

[Resolution enables AMISOM continue vital security support to Somalia](#)

The United Kingdom welcomes the unanimous adoption of this resolution, which enables AMISOM to continue its vital security support to Somalia in 2021, whilst creating the space for a constructive conversation between all partners about the shape of a future mission.

The longstanding deadline at the end of 2021 for the Somali authorities to take on greater security responsibility from AMISOM represents an important step forward in our shared objective to build long-term security and stability in Somalia. It is an opportunity to recognise the success which AMISOM has had in helping to rebuild Somali capacity, whilst acknowledging the continued need for the African Union to provide security support.

The United Kingdom thanks Security Council members for their engagement on this resolution, which is a product of extensive consultation with all members of the Council, Somalia and the African Union. On the central issues, the resolution is balanced, takes into account a wide range of views and reflects consensus. It sets out a timeframe for the next ten months to build on existing efforts towards achieving security transition objectives, including the development of a revised Somali Transition Plan and the publication of the United Nations-led Independent Assessment on future support to Somali security. In addition, it clearly outlines what more is required, including the importance of a clear steer from the African Union on its objectives for a future mission.

Our role as penholder is to consult and to bridge gaps where they appear in order to achieve consensus. We consulted widely and inclusively while drafting the resolution and throughout the four-week negotiating process. We acknowledge that the issue of United Nations assessed contributions has proven challenging to find consensus on. We emphasise that the resolution does not rule anything out and creates time and space for all Council members to continue discussing this issue.

Somalia is, as we all know, at a critical juncture. For fourteen years, AMISOM has played a central role in enabling peace and security in Somalia. We commend the brave troops and police of AMISOM for their work. Today, the Security Council has come together to adopt a resolution which sends a strong signal of support to Somalia.

[Addressing food insecurity in the 21st](#)

century

Thank you, Madam President, and thank you also to the Secretary-General. And may I put on record our thanks to both Mr Beasley and Ms Bucher for briefing us so comprehensively.

As we've already heard from many colleagues on the Security Council today, it is undoubtedly a tragedy of epic proportions. But here we are in 2021, here we are in the 21st century, that we still need to confront famine and that our tasks – and let us be clear about that – is so much harder by those who pursue division, those who pursue conflict. And we must work together to address this immediate priority.

And that is why, Madam President, the United Kingdom wholeheartedly welcomes the United States' initiative to bring this vital issue of conflict and food security to the Council today.

The situation is grave. There are no other words for it. Listening to your words, you talked of the raw humanity of the situation, the human suffering unfolding in front of us. I assure you that resonates with us all.

Right now, famine is likely occurring in many parts of the world, but it's self-evident to us all, in places such as South Sudan. In Yemen, more than 16 million people face a very, very blight future in terms of starvation, likely death in the first half of this year and, as the Secretary-General Guterres has warned us, likely we are on the brink of the worst famine the world has seen in decades.

Many of the countries on this Council's agenda we know that conflict, as has been said this afternoon, is a primary driver of food insecurity and famine risk. We know that people affected by conflict are less able to source food and less able to buy it.

We also know tragically that armed groups use starvation bluntly as a weapon of war and see humanitarian assistance as fuel for their enemy. They wilfully disregard their obligations under international humanitarian law. They regard humanity as insignificant.

We know that COVID and climate change compound this desperate situation.

So this Council must redouble our efforts to break the cycle of armed conflict, which drives and sustains humanitarian crises around the world. And together, as the United Nations, we must do all we can to use the full range of tools at our disposal to prevent and end conflicts.

UN Security Council Resolution 2417 focuses the Council's attention on conflict-induced food insecurity in countries both on and off our regular agenda. Many of us, as we've heard from colleagues today; many of us, including myself, of the United Kingdom; most recently our Special Envoy on Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs have visited these countries directly. We've spoken to people about the brutal realities they face on a

daily basis.

Naming a few conflict situations or country situations, in South Sudan, where famine is likely to take root in Western people, 60 percent of the country's population face severe levels of food insecurity. Fundamentally, the Government of South Sudan must do more to foster peace and stability and to de-escalate subnational conflict. And across the United Nations system, we need to work harder, we need to coordinate better if we are truly to remove the barriers that stop us getting food to those who need it.

