

Speech: 55th Special Session of OPCW Executive Council

Thank you Mr Chair,

The United Kingdom supports the statement made by the Ambassador of Estonia on behalf of the European Union. I would like to make a few additional remarks.

The United Kingdom thanks the Director General for the comprehensive and thorough Fact Finding Mission reports on recent investigations into the incident at Khan Shaykhun on 4 April this year and in to an incident at Um Housh in September 2016.

The OPCW's swift response, deploying the FFM to investigate the allegations of chemical weapons use in Khan Shaykhun within 24 hours of the claims being made, was exemplary. Your team worked in the most testing of circumstances. All of us here today should be grateful for the dedication of your staff.

As your report details, what happened in Khan Shaykhun was the worst of human acts. The banned nerve agent sarin was used to kill at least 100 people, including many children, and to injure more than 200. Even samples that the Syrian Government tested and shared confirm that sarin was used. So those facts are not in dispute. The use of chemical weapons is a war crime. There is now a pressing need to find out who was responsible, and to seek justice for the victims. I am grateful for the Director General's swift work to pass the FFM's report to the OPCW/UN Joint Investigative Mechanism so that they can work to identify the perpetrator of this most horrific crime.

We welcome the fact that the JIM is also looking into the FFM's report on an exposure to sulphur mustard in Um Housh in September 2016. Impunity for such crimes is never acceptable. This Council must take a firm stand against all chemical weapons use, and all perpetrators must be brought to justice.

The United Kingdom's assessment is that it is almost certain that the Syrian Government was responsible for a sarin attack on Khan Shaykhun on 4 April. Let me briefly explain why.

There is no evidence to suggest that any party to the conflict in Syria, other than the Syrian Government, has access to a complex nerve agent such as sarin. We note that the FFM's report refers to testimony from witnesses describing the presence of jets in the area at the time of the attack. Only the Syrian Air Force has the capability to launch a chemical weapons attack from aircraft, and it has already been condemned by this Council for having been found to have used chemical weapons, deployed from aircraft, on at least three occasions in 2014 and 2015.

Meanwhile the Syrian Government's story has changed on multiple occasions since the horrific events of 4 April, twisting a new narrative each time to

fit the emerging facts. First there was a blanket denial of any sarin release, then they told a simply extraordinary story of an airstrike on a supposed jihadist chemical weapons storage facility on April 4th, which they said made sarin; now as we know, sarin is a relatively complex agent to develop and manufacture, and there is no credible evidence that anyone in Syria, other than the regime, has the capability to produce and to weaponise it. We all watched the terrible news footage reporting the early morning attacks in real time, but the Syrians have told us tales of an attack at midday instead. And finally, the Syrian Government handed over samples which it had obtained and tested from the impact site, and proved positive for sarin, just like other samples that the FFM had tested. But now the Syrian Government seeks to discredit the FFM's report as, according to the Syrian Foreign Ministry's statement on 1 July, "the creation of a sick mind".

Mr Chair,

As we all know, the FFM is a professional, independent and impartial body, it has unparalleled technical expertise and works to a consistent and sound methodology. It is our duty to value and to protect the integrity and impartiality of the OPCW – anything less is frankly disrespectful to the ideals we all say we share. In that context I am glad to announce that the United Kingdom will provide further funds to support the OPCW's vital work through the Trust Fund for Syria Missions.

The Technical Secretariat has worked tirelessly over the past four years to shine the light of truth on Syria's chemical weapons programme. Since Syria joined the Convention, in the aftermath of the Ghouta atrocity in 2013, the Syrian Government has denied scientific reality and has covered up the full extent of its chemical weapons programme. Syria and its backers claim that it has destroyed its chemical weapon stockpiles. Yet the Director General has continued to report that the OPCW cannot declare Syria's declaration of its chemical weapons programme as "accurate and complete", and that serious "gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies remain". While the Director General and the Technical Secretariat have worked tirelessly to establish the truth, Syria has failed to reciprocate. The Syrian government has provided limited information, only under pressure; and when challenged with evidence that made its previous position untenable. Syrian engagement with the OPCW has been neither meaningful nor honest. Their supposed cooperation is a facade. The JIM's finding in 2016 of repeated Regime use of chemical weapons underscores the fact that Syria has unquestionably failed to account for, or to destroy, its whole chemical weapons programme.

