

# Speech: 22nd Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention

Thank you Mr Chair,

The United Kingdom supports the statement made by Mr Jacek Bylica on behalf of the European Union.

First, I must thank our Director General, Ahmet Uzumcu for his committed, tireless leadership of the OPCW. He has been a true champion of the Chemical Weapons Convention and of the rules-based international system, at a time when it is under significant challenge. We are fortunate that he will continue to lead the OPCW into the year ahead. The Executive Council has nominated a worthy successor in Fernando Arias of Spain. He will be a strong leader and brings great knowledge of this Organisation and a proven commitment to achieving its goals.

Under Ahmet Uzumcu's leadership the OPCW's Technical Secretariat has made significant progress. Among achievements this year, the OPCW has:

- enhanced its Africa Programme. The United Kingdom was pleased to support the OPCW's work to strengthen national capacity building, including training for East African States Parties in Kampala
- developed the OPCW Mentorship Programme so it is an established platform for sharing experience, knowledge and ideas. The UK has now participated in two fruitful partnerships, first with Malawi and now with Nigeria
- passed a landmark decision on steps that the Technical Secretariat and States Parties should take to address the chemical terrorism threat
- begun preparatory work for the fourth Review Conference, through the Open Ended Working Group on Future Priorities. Under the able co-chairs the Ambassadors of Canada and South Africa, the group has provided a helpful forum to identify the challenges ahead for the Convention and the OPCW
- approved the addition of data on non-scheduled chemicals to the OPCW Central Analytical Database. This will reduce wasted inspection time, and increase the capability of the Technical Secretariat in inspections to confirm and identify the presence or use of chemical weapon agents; and finally

- marked the completion of the verified destruction of Russia's declared chemical weapons programme, and just last week, the completion of the destruction of Libya's declared precursor chemicals

And yet, the Convention is under unprecedented attack. The excellent work that the OPCW does to build capacity among states parties will be meaningless if we do not stand up now for its fundamental tenet: to rid the world of chemical weapons. As we have celebrated the 20th anniversary of its entry into force, it is shocking that in 2017 the world has witnessed repeated chemical weapons use:

- as an illegal weapon of war in Syria
- as an instrument of terrorism in Iraq and Syria and
- as a means of assassination in Malaysia

The case of Syria should weigh heavily on the conscience of this Conference. This year the Fact Finding Mission has confirmed three chemical weapons attacks in Syria between September 2016 and April 2017. It is investigating many more. The OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism determined that Syria was responsible for sarin use at Khan Sheikhoun in April 2017, and Da'esh used sulphur mustard in September 2016. Despite the huge volume of compelling evidence before it, the Executive Council has yet to take any action on Syria this year.

All states parties have taken on a duty to uphold the Convention. That requires action, from us all, here in The Hague. Some have tried to argue that the JIM's findings should only be discussed at the UN Security Council – after, of course, the renewal of its mandate has been vetoed. Those who shout loudest that we should avoid politics, and stick to technical matters, are those who choose to ignore the findings of the technical bodies we have all built.

We must view chemical weapons use in Syria through a technical prism. We must allow the technical experts to do their job, and then we, as states parties, must act on the findings they present to us. The JIM was an expert technical body. The Fact Finding Mission is an expert technical body. Dismissing their findings because they don't fit with the political world view a country happens to hold is hypocrisy.

False argument must not undermine the role of this Organisation. Myths and conspiracy theories have been circulated about the JIM's work. We should stick to facts. The JIM was established in 2015, after careful debate, with the unanimous support of the UN Security Council. Its working methods and practices were made known. It has carried out its work, in the most challenging circumstances, to produce serious, thorough, technical and compelling reports. The JIM's most recent report into Khan Sheikhoun made clear that they considered the full range of alternative hypotheses. They discarded those narratives that were not supported by the evidence. The Syrian Government itself provided samples from Khan Sheikhoun, and confirmed these as sarin.

Those who now challenge so aggressively the working methods of the JIM and FFM appear to have done so only when it became clear what conclusions those bodies would draw. They have chosen to play politics with these technical bodies, because their findings do not support their global political narrative. As we have seen, Russia has mirrored its three vetoes on the report in the Security Council with attempts at the OPCW to discredit the work of the Fact Finding Mission's investigators. Russia is determined to protect its Syrian ally, whatever the harm that causes to the ban on chemical weapons use and to the wider international system.

