

Speech: “Afghanistan needs to be united now more than ever. Afghanistan needs to be looking to the future in hope, not in fear.”

Thank you Mr President.

Let me join others in welcoming Special Representative Yamamoto back to the Council. At the outset I'd like to reiterate the UK's full support for him and for the vital work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

Sadly, as he and the Ambassador from Afghanistan have made clear, these are trying times for Afghanistan. The horrific truck bomb three weeks ago in Kabul was a stark reminder of the threat that ordinary Afghans face as they go about their daily, peaceful lives.

It's a threat that we read about, that we watch on the news, or hear about in this Chamber. And yet, the proximity of the attack to the British Embassy and other diplomatic missions in Kabul really brought home to us the barbarity of those who seek to terrorise Afghanistan. And sadly, Mr President, it was once again the innocent Afghan men, women and children who bore the terrible toll of this attack.

In response to this horrific tide of violence, the United Kingdom stands in solidarity with the people, the government and the armed forces of Afghanistan. We stand in solidarity, knowing what it means to endure terror in our streets, knowing what it means to stand up to those who seek to divide us.

And whether in the streets of Kabul, or of Manchester or London, our message must be clear and unwavering; enough is enough. These attacks must come to an end. All support to those who commit such terrible acts must come to an end.

For Afghanistan, this means the region working together to create the conditions for a more stable future for Afghanistan. It means continuing to prioritise an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process; one that leads to a political settlement that ends the violence.

It means acknowledging the successes the Afghan government has made in such challenging circumstances. And it means Afghans working together to protect these gains in the face of such huge challenges.

Because, Mr President, Afghanistan needs to be united now more than ever. Afghanistan needs to be looking to the future in hope, not in fear. The people of Afghanistan need to feel they have a stake in that future.

We believe that holding parliamentary elections, based on a credible and

realistic timeline, would be an important step towards creating that stake, towards creating broader political inclusion. The setting of a date would be good news and should act as a catalyst for the necessary reforms to be undertaken and processes to be put in place with due speed to ensure that elections are free, fair and transparent.

We welcome President Ghani's work to reshape and reenergise his government's efforts in pursuit of peace. As the tragic events in Kabul remind us, now is the time for action – for implementation of the structures and the processes that will bring progress on this daunting but essential issue.

Afghans from across the country, its ethnic groups, and its socio-economic divides have a stake in this process and need to be embraced and included in pursuit of a national consensus on peace. We encourage meaningful dialogue with all sections of society including women and girls.

In all this the UK believes the UN has a crucial role to play; whether by helping ensure the rights of Afghan people are protected and upheld or by supporting the Kabul Process and its vital work building a regional consensus on peace. I want to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his role in facilitating the launch of the Kabul Process earlier this month. This was the first step in a long journey that will need to emphasise both the security and the political tracks, and which will require energy and commitment from all of us to sustain, including from the United Nations.

As such, we look forward to the outcome of the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. UNAMA is at the heart of the international community's work on Afghanistan. It is more important now than ever that the mission is properly configured and empowered to deliver the maximum effect on the issues that are so crucial for Afghanistan's future, whether its efforts to support the government's pursuit of peace or its work to uphold the human rights of the people of Afghanistan.

Thank you.

Press release: PM statement on Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia

I am pleased to welcome the appointment of His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman as the Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia.

The relationship between Saudi Arabia and the UK is strong and historic, and we continue to work closely together in a range of areas.

Our security and intelligence cooperation is vital as we tackle the shared threat of terrorism and our growing trade and investment ties are important for the prosperity of all our citizens.

Britain remains a firm supporter of Saudi Arabia's ambitious reform agenda 'Vision 2030' which is essential for Saudi Arabia's long-term stability and success.

I look forward to working with Prince Mohammed bin Salman to deepen our close bilateral ties in the years ahead, building on the constructive meetings we had in Saudi Arabia earlier this year.

I also pay tribute to the work of His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Naif, who has played a central role in our counter-terrorism collaboration and been a firm friend of the UK for many years.

