

Speech: Lord Ahmad marks 70th anniversary of UN Human Rights Declaration

2018 is the 70th anniversary of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) but this is not a moment for idle nostalgia. It is our opportunity to reaffirm the Declaration's enduring relevance. An opportunity to redouble our collective efforts to uphold the rights of individuals; to nurture the creativity and human progress which flow from these rights; and to promote the openness and tolerance that allow societies to flourish. We must do this now more than ever because all around the world these rights are under threat.

Syria

In Syria, nearly 7 years since the conflict began, human rights and international humanitarian law are being flouted daily, with apparent impunity. Across the country, thousands of detainees are suffering inhuman conditions and torture. Chemical weapons have been used. Pro-regime forces bomb hospitals and schools, and use starvation sieges to force surrender. Eastern Ghouta, where hundreds have been killed in the past week by pro-regime bombing, is hell on earth. We are appalled by reports that pro-regime airstrikes continue in spite of the UN Security Council Resolution calling for a humanitarian pause. Those with influence over the regime must act now to ensure the ceasefire is implemented in full. We must bring this conflict to an end.

The UK commends the work of the UN Commission of Inquiry in investigating and highlighting abuses and violations and we urge members to support the renewal of its mandate. We are pleased that the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism has begun to identify and build cases against those responsible. The international community must speak up for those who have no voice. We are particularly concerned about the plight of Syrian children. The High Level Panel on the Violations of the Rights of Children should allow us to discuss what more can be done to protect them.

Myanmar

Turning to Myanmar: earlier this month our Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, saw first-hand the devastating impact of the crisis on Rohingya refugees. Ethnic tensions were a significant factor behind the appalling violence in Rakhine state last summer, and we remain deeply concerned by the persecution faced by Rohingya Muslims, Christian and other minorities in Myanmar.

The UK is clear that the despicable atrocities carried out against the Rohingya were ethnic cleansing. In the absence of a credible and transparent judicial process in Myanmar, the UK will continue to explore with

international partners how to bring to justice those responsible for these appalling crimes. The UK supports the work of the Fact Finding Mission and the Special Rapporteur, Ms Yanghee Lee, and calls for the renewal of her mandate.

It is right that we should focus on ensuring that refugees can return voluntarily in safety, dignity and with international oversight. However, we must also work for the longer term. That means supporting Myanmar's democratic transition, and the promotion of freedom, tolerance and diversity, to build a lasting peace.

North Korea

Likewise in North Korea, the international community has rightly focused on exerting pressure on the regime to give up its illegal nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. However, we must not overlook its appalling human rights situation.

North Korea's Constitution speaks of freedom but in reality that freedom is a mirage. In the 2017 ranking of press freedom by Reporters Without Borders, North Korea came last. If North Koreans express religious beliefs they face harsh punishment or even death.

The 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry estimated that there were between 80,000 and 120,000 political prisoners in North Korea. The 2016 Global Slavery Index estimates more than a million North Koreans are enslaved. We urge all UN Members to enact UN Security Council Resolutions regarding North Korean overseas workers, and to avoid returning defectors to North Korea in such circumstances.

The UK urges North Korea to end its illegal nuclear weapons programme; to cooperate with the international community; and to allow human rights actors unhindered access. There is a very different path open to the regime. One that offers security and prosperity and the genuine chance of a better life for every citizen.

Iran

In Iran, while we welcome the passage of the new anti-narcotics law, there remain other issues of real concern, including the reports of torture and deaths in custody during recent protests; the increase in religious persecution in particular against the Baha'i and Christian converts; and the use of the death penalty for juvenile offenders, which is in clear violation of Iran's international human rights obligations. The UK urges Iran to end such executions immediately and to allow all its citizens the rights and freedoms set out in international law. We pay tribute to Asma Jahangir for her dedication to the promotion of human rights.

The Maldives

In the Maldives, the UK is dismayed at the continued erosion of democracy, human rights and respect for the rule of law. We urge the government to end the State of Emergency and restore fundamental freedoms by ceasing all interference in independent institutions, and by guaranteeing free and fair presidential elections.

