

Press release: Joint Statement on Yemen by the UK, UAE, Saudi Arabia and USA

The Foreign Ministers of the UK, UAE and Saudi Arabia, with senior officials of the US Government, met on 10 December in Abu Dhabi to discuss the concerning situation in Yemen.

They expressed outrage at reports of indiscriminate killings and intimidation by the Houthis in Sana'a, including against members of the GPC and their families. They called upon the Houthis to cease actions to suppress or eliminate other political parties in Sana'a.

In the context of a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation, the members discussed means of providing greater assistance to the Yemeni people, and facilitating the entry of humanitarian and commercial goods. The members agreed to enhance their efforts to prevent weapons smuggling into Yemen.

The members urged all Yemeni parties to unify their efforts in search of responsible solutions for a stable and united Yemen.

They agreed to meet frequently to monitor this concerning situation.

Press release: PM statement on NATO Secretary-General extension

Secretary-General Stoltenberg has been a true champion of the NATO Alliance and the values it represents. He has made sure that NATO has stood strong but not stood still, meeting Russian aggression in eastern Europe while reforming to face developing threats such as cyber-attacks and hybrid-warfare.

The UK has always shared his desire to ensure that NATO keeps pace in an ever-changing environment. I am delighted that the Secretary-General will now have the opportunity to build on this and I look forward to continuing our strong partnership.

Speech: Lord Ahmad addresses Amnesty International

Good afternoon Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, friends and colleagues – and indeed I see many familiar faces from both Houses of Parliament around the room – Ann Clwyd who as Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group has worked tirelessly to advance human rights; my predecessor Baroness Anelay, who was strongly committed to this area of work. I am pleased to see many colleagues from the House of Lords, who consistently hold me and this Government to account on this critical agenda.

I would like to start by thanking the All Party Parliamentary Group on Human Rights and Amnesty International for organising today's event, and for all the valuable work they do, including highlighting the important role of Human Rights Defenders.

I would also like to thank Amnesty International and many of you here who have helped us revise the guidance for our diplomats. Our diplomats play a key role across the world and by supporting human rights defenders, especially many tragically facing prejudice and oppression in their front line work, it is important the British Government, wherever we have representation in the world is a voice advocating for those human rights defenders.

Let me assure you that that guidance has now issued to our staff around the world, and will inform their work in 2018 – the year which marks the 20th Anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

And in that context, next year I am also mindful of the fact that that the UK will host the Commonwealth Summit Heads of Government meeting. Working through the agenda with the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and indeed across government, we want to ensure that whilst there will be challenges, we bridge those challenges, as we see 52 Heads of Government assemble right here in London.

I know we are today joined by many human rights defenders and advocates, brave and courageous people who defend human rights across the world. We are joined by Issa Amro, whose work as a human rights defender in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is well known to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Issa, I know you have recently discussed your experiences with my colleague Alistair Burt, our Minister for the Middle East.

Human Rights Defenders – UK Support

I am sure no one here underestimates the contribution of brave human rights defenders like Issa and others who are advancing human rights internationally.

By speaking truth to power and helping individuals understand and exercise their rights, they act as custodians, guardians of our freedoms, our democracies, and of good governance. But they are also acting because it is the right thing to do.

And it is a tragedy, ladies and gentlemen that these very same people frequently come under attack. Unsurprising, they come under attack from the very powerful voices those seeking to protect their own influence, to whom human rights are an obstacle and an inconvenience, not something every citizen should enjoy.

This is why our government, why the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, champions human rights defenders around the world. This year we have been working to uphold and strengthen the protections afforded to them by the international human rights system. Just last month we helped forge consensus on a UN General Assembly Resolution on Human Rights Defenders. Indeed only yesterday I returned from Geneva where the UK supported a Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the plight of the Rohingya .

As part of our commitment to human rights defenders, the UK is a powerful advocate of journalists and programmes to build their capacity. That's why ladies and gentlemen on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists in November, our Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson committed to spending £1 million over the next financial year on projects that will enable journalists and media professionals to promote their own free press and uphold human rights. And let me be clear, this is one area amongst others prioritised by our Secretary of State. He talks very passionately about human rights, in particular the issues of press freedoms and protection of journalists, and LGBT rights, all of which are very close to the Foreign Secretary's heart.

Write for Rights Campaign – Detentions in Turkey

Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign is another powerful way in which we can support those whose basic human rights are under attack. This year's campaign is particularly poignant. As we stand here today, Amnesty International Country Chair Mr Tanner Kilic – who has worked tirelessly to defend the rights of others – remains behind bars in Turkey.

The UK Government is deeply concerned by these detentions in Turkey. But let me assure you, the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary and Ministers have all raised the issue with their Turkish counterparts. We continue to encourage Turkey to work towards the full protection of fundamental rights for everyone, particularly with regard to free speech.

