

Press release: International Trade minister holds UK-Qatar talks to strengthen trade

This week, International Trade Minister, Greg Hands, met with Qatari Minister of Economy and Commerce, HE Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim al Thani, for the inaugural Joint Economic and Trade Commission (JETCO) between the 2 countries.

Today's talks explored opportunities to strengthen and build on bilateral trade ties. It follows a commitment made by the Qatari Prime Minister in March to invest an additional £5bn across the UK over the next 3 to 5 years. The talks concluded with both sides signing a statement outlining their mutual commitment to support small businesses in both countries and improve access to trade financing to help exporters.

Trade between the UK and Qatar was worth more than £5bn in 2016, with machinery, mechanical parts and precious stones and metals among the most popular UK goods exports to Qatar.

International Trade Minister Greg Hands said:

I am delighted to be meeting with my Qatari counterparts today as we look to strengthen our trade and investment relationship, identifying opportunities for growth and breaking down barriers to trade between our nations.

As an international economic department, we are committed to building a long and fruitful trading partnership with Qatar over the coming months and years.

During the talks, the Ministers also met UK companies working in Qatar and looked at ways to overcome market access barriers, while fresh dialogues on education and technology will create significant opportunities for important UK industries.

Notes to editors

Total trade in goods and services (exports plus imports) between the UK and Qatar totalled £5.2 billion in 2016.

This was the first meeting of the UK-Qatar JETCO, which will meet every year to advance the trade and investment relationship.

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Further information

Contact the DIT Media and Digital Team on 0207 215 2000

[Press release: Foreign Secretary statement ahead of visit to Iran](#)

Iran is a significant country in a strategically important, but volatile and unstable, region which matters to the UK's security and prosperity.

My first visit is an opportunity to hold further discussions on a series of crucial issues, including how we can find a political solution to the devastating conflict in Yemen and secure greater humanitarian access to ease the immense suffering there. I will also underline the UK's continued support for the nuclear deal while making clear our concerns about some of Iran's activity in the region.

We will also discuss our bilateral relationship and I will stress my grave concerns about our dual national consular cases and press for their release where there are humanitarian grounds to do so.

While our relationship with Iran has improved significantly since 2011, it is not straightforward and on many issues we will not agree. But I am clear that dialogue is the key to managing our differences and, where possible, making progress on issues that really matter, even under difficult conditions.

I look forward to a constructive visit.

[Speech: "Today I reaffirm our strong support for renewed peace negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians as soon as possible"](#)

Thank you Mr President, both for giving me the floor and for scheduling this important meeting.

Nikolay, thank you for your briefing. In particular for your unequivocal support for the two-state solution and for your warnings against unilateral

measures that jeopardise the prospect of a sustainable peace for Israelis and Palestinians. From the outset, I would like to make clear that the United Kingdom's position on the status of Jerusalem is clear and long-standing: it should be determined through a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and Jerusalem should ultimately be the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian states. In line with relevant Security Council Resolutions, including 242, 478 and 2334, we regard East Jerusalem as part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

We therefore disagree with the US decision to move its embassy to Jerusalem and unilaterally to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel before a final status agreement. These decisions are unhelpful to the prospects for peace in the region, an aim that I know all of us in this Council remain committed to. The British Embassy to Israel is based in Tel Aviv and we have no plans to move it.

Mr President,

We share President Trump's desire to bring an end to this conflict. We welcome his commitment to a two-state solution negotiated between the parties. We note his clear acknowledgement of the importance of the final status of Jerusalem, including the sovereign boundaries within the city, which must be subject to negotiations between the parties.

We remain committed to an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement that is based on 1967 borders with agreed and equal land swaps, reflecting both parties' national and religious interests; and with Jerusalem as the shared capital of an Israeli and Palestinian state. This outcome must be determined through a final status agreement, and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees, that is demographically compatible with the principle of two states for two peoples.

Mr President,

We recognise that Jerusalem holds huge significance and holiness for Jews, Muslims and Christians. We reiterate the fundamental necessity of maintaining the status quo at the Holy Sites, in particular the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif and we welcome President Trump's call on the parties to maintain that status quo. Access and religious rights of both peoples must be respected. We value Jordan's important role as custodian of the Holy Sites, and remain fully supportive of their efforts to maintain calm.

We are deeply concerned by continued developments on the ground that undermine the prospects for a two-state solution. As the Quartet has made clear, settlement construction and expansion, particularly in East Jerusalem is a significant barrier to achieving that solution. Terrorism and incitement to violence constitute another crucial barrier. We will continue to press the parties to refrain from actions which make a viable peace more difficult to achieve. A just and lasting resolution to end the occupation and deliver peace for both Israelis and Palestinians is long overdue. Recent developments demonstrate the urgency of progress towards peace.

Today I reaffirm our strong support for renewed peace negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians as soon as possible. These should be supported by the international community and should result in a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state.