But Russia does not have a veto in the OPCW Executive Council. That's why it resorts to filibustering and unacceptable personal attacks on people of integrity, as happened in the Executive Council last Friday. Bullying is wrong, and it is also – always – a sign of fundamental weakness.

The Executive Council is composed of 41 countries. To take action requires 28 members to clearly say that it is the right thing to do. Abstaining, under these circumstances, has the same effect as saying "no" to further action – and is an abdication of responsibility. Each member state has a duty to decide for itself. And to answer the question – what are we doing here, what are we for, if as an organisation we fail to take action on the basis of the findings of the bodies that we all agreed to support, to end chemical weapons use in Syria?

The UK is committed to uphold the global ban on use of chemical weapons. We urge all States Parties to unite in defence of the Chemical Weapons Convention and hold to account any who use chemical weapons, without fear or favour. This must include not only the Asad regime, but Daesh too. Let us not define the OPCW's 20th Anniversary year as the moment when States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention chose to do nothing. Instead, let us come together to take action to hold those who use chemical weapons to account. Let us send a clarion call that the Convention, and its fundamental tenets, will be upheld by us all.

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## **Press release: Environment Secretary streamlines support for farmers**

Support for farmers will be simplified under plans announced by Environment Secretary Michael Gove today, with the country's decision to leave the EU providing a once in a lifetime opportunity to refocus how we support farmers and landowners.

Speaking at the Country Land and Business Association's (CLA) annual Rural Business Conference, the Secretary of State set out how Defra will make practical and pragmatic changes to existing farm support systems, streamlining the process to free up farmers to focus on what they do best.

Speaking after the conference, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Today I have set out plans to improve our current schemes, starting with simplifying support for farmers to protect and enhance our landscapes and countryside.

But these measures are just the beginning – the first steps towards a simplified system of support. Over the coming weeks and months, we'll be working closely with our farmers to make sure we listen to what they want as we design a new approach and realise our vision for the future of UK food and farming outside the EU.

Acknowledging the daily challenge farmers face within the EU's burdensome Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Secretary of State said the current system of farm support is inefficient, ineffective, inequitable, and environmentally harmful. He outlined the need to change the way we invest in our countryside so farmers can more readily access support to protect wildlife, enhance the environment and improve land use.

As a first step, the Environment Secretary announced simplifications to the Countryside Stewardship scheme through the creation of four new streamlined offers which will launch in January next year. These new offers will have a much simpler application process – half as much paperwork as before – so it will be easier for farmers and land managers to apply and deliver environmental benefits on their land. Further details on this will be shared later this week.

CLA President Tim Breitmeyer said:

Farmers and landowners want to continue providing the country with high quality, affordable food while protecting the environment and supporting wildlife. We welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to streamlining and focusing support into the areas most needed, and we look forward to working with him to drive up participation in crucial schemes to protect and enhance landscapes and the environment.

Jenna Hegarty, Head of Land Use Policy at RSPB said:

We welcome the Secretary of State's ambition to make Countryside Stewardship more effective, which will allow more farmers to help wildlife on their land. This is a crucial step towards realising his aim to refocus agriculture policy to provide clear benefits for people, nature and the future of farming.

The Secretary of State also spoke about the opportunities for UK farmers and food producers to take advantage of changing consumer tastes and reap the

rewards of quality and provenance in production. He celebrated measures set out in the government's Industrial Strategy to work towards a food and drink sector deal and announced further support including a further £45 million top up to the RDPE Growth Programme to help rural business development, food processing and rural infrastructure projects.

The government will look to publish an Agriculture Bill in 2018 and will consult with all those who have an interest in the success of the UK food and farming industry in the New Year.

We have already pledged to match the support farmers currently receive from the CAP until the end of this parliament and set out the intention to go on supporting farmers where the environmental benefits of that spending are clear.

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## **News story: Government launches review into future telecoms infrastructure investment**

The cross-government Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review – led by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport – will explore what makes investment in full fibre and 5G networks attractive. It will establish what, if anything, government can do to promote the right conditions to achieve widespread coverage.

The review will underpin government's strategy to remain a world leader in connectivity in the coming decades – raising productivity and creating the balanced economy of the future. The aim is to create the conditions for connectivity that is ultrafast, reliable, long-lasting and widely available to UK homes and businesses.

Matt Hancock, Minister of State for Digital said:

Government has already committed more than £1 billion to supporting a business case for investment in full fibre and 5G networks through investment programmes and initiatives like our Barrier Busting Task Force.