Speech: Justine Greening speaks at Social Mobility Employer Index launch

Speaking on Wednesday 21 June 2017 at the Guildhall, London, alongside David Johnston, Chief Executive of the Social Mobility Foundation, and Alan Milburn, Chair of the Social Mobility Commission, at an event marking the publication of Social Mobility Employer Index, Secretary of State for Education Justine Greening said:

Thank you very much Alan [Milburn – Chair of the Social Mobility Commission] and to both of you for doing what I think is a very important piece of work.

Clearly our country does face many challenges but we will meet them by building up our people together.

I grew up in a working class family, I was one of those working-class kids.

There were two things I really believed in from the word go.

One was a fundamental fairness in the link between effort and reward and wanting to understand that if I was willing to put that time in, put the persistence in, that I would be able to see some results for that.

The other thing I believed in was a meritocracy.

Because I think talent is spread evenly throughout our country, throughout our communities; and fundamentally our country would be better the more we can unlock all of that.

When you put those things together, a strong link between effort and reward, a real meritocracy, then you have empowered people.

And when you have empowered people you have an empowered country.

And I think when you've got empowered people you have stronger productivity and that's something that all of the organisations that are part of this Index today have fundamentally understood.

It's a virtuous circle in the end.

I happen to think, as well, that this isn't just the smart thing to do.

It's not just about a business case for companies or for organisations.

It is the right thing to do.

A more socially mobile Britain will be a happier place. Communities will be stronger when we achieve that.

I think we can change the internal plumbing of our country to make it more socially mobile.

We don't have to accept where our country has come from and where it is today and see that as the only course that we can take in the future.

But that's going to be up to all of us to make the future different from the past and from where we are now.

We do need to recognise that there are a myriad of barriers – some of them big but some of them small – that stack up against people who are starting perhaps from further behind.

People who, when we talk about a level playing field, are the ones furthest away from having it.

I certainly remember from my own childhood growing up in Rotherham it was a very difficult time, actually.

Many of the children growing up in that town, including myself, saw our parents lose their jobs and you felt like you were a long way from seeing opportunity on your doorstep.

This steady realisation as quite a young child for me, that to get opportunity I was going to have to work a long time, and very hard, just to get myself into a position to be able to start to have some opportunities.

I knew also that the beginning of that was education and probably being able to go university.

Which is why the fact that so many more disadvantaged children are now getting into university for the first time, why people like me back in the 80s and 90s are no longer the norm and actually it's pretty normal for people from those backgrounds to get to university now, why that's so important.

But it's clear that it's not just government, it's not just education that plays a role in driving social mobility.

I like to think that I've got the best job in government and I think that it's the most important job because it's the one that helps people develop our country's human capital.

But what we want to see are companies and organisations in our country using and developing that further when those people become adults and get into the workplace.

We don't want people to just be going into jobs.

We want them to be going into careers where they can continue to develop themselves and their ideas and their potential throughout their whole life, not just at the beginning of it.

That's where business comes in.

That's also where communities and civil society comes in.

The launch of this Index today is about starting to put some numbers and evidence around how we can do that systematically and at scale.

I'd like to congratulate all of the organisations that are in this first Index and achieving a score.

Because you are showcasing what some of that best practice, that can take very different forms, can look like.

It will be the evidence that you are gathering that helps other organisations get further and faster over the coming months and years.

Some of you are doing blind recruitment on CVs.

Some of you are looking at different ways of assessing candidates when they present for job interviews.

I think that some of the work that's been done in my own profession of accountancy in widening the routes of people into that profession in particular have really helped open it up to a brand new generation of different sorts of people – and all for the better.

Alan talked about how it's not just about some of these crunchy changes we can make on process, it's all about changing attitudes.

Again, I can draw on my own experience of being confronted with receiving the sharp end of unconscious bias.

I remember interviewing to go into an investment bank after I became qualified at PwC – and it's fantastic to see PwC in this Index.

Part of that time spent at that company was being taken out to lunch.

I did the interview and the interview was fine and I got taken out to lunch by 2 of the junior managers in this investment bank.

We sat down in a little Italian restaurant and they handed out the menu and the waitress came to take our order.

I remember trying to work out whether I should order the meal in Italian, which was the prime name in this menu alongside each meal, or whether I should read the English translation underneath.

In a split second I decided that I'm not a pompous person, I thought I'd just read the English.

And I could tell with the body language that I'd just failed a test, because I was meant to have had the confidence, apparently, to have just said it in Italian.