The Write for Rights campaign again shows us that human rights defenders have their rights violated all too often:

In China – Ni Yulan has been harassed and attacked for supporting people faced with forced evictions. We have raised her case with China on numerous occasions and continue to be concerned about her treatment. I again urge the Chinese authorities to ensure that Ni and her family are free from

harassment; and that she is able to access the medical treatment she needs.

In Egypt – Human Rights Defenders like Azza Soliman and Ibrahim Metwally face arrest and mistreatment, and are subjected to asset freezes and travel bans. We continue to raise our human rights concerns privately with the Egyptian authorities, but also let me assure you in public, including at the UN. On 3 November our joint statement with Canada, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands set out our concerns about the detention of Ibrahim Metwally.

In Bangladesh, human rights defenders – and I talked to some of you before we got going this afternoon – like the LGBT activist Xulhaz Manan have been attacked for their campaigning, as I heard during my visit in August. This is why Bangladesh remains a human rights priority country for the UK and why we raise our concerns at all levels with the government there.

Standing up for human rights defenders is a regular part of the work of so many of our Embassies as I have already said. Let me take this opportunity to highlight the work that two of them are currently doing.

In Bogota, our Embassy lobbies on behalf of many individual human rights defenders, and we coordinate the work of other concerned members of the international community.

This year, David Ravelo, Huber Ballesteros and Miguel Beltran were released from prison, and we have helped ensure their personal safety on release.

The Embassy also funds a project that is developing self-protection strategies for social leaders in the regions of Colombia most affected by conflict.

In Bangkok, Thailand our Ambassador and his team worked closely with partner countries to support three human rights defenders who on 26 July 2016 were charged with criminal defamation for reporting allegations of torture.

The Embassy stood by them in public and importantly in private to provide the support they needed. We took to social media to say that it is not a crime to report torture. We used our contacts to raise the case in a range of forums and thankfully, on 24 October this year the charges were dropped.

Ladies and gentlemen, these are but two examples. I am proud to say that there are many more. Indeed in virtually every country with human rights challenges you will find that our Head of Mission is in contact with the main civil society actors and leading human rights defenders, and of course the governments themselves, promoting the importance of the work of human rights defenders and defending their right to carry it out.

Conclusion

If I may in conclusion, I would like to end by directly addressing individuals in this room and beyond. Selfless individuals around the world who are willing to speak out and be counted, who are willing to speak out and defend the human rights of others, who are willing to speak out and stand up often at the risk of their own safety or freedom.

Your and their courage and commitment are a shining example to us all. Sometimes you speak for those with no voice and give them that voice. You stand up for the downtrodden; you bring us a step closer to freedom, equality, and justice. Therefore we not only commend you, we salute you. From my heart and on behalf of the Government we thank you. And let me assure you ladies and gentlemen, wherever, whenever we can, Her Majesty's Government will continue to stand with human rights defenders in solidarity.

Speech: Sajid Javid's speech to the Federation of Master Builders

Good evening everyone, it's great to see so many familiar faces and it's a real pleasure to have you all here in Parliament.

As you know, the Palace of Westminster is beginning to show it's age, we really do need to get the builders in.

I'm pretty sure I saw some of you pricing the job up on the way here!

And if you want to send your quotes to the Speaker, tell him Sajid sent you!

You are all, literally, master builders.

The FMB does great work in recognising that, certifying it.

Raising and maintaining standards.

And of course providing clients with the reassurance they need.

It's a vital task.

After all, none of us are immune from the kind of shoddy workmanship the FMB protects against.

Even Winston Churchill.

When he was Prime Minister he complained that 10 Downing Street was, and I quote, "shaky and lightly built by the profiteering contractor whose name the street bears".

Today, of course, the centre of government is strong and stable!

Although I'm sure John will take issue with that!

I want to start this evening by saying thank you to everyone in this room who helped us do something amazing last year.

217,000 net additions to the housing supply. The highest level in a decade, and an increase of 70% on what was achieved in 2009/10.

There's still a long, long way to go but thanks to your hard work we're certainly heading in the right direction.

Almost 40,000 of those net additions came about from change of use, including taking spaces above shops and turning them into homes.

This government has, quite rightly, put a lot of time and effort into regenerating high streets and strengthening local economies.

That has generally focussed on the retail side of things, but as the report you're publishing today shows there is no reason why commercial and residential cannot coexist happily together.

I grew up in the flat above the family shop, so I've seen for myself how it can work not just in theory but in practice too.

That's why last month's [Budget](#) set out plans to make it easier to create quality homes in empty spaces above high street shops. And tonight is the first time I've heard John back the Budget, so well done to FMB for their lobbying!

So, [Homes on our High Streets \(PDF, 2.1 MB\)](#) isn't just a fascinating report, it's also very timely contribution to the debate.

It puts forward some very interesting ideas and proposals; I was going through a draft this weekend.

And we'll be looking at it very closely to see how it can help us to fix this country's broken housing market.