Mr Chair,

This Executive Council cannot turn a blind eye to such flagrant violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention. When the perpetrators of the atrocity in Khan Shaykhun are identified, we must act to send a clear message that chemical weapons use will not be tolerated, and that we are prepared to stand up to the values we all said that we held in common and which we enshrined in that Convention twenty years ago.

Finally, may I confirm that the United Kingdom will be pleased to support the

Joint Declaration to be proposed today by France and Germany on this matter.

Press release: PM call with Greek Prime Minister Tsipras: 5 July 2017

This morning the Prime Minister spoke to Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of Greece to discuss the ongoing Cyprus settlement talks in Geneva.

The Prime Minister praised the constructive role that both parties have played to reach this point and reiterated that there is a major opportunity to be seized.

She added that any agreement requires all sides to show leadership and flexibility and that the UK will do it all it can to support a settlement.

Press release: New fourth lane opens on M3 smart motorway

Main construction on a £174 million project to upgrade the M3 in Surrey and Hampshire to a smart motorway has been completed on time Highways England announced on Saturday 1 July.

Overnight on Friday 30 June, the last of the cones were removed and a new fourth lane is now open for traffic in both directions. Work to test and commission the new smart motorway technology will continue for a short period, with the fully upgraded road opening to traffic later in July. A 50mph limit is in place for safety reasons while this work is carried out.

Highways England project manager Pranav Devale said:

I am delighted that we've opened this vital motorway upgrade on time. This new stretch of smart motorway will tackle congestion and improve journey times for the 130,000 drivers who use it every day.

Smart motorways add vital extra capacity, improve journey times and maintain high levels of safety. Drivers will also see better information about conditions on the road ahead and enjoy smoother journeys on the fully resurfaced road – as well as the smart motorway upgrade, we have also been carrying out the most extensive

maintenance on the M3 since it was first built in 1971 in parallel with the smart motorway works.

I would also like to thank drivers for their co-operation and understanding during the final testing phase and hope they enjoy the improved journeys between London and the south coast.

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

The smart motorway upgrade has converted the hard shoulder of a 13.4 mile section of the M3 between Farnborough and the M25 to an extra traffic lane. New technology will make the road more resilient to disruption, improving journeys by using variable speed limits that will help tackle frustrating stop-start traffic and giving drivers better information on conditions ahead.

The extra running lane has opened for traffic as scheduled, with the smart motorway technology being switched on shortly afterwards. When the testing and commissioning is complete, the speed restriction will be lifted and all four lanes will operate at 70mph in normal conditions. The testing phase is expected to last for up to three weeks.

Work on major maintenance being carried out alongside the project is also substantially complete, but some activities – including the rebuilding of the Woodlands Lane bridge over the M3 near Windlesham – will continue until later in the year. None of this maintenance will require any permanent traffic restrictions on the M3.

General enquiries

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

Media enquiries

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[Press release: £50 million investment in M6 Knutsford roundabout](#)

The 'Option A' idea, to provide a new bridge across the middle of the roundabout where the motorway meets the A556, received the backing of three quarters of drivers, Cheshire East and Tabley councils and other local people responding to last summer's month-long consultation. Today it was unveiled as

the option Highways England is taking forward in its preferred route announcement (PRA) for the improvements.

Highways England project manager Irene Ofei said:

We are delighted to announce the scheme we are taking forward is the one which was the overwhelming choice of people taking part in last year's consultation. We feel this option will deliver most and lasting benefits in terms of improving journey reliability and safety and increasing capacity.

The new link roads across the middle of the roundabout will take a lot of traffic away from other parts of the roundabout, reducing congestion for everyone.

While further work to refine the idea will now take place, construction work could start as soon as March 2019 but by March 2020 at the latest.