Now it wasn't that I didn't have confidence, I absolutely had lots of confidence as a person but I just had a different attitude to how I felt it was appropriate to behave.

And frankly, did it really matter either way?

Probably not, anyway.

But the point is you had a sense of it being part of a test.

And I had a sense of it being a test I failed not because I wasn't going to do a great job at that company but just because I came from a different place and had a different attitude to that situation.

These are the small things that add up to big differences in terms of whether or not, in the end, people get opportunities.

I should say the great news is that company is also in this Index today, so again I think that's fantastic progress.

There are real benefits for all of the organisations in today's Index. I think they will simply do better.

There is evidence that says that companies that are more diverse, that crack these issues of social mobility, do better.

Because when they are taking decisions they are having broader discussions, they consider a variety of different things from different angles, and the decisions they take are better, the outcomes they achieve will be better.

And, actually Alan is right that doing this isn't always easy but there are some things that companies did that scored in this Index that are straightforward and that can actually be done tomorrow, if organisations and businesses want to do that.

That's what we want to see.

We want to see people getting on with change that removes the barriers that are holding some of our most talented youngsters back.

It doesn't always cost a penny.

It's just about changing how we approach these issues, changing how you approach processes, changing how you then develop people when they're in your companies.

It's also about changing hearts and minds.

I think if all organisations were able to do this, if they were all able to have that business case that social mobility brings, the advantages from it, it would be one of the biggest rocket boosters that we could put under the UK economy in coming years.

And it would be one of the biggest advantages the UK could have globally as an economy in the coming years, if we were to systematically make more out of our human capital than other countries around the world.

That's why it's so important.

This Index also matters not just because it starts to give us the evidence – and I love the evidence to help us develop policy – it gives us the transparency as well to see who's doing what.

And I want to increasingly use these sorts of evidence bases to help us drive government policy.

We looked very closely at the work that the Social Mobility Commission did in relation to place; the communities and parts of our country where things were most stacked against young people doing the best for themselves.

We fundamentally took that as our starting point for where we would set up our Opportunity Areas.

I want us to look equally hard across Government and how we can see these companies as exemplars and how we can work to help make sure that what they are learning and what they are demonstrating is spread far more broadly, far more widely and far faster across our whole country.

I know that all of this means working in partnership, and I really do hope that, as Alan said, we can start to achieve a true, meaningful cross-party consensus on driving forward on social mobility.

Not just a debate where we recognise where we agree on this, but a debate that goes beyond that to say 'well what are we going to do about it?'

A debate that focuses on the 80% that we can agree on, rather than the 20% that we don't agree on, that we seem to spend our time dysfunctionally arguing about instead of getting on with things that we can make progress on instead.

That's what I want to see happen as a change in Parliament.

We all need to realise that we will only move forward on social mobility and

only make a change on it if we can set aside some of the areas where we don't quite see eye-to-eye but instead focus on the areas where we absolutely have common ground and then work together, tirelessly and persistently, on that – whether it's the government, in politics, or whether in our communities, whether in schools, in businesses, in civil society.

I think we can change things in our country but it is going to take a mammoth effort of people coming together and working together and making this a true movement, as Alan said.

The path to success isn't going to be glamorous.

No one thing is going to be that silver bullet that changes everything overnight.

It's going to be thousands, probably hundreds of thousands, possibly even millions of people doing things differently in their own lives, in the sphere of influence that they've got in their own organisations, day to day.

It's as much as anything a change of heart in our country that we need to really drive social mobility.

We need people who recognise that they already have opportunity to understand that they too absolutely have to play a role in making sure that those who do not now get it as well.

That's our task, and I think that's the task also of British business, the ultimate opportunity-giver in our country.

It may not be glamorous but if we can make progress on this it will be transformational.

Because I believe that using all of the talents of people in our country is no longer an optional extra in Brexit Britain. It's absolutely essential.

And I think the sooner that we can win this argument to put social mobility right at the heart of everyone's agenda – including in government, in Parliament – the better.

And I think the more united, fundamentally, our country will be.

We do want a positive movement for change on social mobility. And it should be hope and social mobility that is the real antidote to today's 'day of rage'.

Thank you.

Press release: Ozone air pollution alert

A high pressure system persisting over the UK has brought warm and still conditions, resulting in increased ground level ozone.