In northeast Nigeria, over a decade of conflict has left more than 1.2 million people unable to access basic humanitarian assistance. The horrifying recent attack by armed opposition groups in Dikwa that affected civilians and targeted humanitarian workers is utterly and totally unacceptable. Attacks like these have made the food situation, the humanitarian situation, so much worse, and therefore we need to work together to improve humanitarian access on an urgent basis.

As Mr Beasley highlighted – indeed, Madam President, you yourself mentioned – across Ethiopia, around 18 million people will require humanitarian assistance in this year alone. In Tigray, humanitarian access remains hugely constrained. Four months of violence has resulted in forced displacement, human rights violations, sexual violence allegations and the collapse of essential basic services. The risks of extreme food insecurity are significant. An estimated 4.5 million people, 80 percent of the region's population, will need emergency aid over the coming months. Urgent action is needed to avert a major catastrophe.

And these are just a few of the many tragic situations currently faced around the world.

UN Security Council Resolution 2417 needs to be implemented more effectively. Colleagues, famine is not, as we've heard today, inevitable. In line with UN Security Council Resolution 2417, the United Kingdom stresses three immediate actions that we can take to prevent famine and the suffering caused by food insecurity.

Firstly, we need to improve reporting and evidence of food insecurity and famine risk, including on who is blocking humanitarian access and, importantly, how they are blocking. Reporting needs to be swift and timely so that this Council can take action before it is far too late.

Secondly, this Council must act on the reporting it receives. Words are simply not enough. Despite the provisions in Resolution 2417, the Council has failed to encourage any independent state investigation into the use of starvation of civilians as the of warfare.

And finally, and importantly, we also join the voices of those who say that the Council must hold to account those responsible for driving conflict-induced food insecurity, and that includes the use of sanctions against those who restrict humanitarian access.

In conclusion, Madam President, conflict is escalating famine and millions upon millions are suffering. If we are truly to prevent the starvation of more innocent women and men and of course, tragically, children, it is vital that the UN reporting on this situation leads to Council action. We therefore welcome the announcement of the Famine Task Force today to more strongly coordinate the aid effort on famine protection. And we therefore look forward to working together with all of you – our colleagues, our friends, our fellow Council members, and across the UN family of nations – to bring about the actions that can properly respond to the harrowing evidence we have heard today from our expert briefers.

The question often asked is why. Put simply because it matters. Lives literally depend on it. Thank you, Madam President.

[Hong Kong: G7 statement on Hong Kong electoral changes](#)

Press release

G7 Foreign Ministers have issued the following statement on China's decision to erode democratic elements of the electoral system in Hong Kong.



We, the G7 Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America and the High Representative of the European Union, are united in expressing our grave concerns at the Chinese authorities' decision fundamentally to erode democratic elements of the electoral system in Hong Kong. Such a decision strongly indicates that the authorities in mainland China are determined to eliminate dissenting voices and opinions in Hong Kong.

The package of changes approved by the National People's Congress, combined with mass arrests of pro-democracy activists and politicians, undermines Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy under the "One Country, Two Systems" principle. The package will also stifle political pluralism, contrary to the

aim of moving towards universal suffrage as set out in the Basic Law. Furthermore, the changes will reduce freedom of speech which is a right guaranteed in the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

The people of Hong Kong should be trusted to cast their votes in the best interests of Hong Kong. Discussion of differing views, not silencing of them, is the way to secure the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong.

We call on China to act in accordance with the Sino-British Joint Declaration and its other legal obligations and respect fundamental rights and freedoms in Hong Kong, as provided for in the Basic Law. We also call on China and the Hong Kong authorities to restore confidence in Hong Kong's political institutions and end the unwarranted oppression of those who promote democratic values and the defence of rights and freedoms.

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[Response to media coverage on National Audit Office report on the Culture Recovery Fund](#)

Contrary to media coverage of a recent report by the National Audit Office, over 80% of grants awarded in the first round of the Fund have been paid to successful organisations with the final instalments scheduled to be paid in early April. 85% of loans to the value of over £149 million have also been paid to successful organisations since February. This means that the funding designed to support organisations up until April has now gone out.