The improvements will involve significant construction in the middle of the roundabout over the existing M6 motorway carriageways. This will provide dedicated link roads between the northbound M6 and the new northbound A556 Knutsford to Bowdon dual carriageway as well as the southbound M6 onto the southbound, local, A556 road towards Northwich.

The improvements also include:

- wider lanes on the existing roundabout to increase capacity, including the bridges over the M6.
- new traffic lights on the roundabout and its approach roads.
- new traffic lights for the Tabley Hill Lane/Pickmere Lane junction.
- improvements to local access for walkers, cyclists and horse riders using the junction.

The reports setting out the preferred route announcement and detailing the responses to last summer's consultation can be found on the [consultation web page](#).

Money for remodelling the roundabout at one of the region's busiest road junctions is being provided as part of the Government's £15 billion Road Investment Strategy (RIS), and will help boost the Northern Powerhouse agenda of improving transport connectivity and reliability to help the economy of the North.

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[News story: New Immingham Port link officially opens](#)

Maritime Minister John Hayes MP was in Immingham to open the scheme which has provided vital transport improvements to reduce congestion and increase capacity for the 40,000 vehicles that use this route daily.

Immingham is the UK's busiest port and currently contributes £460 million to the regional economy every year.

Right to Left: Highways England Project Manager Ben Ridgeon, Martin Vickers MP, Maritime Minister John Hayes MP, Highways England Regional Investor Programme Director David Haines, Costain Group Strategy & Risk Director Matthew Harris and Costain Project Manager Craig Snow.

Maritime Minister John Hayes said:

I am delighted to open this fantastic new port link, a scheme which will significantly reduce congestion for tens of thousands of drivers and boost productivity across the region.

Ports like the one here in Immingham play a key role in the long term growth of the economy and provide essential access to global markets.

The scheme started in 2015 and in total a 3 and half mile stretch of the A180 has been improved.

The roundabout at Brocklesby Interchange has been upgraded providing access to and from the A180 and the A160 between Brocklesby Junction to Habrough roundabout has been increased from one lane to a dual carriageway.

The Port of Immingham is the UK's largest port by tonnage and handles up to 55 million tonnes of goods every year, including nearly 20 million tonnes of oil and 10 million tonnes of coal.

At peak times 10 per cent of the traffic in the UK is lorries. On the A160/180 it is up to 70 per cent, with more than 100 abnormal loads a month, heading to and from the port.

Highways England Project Manager Ben Ridgeon said:

We are already seeing a reduction in congestion as a result of this project which we completed in March. It will provide vital transport improvements in this area by increasing capacity and boosting productivity in the area creating more jobs and greater investment.

We would like to thank drivers and the local community for their patience while this work has been taking place, and are pleased they can now benefit from the completed upgrade.

During Christmas 2015 contractors carried out a complex piece of engineering when they slid a 4,000 tonne bridge slid into place using hydraulic jacks weighing more than 5 tonnes each.

Contractors worked around the clock to install the bridge at Rosper Road under the railway line which carries freight trains between the Port of Immingham and Ulceby.

Aerial shot of the Brocklesby Junction at the A160/80 Port of Immingham improvement scheme.

Simon Bird, Humber Director at the port's owner Associated British Ports (ABP) said:

The A160 road improvement works have already made a significant difference to the way we operate our port. ABP's Humber ports currently contribute £2.2 billion to the region's economy and ABP is continually investing in new infrastructure and equipment in order to expand our operations in Immingham. The newly established improvement works will help us to handle the additional traffic we expect to see come through the port.

Facts and figures:

- more than 1,700 staff worked on the project with over half of them living within the local area
- over 98% of the scheme waste went on to be recycled
- in a first for Highways England the scheme trialled innovative asset tagging technology to improve the monitoring and maintenance of highway equipment located along the road, such as street lighting and drainage
- the scheme has donated almost £30,000 towards the community with staff working on the project also spending more than 400 hours volunteering with local schools and charities; this included working with Cannon Peter Hall School to build bat and bird boxes with wood left over from the scheme

More details on the scheme are available at the [road project website](#).