A number of sites in the UK have exceeded the EU ozone public information threshold of 180µg/m³.

The latest information on these alerts will be issued on the [UK Air website](#).

Some people are more sensitive to ozone than others and may begin to notice an effect on their breathing. People with asthma are not necessarily more sensitive but, if affected, can use their 'reliever' inhaler to alleviate symptoms.

If affected, people are urged to take sensible precautions. In particular, avoiding exercise outdoors in the afternoon can reduce individual exposure to ozone.

If the legal threshold for ozone is again breached, further alerts will be issued on our [UK Air website](#).

Forecasts, latest measurements and health advice are available on UK Air and via Defra's freephone helpline (0800 556677). Updates on current and forecast levels of air pollution can also be found on Twitter [@DefraUKAir](#).

Public health advice following the Grenfell Tower fire

Latest update

PHE continues to publish [weekly reports](#) about the air quality in the area surrounding Grenfell Tower.

Previous updates

15 October 2018

PHE's response to reports of toxins in the soil around Grenfell Tower.

PHE Regional Director for London, Dr Yvonne Doyle said:

Since the Grenfell Tower tragedy we have been working very closely with local health partners and the community to ensure they have access to the best available public health evidence and advice. PHE has asked Professor Stec for the data and evidence so that it can be carefully reviewed and appropriate action taken if necessary.

Local authorities are responsible for assessing and legally determining contaminated land within their communities, which are generally considered a very low risk to health because people would need to be exposed to the soil over long periods of time, and we have been providing advice on contamination to Kensington and Chelsea council.

15 September 2017

Public Health England has been assessing air quality in the area surrounding Grenfell Tower since the start of the fire on 14 June. The independent air quality monitoring commissioned by PHE has shown the risk to people's health from air pollution around the Grenfell Tower site to be consistently low. No asbestos has been detected, levels of particulate matter remain low, and monitoring results for dioxins, furans, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are broadly equivalent to background levels for London.

See the [latest air quality data](#) taken from monitoring locations around the site which we publish on a weekly basis and read the [public health advice](#).

14 July

The risk to people's health from air pollution around the Grenfell Tower site continues to be low and no asbestos has been detected.

Following discussions with local residents, PHE has published a report containing the [air quality data](#) from the monitoring locations around the site. The report contains data tables, graphs and photographs of where the equipment is based, alongside an explanation of the data.

13 July 2017

Public Health England has published additional health advice relating to [cyanide](#).

7 July 2017

On Thursday 6 July, regional director for PHE London, Dr Yvonne Doyle and her team attended a community question and answer session near the Grenfell Tower site.

PHE attended to update residents on the continuing air monitoring taking place and to address any concerns about the wider risk to people's physical health.

30 June 2017

Public Health England (PHE) has been providing [specialist advice on health following the Grenfell Tower fire](#). This includes health advice on air quality, smoke exposure, asbestos, and the clean-up process.

Dr Deborah Turbitt, health protection director for PHE in London, said:

We have been assessing air quality over the past week in relation to the Grenfell Tower fire and this shows no detectable deterioration in air quality. Our advice is that the wider risk to people's physical health as a result of the fire, beyond those directly affected, is low.

People who were close to the scene and exposed to smoke from the fire may have experienced irritation to their air passages, skin and eyes, and respiratory symptoms including coughing and wheezing, breathlessness, phlegm production and chest pain. People who have ongoing concerns about their symptoms should call NHS 111 for medical advice.

We know that bound asbestos, contained in building materials such as plaster or fibre board, was present in Grenfell Tower in ceilings and header panels inside airing cupboards. It is possible that very small amounts of asbestos fibres will have been dispersed within the smoke plume but would have formed only a small fraction of the smoke and particles released in the fire; all smoke is toxic and any asbestos would present a minimal additional risk to health.

Asbestos related diseases are typically associated with a long term workplace exposure to high levels of airborne asbestos fibres.

Safety officers working with teams currently on the site have tested the air within Grenfell Tower for dust and asbestos and have not detected any levels of concern. When work commences clearing the site there will be a system of engineering work that will prevent any asbestos being released from the site and a programme of regular environmental air monitoring conducted to ensure that both contractors and local residents are not put at any risk.

