

[Press release: Statement on first parliamentary elections in Lebanon since 2009](#)

I welcome Lebanon's first parliamentary elections since 2009, which took place on 6 May. I was pleased to see that the elections took place peacefully and in an orderly way, and I hope that the recommendations of the electoral observer missions will be acted on.

The United Kingdom remains steadfast in its commitment to Lebanon's stability, security and prosperity. I hope that Lebanon's political leaders, following the announcement of the election results, move swiftly to form a new government to address the crucial issues facing the country. I welcome calls from political leaders to carry out celebrations in a calm and peaceful manner.

The next government will have the important task of protecting Lebanon's stability and security by: robustly implementing the policy of disassociation from regional conflict; abiding by the provisions of all relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, in particular 1559 and 1701; and ensuring that the state's legitimate security institutions hold the monopoly on the use of force.

We also look forward to the next government making rapid progress on implementing the commitments to economic reform made at the CEDRE Conference (Conférence économique pour le développement, par les réformes et avec les entreprises) in Paris on 6 April, and working with the international community on the approach to the many refugees from Syria hosted by Lebanon, as set out in the Lebanon Partnership Paper jointly agreed at the Brussels Conference on 24 and 25 April.

The United Kingdom will remain a strong partner of Lebanon as it addresses the crucial challenges ahead.

[News story: Witness appeal](#)

The Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) is appealing for witnesses with photographs or videos of an accident involving fishing vessel Laura Jane. The boat capsized close to Mountbatten breakwater, Plymouth at about 1330 on Bank Holiday Monday, 7 May.

Contact us by email at maib@dft.gov.uk or via our 24-hour reporting line, 023 8023 2527.

News story: Extension of Countryside Stewardship payment claim deadline

The Countryside Stewardship (CS) claim deadline is being extended by one month to 15 June 2018. This means CS agreement holders have an extra month to submit their CS annual claim. The original deadline for Natural England to receive these by was 15 May 2018.

The claim deadline extension does not apply to Environmental Stewardship claims or Basic Payment Scheme 2018 applications; both of these must be submitted by 15 May to avoid late claim penalties.

Farmers and land managers who are waiting for their CS agreement offer will be notified soon about whether or not their application was successful. Natural England is working to send out the remaining agreement offers by the end of May, and successful candidates will need to accept their agreements and send in a claim by 15 June.

Natural England is writing to all Countryside Stewardship agreement holders and applicants awaiting their agreement to inform them of the one month extension. The extra month also means that customers who need to make any changes to the maps on their agreement offer or raise any other queries with Natural England have time to do so.

Press release: Minister for Europe statement on election of new Armenian Prime Minister

I am pleased that a solution to the political situation in Armenia has been found, via negotiation and through the Parliament, and congratulate Nikol Pashinyan on his election as Armenia's new Prime Minister.

It is to the credit of all involved that events over the last three weeks have unfolded peacefully and largely without incident.

It is important that the restraint and statesmanship shown by all parties continues and that the political process moves forward, based on solid constitutional and legal foundations.

In my two visits to Armenia in the last 12 months, I have seen first-hand the

country's rich history, and its huge potential. I was particularly impressed by the many young people I met, who are determined to build a bright future for Armenia.

The UK, as a longstanding friend of Armenia, stands ready to support its efforts to strengthen its democracy, deliver good governance, and improve economic opportunities for all.

Government response: Ministerial statement on the peace process in South Sudan

The UK welcomes the resumption of peace talks in South Sudan next week and the consultations that are now underway. This is a critical moment for the peace process and we remain strongly in support of regional efforts to bring about a lasting peace.

It is disappointing that we once again find ourselves in a position where the cessation of hostilities agreement reached at the last set of talks has not held, and the talks have so far failed to generate serious commitment to compromise. Meanwhile, the people of South Sudan remain in a terrible state of conflict and humanitarian crisis. Fighting, troop movements and the rhetoric of war continues, pushing the country deeper into crisis. In recent weeks we have seen violent clashes surge in Unity, Jonglei and the Central Equatorias. This is causing immense suffering and preventing lifesaving assistance from reaching those most in need.

As no party has yet been held to account for violating the cessation of hostilities agreement, the perpetrators continue to act with impunity. This is undermining prospects for a lasting peace to be agreed at the upcoming talks. Those who have violated the cessation of hostilities agreement must face consequences for their actions. We urge the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to take immediate action in this regard, to leave the parties in no doubt of the region's commitment to peace.

Only a negotiated agreement can bring peace in South Sudan and create the conditions for elections. We believe that the High-level Revitalisation Forum remains the only platform with the scope and inclusion to deliver this.