We'd like to build on what has been achieved so far, by removing future barriers before they arise, and ensuring that market and policy conditions are as good as they can be to maximise investment in new technologies.

The Review will consider the types of competition that different parts of the telecoms market in different areas of the UK can support, with implications for the level and makeup of investment. For more information, please see [Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review: Terms of Reference](#) (PDF, 82.4KB, 2 pages)

DCMS will be seeking a wide range of evidence, including from across industry and the investor community, and will shortly be issuing a Call for Evidence.

A report, to be published in Summer 2018, will identify options available to government to promote an attractive and stable environment for investment.

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## [News story: Rory Stewart returns from Zimbabwe](#)

Minister for Africa visited Harare shortly after the resignation of President Mugabe to meet the new President, members of the opposition and civil society

Minister for Africa Rory Stewart has just returned from a visit to Zimbabwe. The visit follows the historic resignation of President Robert Mugabe who had held power for 37 years.

### **Minister for Africa Rory Stewart said:**

We're now at a situation in Zimbabwe where there could be an opportunity for progress so I went to listen and to learn.

This was one of the wealthiest countries in Africa. It has incredible human potential, a very educated population and fantastic natural resources. But it is a country which has suffered terribly.

If we're patient and if we're careful, this can be a moment of change where Zimbabwe becomes the country its people and its many international friends want it to be.

### [Minister Stewart](#)

In Harare the Minister called on the Zimbabwean government to use the resignation of President Mugabe to push for a full programme of political and economic reform.

The Minister met with the full spectrum of Zimbabwean political voices including new president Emmerson Mnangagwa and opposition leaders Morgan

Tsvangirai and Joice Mujuru. They discussed the need for an all-inclusive political process and elections which meet Zimbabwean and International standards. Economic reform is absolutely crucial and the Minister discussed this with all his Zimbabwean counterparts.

The Minister also met with Zimbabwean civil society and human rights groups. They discussed how human rights and rule of law could be prioritised and protected following the transition.

Also in Zimbabwe, the Minister visited a health and sanitation project funded by UK aid which has reached more than three million people in the last five years, giving them access to clean water and sanitation. The minister was also able to meet with young entrepreneurs who are being supported by DFID to run businesses and find innovative solutions to address issues faced by their communities.

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## [News story: Universities Minister breaks ground at the Dyson Institute](#)

Today, 28 November, Universities Minister Jo Johnson officially 'cut the turf' for the new undergraduate village at the Dyson Institute of Engineering and Technology.

The student facilities, located in Malmesbury, Wiltshire, will comprise 78 accommodation pods, as well as a library, café, bar, screening room and shop. The village will officially open in September 2018.

Founded by Sir James Dyson, the Institute gives students the opportunity to study for an engineering degree while concurrently working as part of Dyson UK. Over 850 students applied for 25 places in the first year of the course, which started this year.

Universities Minister Jo Johnson said:

The value of a skilled workforce to Britain's future was spelt out in last week's Budget, making clear that better training and skills are key to raising productivity and growth.

The Dyson Institute is a brilliant example of a new, innovative and high-quality provider that has taken advantage of the government's reforms to offer something genuinely exciting. It is giving students the opportunity to get hands-on experience at Dyson while studying for their degree, learning about everything from robotics to software to aerodynamics. It is playing an important role in educating the next generation of much-needed engineers, giving

young people the skills they need for the jobs of the future. It has been a pleasure to be here today and see the brilliant work of the Institute in action.

Recent government reforms through the Higher Education and Research Act have made it easier for new providers – like the Dyson Institute – to enter the sector and award degrees, giving students more choice and boosting competition to improve teaching quality.

Sir James Dyson said:

My attitude has always been to take on young people, graduates, and give them immediate responsibility. Dyson takes on hundreds of graduate engineers every year and we mentor them through. If you walk around, you can see that there is already a campus feeling here in Malmesbury – cafes and restaurants full of people working and learning. It just seemed absolutely natural to take it one stage further by taking on school leavers and giving them a really unique and rigorous engineering education.

Jo Johnson's inspired legislation is enabling us to do something entirely new and very exciting – this is not an easy option for a student to choose but we are developing some truly exceptional engineers who will develop future Dyson technologies.

Today's visit comes the day after the launch of the government's Industrial Strategy, which sets out a vision for Britain to boost people's skills and earning power.

This Thursday, 30 November, the Department for Education is also hosting its own Skills Summit, bringing together education experts and top employers to tackle the nation's skills gap.