

Speech: Protecting Victims of Chemical Weapons Attacks in Syria, Salisbury and Internationally

Thank you very much Mr President and thank you to the Deputy High Representative for his briefing.

I would like to start also by saluting Dr Mourad. Thank you for your work, sir, thank you to Ambassador Haley for drawing our attention to your presence here today and thank you to all those members of the UN, the ICRC and others who try so hard to help the people of Syria.

We've heard very graphic accounts, Mr President, of what exactly sarin is and how it attacks the central nervous system, leads to convulsions, paralysis and asphyxiation. And I am sure none of us will forget the footage we saw of the agony of the men, women and children who were poisoned by this nerve gas. As the other speakers have said, the OPCW Fact Finding Mission concluded that sarin was used in Khan Sheikhoun, and the JIM concluded that the Syrian regime was responsible for the attack.

Khan Sheikhoun was not the first time the regime used chemical weapons. In 2013, after hundreds were killed with sarin in Eastern Ghouta, Russia and the Assad regime promised the world that Syria would abandon all of its chemical weapons. Resolution 2118 decided that Syria would destroy its CW programme and join the Chemical Weapons Convention. And last month the Director General briefed the Council on Syria's progress in doing just that. The Director-General noted that Syria had destroyed its declared programme very quickly, but that questions had arisen following inspections by the OPCW. And over time, Mr President, those questions have increased as inspectors deployed to Syria more than a dozen times. Chemicals were found which should have been declared, and yet Syria claimed not to know why. After long drawn out discussions, they finally declared the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre – but there are still 21 serious issues remain unaddressed. This means that after more than four years of work, the OPCW is still unable to verify that Syria's declaration is accurate and as we have heard many times, gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies remain in Syria's account of its declaration under the Chemical Weapons Convention. These are not trivial points of minor detail; they are substantive and the seriousness of the outstanding concerns has increased over time.

Mr President, my US and Dutch colleagues have eloquently drawn attention to the fact there can be no impunity and we echo their call on that. Last November Russia blocked the renewal of the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, and this leads us, as the Dutch Ambassador said, without a proper mechanism to determine accountability. I echo what he said about the way to explore all avenues to try to find a way of setting up accountability and responsibility for these weapons.

It is not just through its actions in Syria, Mr President, that Russia's disdain for the international system manifests itself. The poisoning in Salisbury of two people with a military grade nerve agent endangered anyone who chanced to be in the vicinity; more than 130 people were potentially exposed to the agent, including a police officer. There has been no explanation offered as to how a Russian nerve agent came to be used in this manner.

On 22 March, a Foreign Ministry official in Moscow rejected the idea that Russia would accept the OPCW independent conclusions in examining the material from the Salisbury attack; and today Russia has called a meeting of the Executive Council of OPCW in the Hague to pre-empt the findings of the OPCW investigation.

Mr President, there should be no more victims of chemical weapons attacks, whether they take place in the warzone of Syria or in an English country town.

The rules-based international order and its institutions are too valuable to be put at risk in this way. It is our collective duty to protect them and seek accountability for those who choose to defy them. We fail the people of Syria, we fail the people of Salisbury, we fail the world if we do not act. Both my Dutch and American colleagues drew attention to the 100 years since some of the worst battles of the First World War. Allow me to conclude Mr President with a quote from a poem from that war, "He died in hell. They called it Passchendaele." It has a new name now.

Thank you.

Press release: Iconic Spaghetti Junction featured on big screen

It's stood tall above the city of Birmingham for the past 50 years – and now the foundations of Spaghetti Junction have played a part in Steven Spielberg's new big-screen adventure Ready Player One, now in cinemas.

Highways England facilitated filming for Ready Player One underneath the iconic structure – known officially as Gravelly Hill interchange – in August and September 2016.

The towering concrete columns, some reaching to 80 feet high, formed the ideal backdrop to the film, which is in cinemas now.

Special templates featuring graffiti were stuck to the concrete structures and various props added into the set, including cars and tyres, with a 'camp' constructed for the new film.

The crew took considerable effort to protect the structure and ensure nothing was damaged during filming. Emergency planning officer for Highways England, Frank Bird, said:

We're thrilled to finally see the structure on the big screen and we were more than happy to facilitate filming for the staff and crew that were down on-site.

We spent considerable weeks working with the film company and producers and they were really pleased to be allowed access underneath the road. It's not something that we do every day, but as it was a new Steven Spielberg film, it was an opportunity we couldn't refuse. Those travelling on the road had no idea what was taking place underneath and that is testament to the hard work and organisation that went into this facilitating this project.