We welcome the UN Secretary-General's intent to do everything in his power to support the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to return to meaningful negotiations and to realize this vision of a lasting peace for both peoples.

We strongly encourage the US Administration to bring forward detailed proposals for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. The UK will also do everything we can to support progress and achieve the vision of a lasting peace.

To have the best chances of success, the peace process must be conducted in an atmosphere free from violence. We call on all parties to maintain calm, and work together in a spirit of commitment to this common enterprise.

On Jerusalem specifically, peace efforts need to take account of the people, not just the land and the Holy Sites. There are more than 320,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem. The vast majority are permanent residents whose permits can be revoked at any point. If they move away from the city, Israel often does not allow them back. If they marry, they face obstacle in bringing their spouses. If they apply for Israeli citizenship, and most do not, a high proportion of applications are rejected. Their status must not be forgotten in any peace effort.

Mr President,

If all parties can truly take bold steps in the spirit of compromise, I have no doubt that an agreement can finally be reached. This is the only way to ensure the long-term security that Israelis deserve, and the statehood and end to the occupation that Palestinians are calling out for. This is what both peoples ought to have. It has been denied to them for too long.

[Press release: A1 plans to improve Newcastle journeys](#)

The plans to upgrade the road will improve safety while supporting economic growth in the region.

The Highways England plans will improve journeys through Newcastle by adding an extra lane along a 5-mile stretch of the existing dual carriageway from Scotswood, just after the River Tyne, up to North Brunton.

Around 750 people came along to the public information events, including

residents, community groups, local businesses, and councillors.

Questionnaires were filled out by 272 people with 73% of respondents agreeing there is a need for improvements.

Highways England project manager Charlotte Taylor said:

This is an exciting scheme that will help improve motorists' journeys and cut congestion near Newcastle.

As part of this scheme we have held a number of public engagement events, including ones for residents living near Birchfield Gardens about the possibility of closing the access road and we have concluded that the access road will remain open.

There are a number of options for the design of the access road and these will now be developed along with the rest of the scheme and further engagement will take place next year.

The overall improvements will provide additional capacity, improve journey times and safety while supporting economic growth in the region.

Further information events will be held in autumn 2018 towards the end of preliminary design stage. Work is expected to start by March 2020.

For more information please [visit the scheme website](#), where a copy of the scheme announcement brochure can be found.

People who would like a hard copy of the announcement brochure can pick one up from reception at the following venues:

- Lemington Resource Centre
- Outer West Community Centre
- Blakelaw Community Centre
- Kingston Park Community Centre
- Fawdon Community Centre
- Team Valley Retail Park, Axis Building
- Washington Services
- Great Park Community Centre
- Gosforth Library and Learning Centre
- Denton Burn Community Association
- Scotswood Centre
- City Library, Charles Avison Building

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.

[Press release: Pair guilty of illegal fishing in County Durham](#)

The Environment Agency has prosecuted two County Durham men for poaching and using illegal fishing equipment.

Ian David Cook, 38, of The Grove, Consett, and Michael Fullerton, 22, of Surrey Crescent, also in Consett, were each given a 12 month conditional discharge by Newton Aycliffe Magistrates' Court on 6 December 2017 after pleading guilty to the offences. They were also each ordered to pay £420 costs.

Magistrates heard that on 30 November 2016 Environment Agency fisheries enforcement officers observed Cook and Fullerton shining torches into the upper River Browney near West Buttsfield, during a targeted evening patrol.

The River Browney and its catchment is an important and improving area for migratory fish, especially sea trout. Recent improvements to aid fish passage and water quality and a robust approach to enforcement have led to an increase in returning fish but at present, stocks remain low and vulnerable.

After detaining the men they seized two torches and a landing net containing three dead sea trout, each at various stages of spawning. Under the Salmon & Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975, lights are prohibited, as are landing nets if used without an authorised rod and line. It is also illegal to fish during the close season for migratory fish.

During interview, Fullerton admitted to shining the torch into the river and using the net to take fish but denied knowing it was illegal. He also denied knowing it was illegal to take fish during the close season. This was despite him holding a rod licence at the time, which spells out when and how legal fishing can be undertaken. Cook confirmed he understood that using a lamp to either take or assist in taking fish is an offence.

Kevin Summerson of the Environment Agency said:

This was a serious poaching incident using illegal instruments that could have had a severe impact on future stocks of sea trout in the River Browney. At this time of year sea trout are returning to rivers to spawn and protecting returning fish is vital to

maintaining a healthy fish population.

That's why our fisheries enforcement officers work hard to target those people flouting the law and we won't hesitate to take action.

The conditional discharge will appear on Fullerton and Cook's criminal record. If either commits another crime within the next 12 months they can be sentenced for the first offence and the new offence.

Anyone witnessing illegal fishing incidents in progress can report it directly to the Environment Agency hotline on 0800 80 70 60. Information on illegal fishing and environmental crime can also be reported anonymously to Crime stoppers on 0800 555 111.