, skilled workforce – more than 5,000 health workers have been trained including district physicians, medical assistants and community health service providers .
- And perhaps most importantly, we have supported community groups, leaders and traditional healers to turn the tide against discrimination of people with mental health conditions. This has included supporting 500 self-help groups, reaching an estimated 10,000 people, to increase their access to social support and livelihoods.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

The partnership between the UK and Ghana is strong, and now maturing to support Ghana move beyond aid. His Excellency the President's vision for a self-reliant Ghana is truly inspiring and is applauded by the UK and all development partners. But "Ghana Beyond Aid" must leave no one behind. It has to be about the poorest and most marginalized Ghanaians. And that means every Ghanaian affected by mental health condition. A country can only reach its full potential if all its citizens can.

So we call on the government to go further still to champion mental health. With the imminent launch of the Mental Health policy, now is the time for implementation. I want to highlight three priorities:

- First and foremost, securing sustainable funding for and addressing the shortages of psychotropic drugs.
- Secondly, scaling up quality mental health services at the community level, equitably across the country including in regions currently disserved.
- Thirdly, more needs to be done to overturn stigma and discrimination and support the full, active inclusion of people with mental health conditions.

If these three priorities are implemented together, with their focus on prevention and community care, it will ultimately save Ghana money and support its move beyond aid.

I'd like to end by congratulating WHO, Mental Health Authority and civil

society partners here today on this important launch of Quality Rights. This will help Ghana to transform mental health, to promote care and support that is good quality, meets people's needs and respects their dignity and rights. I look forward to a continuing partnership.

[News story: Rail Review Chair says franchising cannot continue in its current form](#)

- reform must put passengers at its heart
- ORR to look at compensation and accessibility
- review to make recommendations in the autumn

Keith Williams, independent chair of the first 'root and branch' [Rail Review](#) to be supported by government, will today (26 February 2019) announce that the rail franchising system cannot continue in the way it is now.

In the George Bradshaw Address, Keith Williams is expected to say:

I have heard a great deal about the franchising model...driving growth in passengers and benefits to services. But with this growth the needs of passengers have changed whilst many of the basic elements of our rail system have not kept pace.

Put bluntly, franchising cannot continue the way it is today. It is no longer delivering clear benefits for either taxpayers and farepayers.

I believe that for the railway to be successful it needs to put passengers at its heart.

We need to recognise that there is unlikely to be a 'one size fits all' solution which will work for every part of the country and all types of passenger.

The former British Airways chief executive and deputy chairman of John Lewis Partnership, will set out that the reason he took on the review was because he had a clear commitment from the government to deliver change:

This is the first full-blown rail review to be supported by government for some considerable time – with a very clear commitment from the Transport Secretary and from Bernadette Kelly,

and the whole of the department's executive.

I see our role not just to tackle those recent problems that passengers have experienced but also to tackle the more fundamental underlying causes of those problems.

In his address, he will also say that the rail industry is adapting to a fast-changing world but unable to respond to consumer demand:

We are spending on the railway, in offering new services, purchasing new rolling stock, and renewing and enhancing the network. The May timetable change, for instance, was designed to offer thousands of new services, hundreds of new trains, and much improved critical infrastructure – but as a system we were unable to deliver on this investment. And the customer suffered.

Williams will summarise the progress made on the Rail Review as well as the next steps. He will say:

There's real hunger for change within the industry as well as outside. We will continue listening to what you have to say and learning from your insight and experience.

We need to do more on making it easier for customers to access the compensation they are entitled to and improving accessibility for all users, including disabled people.

I've asked the ORR to advise me on what more could be done by rail operators to improve this, and whether more regulatory powers are required to ensure it happens. They will report back within the timescale of the review recommending action to help transform compensation and accessibility across the network.

In the autumn we will bring everything together and alongside government, recommend change through a white paper. It will be the culmination of the biggest and widest review of the railway for generations.

- the Rail Review was established to recommend the most appropriate organisational and commercial frameworks to support the delivery of the government's vision for the railway
- former British Airways chief executive Keith Williams leads the major review of the rail industry, supported by an expert challenge panel
- the government will publish a white paper on the review's recommendations, with the implementation of reforms planned to start from 2020
- the annual Bradshaw Address is named in honour of George Bradshaw (1800 to 1853), who developed the Bradshaw's Guide to the railways

- the review's first evidence paper, The role of the railway in Great Britain, will be published at 7pm today (26 February 2019)
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[Press release: New ambassadors to champion green action](#)

Leading environmentalists have today (26 February) pledged to champion and promote the Year of Green Action.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove has welcomed UN Patron of the Oceans and endurance swimmer [Lewis Pugh](#), environmentalist David de Rothschild and TV presenter Jan Leeming, who will all help to educate and inspire the next generation of environmental leaders.

They are among the first ambassadors to join the Year of Green Action, a year-long drive to connect more people with the environment and raise awareness about the simple steps everyone can take – in their home, garden, workplace or school – to make a difference to the natural world.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

The natural world is our greatest asset and we all have a responsibility and role to play in protecting it for generations to come.

These new ambassadors have shown tremendous passion in their drive for environmental protection and have been tenacious in their desire to raise awareness, from swimming the length of the English Channel to sailing a recyclable boat made from reclaimed plastic bottles.

I am delighted to have them on board to champion the Year of Green Action and inspire change.

The Year of Green Action is a year-long initiative to get more people from all backgrounds involved in projects to improve the environment.

It provides a focal point for organisations, individuals, communities and businesses to learn more about their environmental impact, take action to reduce it, and spread the word on environmental issues.

The newly-announced ambassadors are:

- UN Patron of the Seas Lewis Pugh, an ocean advocate and endurance swimmer;

- Adventurer and environmentalist David de Rothschild, who sailed across the Pacific Ocean in 2009 on a entirely recyclable boat made using 12,500 reclaimed plastic bottles;
- TV presenter and newsreader Jan Leeming, a keen supporter of environmental issues, who has also spent time working on cheetah conservation projects in South Africa;
- Ethical lifestyle blogger [Besma Whayeb](#);
- Sian Conway, Green & Eco Influencer of the Year 2018;
- Explorer, entomologist, zoologist and broadcaster George McGavin;
- Professor Tim Jackson, [Director of the Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity](#);
- Founder of [Earth Changers sustainable travel company](#) Vicky Smith;
- Blogger and social influencer Izzy McLeod; and
- Lucy Finlay MBE, Founder of [Social Enterprise Mark CIC](#).

UN Patron of the Oceans Lewis Pugh said:

I have been swimming for 32 years and over that period of time, I've seen our oceans change completely. That's why I am delighted to support the Year of Green Action and help share the importance of protecting our oceans and tackling plastic pollution.

We need urgent action. Our greatest hope is that there are 66 million people in the United Kingdom. Any problem, however colossal, becomes manageable when divided by 66 million. If we all play our part, we can fix this.

The Environment Secretary has also called on businesses up and down the country to pledge support for the Year of Green Action, with representatives from some of the UK's biggest businesses attending a parliamentary reception this evening.

The Year of Green Action is a leading pledge from the government's 25 Year Environment Plan, an ambitious blueprint to improve the environment within a generation.

Since its [launch in January](#), the government has outlined ambitious plans to overhaul the waste system and transform household recycling, pledged support for charity [Step Up to Serve's #iwillfor nature campaign](#), and set out plans to protect some of the country's rarest and most threatened fungi.