Let me also take the time to thank Mark Prisk for all the work he has done, and for being the genesis of this report.

To do that, to fix the market, we're going to have to create at least 300,000 homes each year.

And small and medium-sized builders are going to have big role to play in making that happen.

Our [housing white paper](#) was very clear on this.

Ever since the recession, the market has been dominated by a handful of very large developers.

It used to be the case that more than 60% of new homes were delivered by small firms.

Today the figure is half that, and that's a tragedy.

I want to turn that around, to see more of you building more homes.

And we're backing that with more funding – an additional £1.5 billion of short-term loan finance for SMEs, custom builders and innovators announced in the Budget.

We're doing this because smaller firms are skilled at developing small sites, great at building out quickly, and have a strong track record of innovation.

And you also put a great premium on standards.

On quality.

When my dad was running his shop he had to make sure the clothes he was selling were of the highest quality...

...because he was selling them to the local community, to people he'd see every day.

And it's the same for SME builders.

When you operate locally, your reputation is just as important as the work that you do.

That's why membership of the FMB is such a badge of honour, it shows that you're only happy with the best.

And it's not just the quality of work that matters.

Quality of design is crucial too.

That's not just my opinion – it's something the great British public agrees with.

You know as well as I do that getting local communities onside is crucial to getting planning permission.

Well, almost three-quarters of people say they would support the building of more homes in their area if they were well-designed and in keeping with the local style.

People don't like looking at identikit red-roofed boxes that could be basically anywhere in the country.

And nor should they.

Just because we need to build more homes it doesn't mean we need to build ugly homes. Last month I was looking at RIBA's House of the Year.

Make no mistake, the winner was undoubtedly a stunning piece of architecture.

But I'm not sure your average new-build 3-bed home has space for an art gallery, performance area and 27,000 fruit trees!

Good design doesn't have to mean Grand Designs.

To be beautiful, to win that local support, new homes don't have to make bold statements.

They just need to be an appropriate addition, something that local people want to live in and live next door to.

Last week we [invited bids for our new fund](#) that will help local authorities plan for growth and improve design.

But I want to go further.

So, in the spring, we will be working with the sector and with local government to host a national housing design conference.

It will be a showcase for ideas, insights and best practice from across the country and across the world, kicking off a real debate about how we can raise the design bar for everyone.

But I want you to be building houses that are worthy of your skills as master builders.

And this conference will go a long way to help making that happen.

As I said, there is still much to be done.

Still a long way to go to fix our broken housing market.

But with the FMB's support, with your commitment to quality and innovation, I know that we can get there.

And I'm looking forward to making that journey with you.

Thank you.

[News story: Health secretary urges people to talk to each other about organ donation](#)

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt has asked people to overcome their reluctance to talk about organ donation with relatives, as he launches [a public consultation on a new opt-out system](#).

Figures from NHS Blood and Transplant show that in the past year around 1,100 families in the UK decided not to allow organ donation because they did not know whether their relatives would have wanted it.

In October, the Prime Minister announced a change to an 'opt-out' system, that would shift the balance of presumption in favour of organ donation.

At present, 80% of people say they would be willing to donate their organs, but only 36% register to become an organ donor.

It is hoped that changing the system to an opt-out model of consent will mean more viable organs become available for use on the NHS, potentially saving thousands of lives.

Over the next 3 months, the government is asking for comments on the defining questions of the new system:

- How much say should families have in their deceased relative's decision to donate their organs?
- When would exemptions to 'opt-out' be needed, and what safeguards will be necessary?
- How might a new system affect certain groups depending on age, disability, race or faith?

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

Every day, 3 people die for want of a transplant, which is why our historic plans to transform the way organ donation works are so important. We want as many people as possible to have their say as we shape the new opt-out process.

But as well as changing the law, we also need to change the conversation. It can be a difficult subject to broach, but overcoming this fatal reluctance to talk openly about our wishes is key to saving many more lives in the future.

Only about half of adults on the current organ register say they have discussed their wishes with a relative.

Simon Gillespie, Chief Executive of the British Heart Foundation, said:

The government's commitment to an opt-out system is a commitment to ending the pain felt by families who risk losing a loved one while they wait for an organ. There is a desperate shortage of organ donors in the UK, but around 8 in 10 of us say we do want to donate our organs.

Introducing an opt-out system in England will mean more people get the life-saving heart transplant they need. In the meantime, it's still important for all of us to have conversations with our loved ones about organ donation so our wishes can be met if the worst should happen.

Fiona Loud, Director of Policy at Kidney Care UK, said:

With 8 out of 10 people on the transplant list hoping for a kidney and at least one person dying every day while waiting, this consultation is a unique chance to change this. Whatever your views are on organ donation, please share them.

It's a good time to make sure your loved ones know how you feel too because currently we have one of the lowest rates of consent to donation in Europe.