Sri Lanka

Elsewhere in Asia, we welcome Sri Lanka's constructive engagement with the UN, but we urge them to make more progress in implementing their Council commitments. We look forward to High Commissioner Zeid's update.

South East Asia

Turning to South East Asia – its impressive economic growth could be put at risk if political and civil space is eroded. Yet there are concerning developments across the region – whether it be the dissolution of the main opposition in Cambodia, the arrest of Mother Mushroom in Vietnam, the trial of Reuters journalists in Burma, the increasing use in Thailand of laws against sedition, Computer Crimes and lèse majesté, or the deadly 'war on drugs' in the Philippines.

We hope that Thailand, Cambodia and Malaysia will enable free discussion and open political debate in the run-up to their elections, which will demonstrate that democracy in the region is alive and well.

South Sudan

There are challenges in every continent, for example, in Africa the human rights situation in South Sudan continues to be of serious concern. The details contained in the recent report by the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reflect the ongoing and widespread human rights violations we have seen since conflict first erupted. The solution is political stability, and we urge all parties to the conflict to engage with the peace process with seriousness of purpose. We also urge the Council to renew the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights.

We are deeply concerned at the allegations of sexual exploitation in the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). We welcome the statement by UNMISS that restates, and outlines concrete steps towards implementing, the UN's commitment to zero tolerance, transparency, accountability. We call on Troop Contributing Countries with allegations made against them to also carry out investigations promptly, transparently and report their findings to the UN. The UK strongly supports the important work done by UNMISS, and all the Troop Contributing Countries within the Mission, to protect civilians and seek an end to the conflict.

The UK fully supports the UN Secretary General's 'zero tolerance' policy on

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in peacekeeping operations and multilateral development and humanitarian agencies. In the 21st century, it is utterly despicable that SEA continues to exist. The UK will hold the UN and NGOs accountable for improving their safeguarding measures and review our funding relationship with those who fail to meet standards. Our priority is to keep the world's poorest and most vulnerable people safe from harm.

The Gambia and Zimbabwe

But there are also some reasons for optimism: The Gambia is renewing its democracy after decades of oppression; and Zimbabwe has an opportunity to take the path towards stability, prosperity and democracy.

The UK will continue to play its part in supporting these and other positive developments, both within the international community and through its own bilateral relationships. We welcome the recent co-operation with the Government of Argentina to identify the remains of 88 Argentine soldiers buried in the Falkland Islands. We hope that this project, along with a planned visit to the Islands, brings some comfort to the families of the fallen.

Gender equality

I should like to remark on 2 further issues of particular importance to the UK, namely gender equality and freedom of religion or belief.

Turning to gender equality, the UK believes that women and girls have the right to be educated, equal, empowered and safe and that achieving this will benefit all of society. That is because educating girls gives them greater control over their assets, their income and their bodies. Education empowers girls and women to speak out about issues that affect them and their communities; and it can have a hugely positive impact on stability, conflict-reduction and peace building.

This is why we believe that supporting girls' education is a smart investment. More than 130 million girls are still out of school so there is still much more to be done. The abhorrent abduction of over 100 schoolgirls in Dapchi, north east Nigeria, last week is a stark reminder of just how dangerous it is for some girls to exercise the right to an education that so many of us take for granted.

Freedom of religion or belief

Finally, the UK attaches great importance to freedom of religion or belief. Daily, we hear reports of persecution against the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Shia Muslims, the Baha'i faith and others. The international community must stand together in tackling this issue, so that all individuals can practise their faith or belief freely.

Conclusion

To conclude, we are still far from achieving the rights and freedoms expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At this Council, let us renew our determination to stand up for the downtrodden, to speak up for those with no voice, and to strive for a world in which everyone, everywhere can live without fear or suffering, and is free to live the life they choose.

Further information

[News story: Automated cleaning of surgical instruments: apply for funding](#)

Surgical instruments and tools including scalpels, forceps and tweezers.