Three new air quality monitors have been installed in the immediate area of Grenfell Tower on Saturday (24 June 2017) by an independent environment company. Initial readings show low levels of pollution but PHE will continue to closely monitor all relevant readings to ensure the best advice is given.

Richard Mills, Assistant Commissioner for the London Fire Brigade, said:

Lingering smells of smoke in buildings and homes near Grenfell Tower are to be expected. This will clear over time and can be helped by opening windows and washing or cleaning of items such as

curtains and soft furnishings.

Public health advice

Cyanide

Chemicals produced when the Grenfell Tower fire was burning will not be present now. Smoke from any fire is toxic and chemicals that can be present in smoke include carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, hydrogen chloride and hydrogen bromide, as well as others.

The amounts of toxic substances will vary with the specific materials involved in a fire, its temperature and the amount of oxygen. Smoke inhalation may lead to toxins being absorbed into the body, including carbon monoxide and hydrogen cyanide.

Short-term health effects

People who were close to the scene and exposed to smoke from the fire may have experienced irritation to their air passages, skin and eyes, and respiratory symptoms including coughing and wheezing, breathlessness, phlegm production and chest pain. People who continue to experience symptoms should call NHS 111 for medical advice or consult their GP.

Long-term health effects

People who were not directly impacted by the fire or suffered significant smoke inhalation and are generally fit and well are unlikely to experience long-term health problems from temporary indirect exposure to smoke from a fire.

PHE is continuing to commission monitoring for pollutants that have both short and long-term effects, including cancer, to be sure that we understand if there is any risk to public health as a result of the fire and we will keep local people updated with all results.

Asbestos

Asbestos is a term for a group of naturally occurring minerals made of microscopic fibres. Before its dangers to health were known, asbestos was often used in buildings for insulation, flooring and roofing and sprayed on ceilings and walls. It is now banned in the UK. Buildings constructed before the year 2000 may still have asbestos in them.

We know that bound asbestos, contained in building materials such as plaster or fibre board (also known as 'asbestos containing material'), was present in Grenfell Tower in textured ceilings and header panels inside airing cupboards.

Asbestos may be destroyed at very high temperatures such as those that would have happened during the fire.

Safety officers working with teams on the site have tested the air within Grenfell Tower for dust and asbestos and have not detected any levels of concern. Regular environmental air monitoring is being conducted to ensure that both contractors and local residents are not put at any risk.

It is possible that very small amounts of asbestos fibres will have been dispersed within the smoke plume from the fire but would have formed only a small fraction of the smoke and particles released in the fire.

There is little evidence to suggest that asbestos was deposited in the vicinity of Grenfell Tower and any asbestos is likely to have remained within the building structure or inner cordon. Even if small amounts of asbestos containing materials were deposited off site, as the majority of asbestos fibres are held tightly within asbestos containing material, they are not released into the air and this minimises the health risk.

To have any long term health effects of asbestos, a direct exposure by inhaling asbestos fibres would have needed to have taken place over a long period of time. There is evidence to show that breathing in large quantities of asbestos over a long period of time (such as in an occupational setting) mainly affects the lungs and in some cases, it can cause a cancer of the lining of the lung called mesothelioma; it can also cause lung cancer.

Work on the remediation of the Grenfell Tower site will take into account the protection of contractors carrying out the work and of the people in the vicinity. Appropriate mitigation measures such as screens will be installed and monitoring will be undertaken at the site perimeter during the remediation process to ensure there are no off-site impacts from asbestos or harmful materials.

Water quality

Drinking water quality has not been impacted by the fire and tap water is safe to use as normal. Drinking water for the area around Grenfell Tower is supplied by Thames Water and the source of this water supply is not local to Kensington. Water run-off from the Grenfell Tower site would have entered the drainage and sewage system and would be processed as normal, so would not present a risk to physical health.

Air purifiers

Air purifiers, which are generally used to reduce allergens from pets from the air, are not recommended for use in this situation because larger particles produced during the fire will have already settled and not be present in the air.

Larger dust particles settle quickly onto surfaces and are best removed by dusting with a damp cloth.

Locally grown fruit and vegetables

People with gardens in the local area should continue to use their fruit and

vegetables as normal ensuring that they are washed and peeled before cooking or eating.