Work started on Spaghetti Junction some 50 years ago this year and it's great to see that the road continues to hold international acclaim.

The structure continues to carry more than 220,000 vehicles every day and is subject to regular maintenance projects, many of which go unseen by the travelling public.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[News story: New requirements for farmers to improve environment for all](#)

New rules are now in force which will protect the water environment and save farmers money.

[The new rules](#), which came in to force on 2 April 2018, mean it is now mandatory for all farmers in England to maintain good practice to protect water quality and prevent water pollution incidents.

Collectively, farming related pollution incidents can harm wildlife in our rivers and seas. They also impact on our economy, resulting in higher bills from increased water treatment and affect our tourism and shellfish industry. Many farmers have already made great progress in addressing pollution risks but the new rules will help tackle water pollution by ensuring all farmers take action.

The rules will:

- promote good practice in managing fertilisers and manures;
- encourage land managers to take reasonable precautions to prevent diffuse pollution from runoff or soil erosion;
- require land managers to plan each application of manure or fertilisers, based on soil tests, to meet but not exceed crop and soil needs.

Our [25 Year Environment Plan](#) set out how these new rules will require every farmer to identify and manage risks to water and start taking precautions to reduce ammonia emissions, reducing pollution and soil erosion and improving resource efficiency.

Environment Minister Therese Coffey said:

This is a really important opportunity for farmers to reduce pollution in watercourses. In following these rules, farmers will be able to help reduce pollution incidents, improve water quality and save money through more efficient use of resources.

The new rules are an important part of our 25 year plan for the environment which will help us deliver our plans for a Green Brexit and leave our environment in a better state than we inherited it.

The new farming rules have been drawn up with farming and environment representatives so that they are practical, risk based and will prevent and reduce agricultural pollution. They encourage the farmer to think about the risk of water pollution, how to keep valuable topsoil on their fields and to apply fertilisers only when it is appropriate to do so. Farmers and land managers will be able to determine what approach is best for their land, through methods such as deciding when it is safe to spread fertilisers.

The rules cover:

- planning the use of manures and fertilisers to improve soil nutrient levels and meet crop needs;
- storing organic manures and positioning livestock feeders away from water bodies;
- applying manures or fertilisers to minimise impact on the water environment;
- precautions to prevent soil erosion;
- reducing livestock poaching.

Farming rules for water are part of a whole package of measures to help

farmers and land managers look after the environment. The government is also investing £400 million through [Countryside Stewardship](#) which supports farmers in creating or restoring precious habitats and a £12 million ammonia reduction grant has incentivised farmers to tackle agricultural emissions.

[News story: Plastic purge: Defra Legal Advisers](#)



As the government announces a deposit scheme to encourage people to recycle plastic bottles and cans, GLD lawyers have been doing their bit to help stem the mounting volume of plastic waste that is posing a threat to much of the world's wildlife.

Brought into focus by the recent series Blue Planet II in which David Attenborough highlighted the toxic effect of plastic waste on the world's oceans, government lawyers from Defra Legal Advisers have joined a global effort to curb pollution.

Gilly Stratford of GLD was part of the UK delegation that joined the third United Nations Environmental Assembly which took place recently in Nairobi, otherwise known by its more snappy acronym UNEA-3.

UNEA-3's aim was to work towards ridding the planet of pollution, including the menace of marine plastic litter. At the end of long and intense negotiations, 15 anti-pollution measures were unanimously agreed by the 190+ countries which attended. Gilly's role was to advise policy colleagues and help draft amendments to the texts, while keeping an eye on the UK's negotiating position.

While these measures are not legally binding, they nonetheless send out a statement of intent. Defra achieved all its objectives at UNEA-3, especially its main aim to reduce marine pollution by plastics and microplastics.

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[News story: London seminar – The Lammy Review: bringing to life recommendations 31 and 32](#)

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The Lammy Review: Bringing to life recommendations 31 and 32

The role of commissioning and the involvement of smaller organisations featuring

George Barrow | Head of Lammy Response Team | Ministry of Justice

Eila Davis | Head of Equalities | HM Prison and Probation Service

Jeremy Crook, OBE | Chief Executive | Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG)

Jonathan Martin | Head of Community Commissioning | Ministry of Justice

Omar Ralph | Lammy Response Team Lead | Ministry of Justice

For a more detailed overview and how to book please see the attached flyer.

PDF, 278KB, 1 page

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