The [NHS in Scotland](#) – supported by the [Can Do Innovation Challenge Fund](#) – has up to £150,000 to invest in studies that look at new ways of automating the pre-cleaning of surgical instruments.

Importance of pre-cleaning

Surgical instruments must be properly cleaned, inspected and sterilised within the sterile services process before each use.

Most existing procedures rely on manual cleaning. This is because current, automated pre-cleaning systems have a limited focus on one specific area, such as neurological surgery. They are also not designed for a range of instruments.

Improvements to automated systems could tackle clinical, health, safety and environmental concerns, improve efficiency and reduce costs.

Solutions must reduce cost and waste

The competition aims to find a solution for automated pre-cleaning that reduces costs and waste, is easy to operate and connects with existing NHS equipment. It must include:

- pre-soaking and internal flushing
- automated chemical dosing
- coarse-contamination removal, ideally ultrasonics or a spray function
- fully programmable pre-cleaning steps

- measurement and monitoring
- integration with automated washers or washer-disinfectors

Funding of £150,000 is for a series of feasibility studies. A further £300,000 could be available in a second phase to develop the most promising ideas.

The competition is being run under SBRI (the Small Business Research Initiative).

Competition information

- the competition opens on 5 March 2018, and the deadline for registration is at midday on 9 May 2018
- it is open to any organisation that can demonstrate a route to market for its idea
- we expect phase 1 contracts to be worth up to £30,000 and to last up to 6 months
- successful projects will attract 100% funded development contracts
- a briefing event will be held on 18 April 2018

[Press release: PM call with Taoiseach Varadkar: 27 February 2018](#)



A Downing Street spokesperson said:

Yesterday evening the Prime Minister spoke to the Taoiseach on the Brexit negotiations and the situation in Northern Ireland.

The PM reaffirmed our commitment, as set out in the Joint Report, to avoiding a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland or between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom and to converting all of these commitments into legal text in the coming

months.

The PM and the Taoiseach both agreed that it was their preference to achieve this through the overall future relationship between the UK and the EU. The PM advised that she would say more on this future relationship in her speech on Friday.

The leaders also discussed the current political situation in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister said she had met with both Sinn Fein and the DUP last week and that she still believes a basis for accommodation remains. They committed to remain in touch on this.

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[News story: Defence Minister hosts Polish counterpart at Allied Rapid Reaction Corps](#)



Defence Minister Mark Lancaster and Polish Under Secretary of State Tomasz Szatkowski. Crown Copyright.

Following Mr Lancaster's visit to Poland in August 2017, the Polish Under Secretary of State has been in the UK for a two-day visit to discuss plans for the continued close defence relationship between the two countries.

The pair visited the UK's leading contribution to NATO, the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps. The high readiness force staff includes two Polish nationals, as well as UK nationals and personnel from 21 NATO countries.

Minister for the Armed Forces Mark Lancaster said:

Our defence cooperation with Poland continues to go from strength to strength. We recently signed a defence treaty together, only the second such treaty the UK has signed with another EU country, signifying the importance of our relationship. We remain entirely committed to the security of our friends in Europe.

We are allies together in NATO and this visit has shown how our troops work side by side within the alliance to protect our interests.

The UK has deployed 150 military personnel to Poland as part of NATO's Enhance Forward Presence (eFP) in the region. [Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson visited these troops in December.](#)

As well as visiting the UK's leading NATO high-readiness headquarters, the Defence Minister and his Polish counterpart commemorated veterans at the Polish War Memorial and witnessed a Ground Based Air Defence demonstration at Salisbury Plain. They also held a series of bilateral talks following on from the successful signing of the [new defence treaty in December.](#)

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Press release: UK Public Health Rapid Support Team deploys to Nigeria

The UK Public Health Rapid Support Team (UK-PHRST), a joint run effort of Public Health England and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, is deploying to Nigeria to help control an outbreak of Lassa fever.

Nigeria is currently experiencing an unusually severe epidemic of Lassa fever – a viral haemorrhagic illness that is normally present in the country but on a lower scale. The outbreak is most prevalent in the southern Nigerian states of Edo, Ondo and Ebonyi.

Given the size of the current outbreak and the risk of further spread locally, the government of Nigeria has requested support from the UK-PHRST team.

The UK-PHRST team deployment includes an expert in patient management, 2 epidemiologists (experts in tracking outbreaks) and a logistician.

The UK-PHRST will provide technical and analytical support for the public health response to control this outbreak, and will also assist with important

research on Lassa fever that can provide insight for controlling the disease in the future.

The team will be working alongside the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control, the World Health Organisation (WHO), and other experts in outbreak control to support the Nigerian government's response.

Professor Daniel Bausch, Director of the UK PHRST said:

The Lassa fever situation in Nigeria has been worsening and now requires an escalated level of response in order to help the Nigerian government slow transmission and save lives.

We are proud to be assisting the government of Nigeria by offering specialist support that will benefit the country both in the immediate and long term.

Public Health Minister Steve Brine MP, said:

Viruses like Lassa fever do not respect borders – and it is only right that we share our expertise with countries facing serious outbreaks around the world.

Our invaluable Rapid Support Team will provide help on the ground in Nigeria to manage the spread of the virus, and grow the country's ability to protect itself from other dangerous diseases.

Humans usually become infected with Lassa virus from exposure to urine or faeces of infected rodents that are unique to Africa. The virus may also be spread between humans through direct contact with the blood, urine, faeces, or other bodily secretions of an infected person, though this tends to be less common. Typical symptoms include fever, sore throat, headache, abdominal pain and diarrhoea, with bleeding and shock in severe cases. The public health risk to the UK is low.

The UK PHRST is funded by the UK government. It continually monitors infectious diseases and other hazards globally, identifying situations where the deployment of specialist expertise could prevent these threats from turning into a global outbreak. It also conducts outbreak-related research and focuses on building in-country capacity to prevent outbreaks with overseas partners.

For latest case numbers of Lassa Fever in Nigeria, please refer to the WHO: <http://www.ncdc.gov.ng/reports/weekly>.

UK-PHRST

UK-PHRST consists of public health experts, scientists, academics and clinicians ready to respond to urgent requests from countries around the

world within 48 hours to support them in preventing local disease outbreaks from becoming global epidemics.

Informed by surveillance data, the UK-PHRST deploys on behalf of UK government in response to requests from low- and middle-income countries, as well as with the WHO and the Global Outbreak and Response Network (GOARN).

The UK PHRST has previously deployed members to Ethiopia (outbreak of Acute Watery Diarrhoea), Nigeria (Meningitis outbreak), Sierra Leone (cholera risk), Madagascar (plague outbreak) and Bangladesh (Diphtheria outbreak).

The core team consists of:

- epidemiologists (experts in tracking and understanding disease transmission)
- microbiologists (diagnosing the cause of an outbreak)
- clinical researchers (developing the best patient management practices)
- social scientists (community engagement during outbreaks)
- data scientists (managing data and modelling outbreak trajectories)
- infection prevention and control experts (advising on preventing transmission)
- logisticians

The UK-PHRST consortium of research institutions includes the University of Oxford and King's College London as academic partners.

Public Health England

[Public Health England](#) exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. We do this through world-leading science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and providing specialist public health services. We are an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care, and a distinct organisation with operational autonomy. We provide government, local government, the NHS, Parliament, industry and the public with evidence-based professional, scientific expertise and support. Follow us on Twitter: [@PHE_uk](#) and Facebook: www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland.

London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

The [London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine](#) is a world-leading centre for research and postgraduate education in public and global health, with more than 4,000 students and 1,000 staff working in over 100 countries. The school is one of the highest-rated research institutions in the UK, is among the world's leading schools in public and global health, and was named University of the Year in the Times Higher Education Awards 2016. Our mission is to improve health and health equity in the UK and worldwide; working in partnership to achieve excellence in public and global health research, education and translation of knowledge into policy and practice.