Responding to recipients' needs

We designed the fund to respond to the changing needs of recipients against what has been an unpredictable public health picture. Organisations across the sector asked us for this flexibility and we have given them the freedom to spend their awards in a timeframe that works for them.

Grant awards were structured in instalments to give sustained support throughout the financial year to help recipients cover covid-related costs as they arose.

Some money was held back for a second round so that we could reflect the latest public health position. Where organisations have needed to, we have allowed them to delay their award to the spring or early summer to cover reopening plans that have been pushed back.

We have always been clear that no eligible organisation will be allowed to fail as a result of the payment schedule and none have. We acted quickly to save grassroots music venues with emergency funding to help them survive until the first Culture Recovery Fund grants were awarded.

Throughout, any organisation at risk of imminent collapse and other severe financial risks has always been able to contact the delivery bodies about emergency payments.

Safeguarding public investment

Whilst funding has been distributed at pace, it is right that we have put in place the safeguards that taxpayers would expect to see in such a huge investment.

DCMS and our arms length bodies, Arts Council England, Historic England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the British Film Institute, overseen by a high calibre independent board, have worked flat out with rigorous but proportionate assessment and due diligence processes to pay organisations as soon as possible whilst stewarding public money on behalf of the taxpayer.

We have been clear throughout that funds should only be for organisations at risk of financial failure, so that taxpayers money is not used to support organisations that can manage without it.

We have also put in place other eligibility criteria and checks to target funds and to mitigate the risk of fraud or error. To ensure the time spent on checks did not lead to any eligible organisation failing, we created a fast track 'Organisations in Distress' route for those needing urgent support.

More support still to come

Since the National Audit Office's report was compiled, hundreds of millions of pounds more in support has been made available to the cultural sector. Applications are being processed for a £400 million second round of grants and loans and decisions on these awards will be made imminently. An additional £300 million announced at the Budget will help the hardest hit reopen and recover. This brings direct support for the culture sector during the pandemic to almost £2 billion.

Whilst more help is coming to see our cultural sectors through reopening and recovery, organisations have also benefited from other support measures since the beginning of the pandemic. We have announced that the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme will continue until September, with a fourth and fifth grant. This provides certainty to business as the economy reopens and continues to be one of the most generous self-employment income COVID support schemes in the world. Through this crisis, the government will spend over £33 billion supporting those in self-employment through this scheme.

The clear payment schedule of Culture Recovery Fund awards gives recipients the confidence to plan for the future and reopening. It is thanks to this unprecedented package of support that thousands of organisations and

institutions, both big and small, have been saved so that the thriving cultural life of our nation will still be here after the pandemic.

The London Theatre Company has received a loan from the Culture Recovery Fund.

Nick Starr, co-director of London Theatre Company and the Bridge Theatre, said of the support:

The grants made by the Culture Recovery Fund have been an essential intervention in the crisis that has befallen the performing arts. The CRF Repayable Finance Scheme is a further vital infusion of cash into a sector struck hardest by Covid, and we are very grateful to be included amongst these loans.

We're determined to do all we can to generate employment for the freelance community and joy for audiences. People are going to need ever more the stimulation of live performance and we're determined to make our contribution as energetically as we can.

We have a strong and constructive working relationship with the NAO, as was the case during the drafting of this report. We look forward to continuing this as we work hard to support our cultural, arts and heritage institutions in the weeks and months ahead.

[Two new COVID-19 testing sites open in south Wales](#)

Two new drive-through coronavirus testing facilities have opened in Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend for those with symptoms to book appointments.

The sites have opened at Keir Hardie Health Park Community Testing Site (CF48 1BZ) in Merthyr and Ysbyty'r Seren Community Testing Site (CF31 3SH), Bridgend as part of the UK Government's drive to continue to improve the accessibility of coronavirus testing for local communities.

Testing at these sites is only available for those with coronavirus symptoms – a high temperature, a new continuous cough, or a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste. Anyone with one or more of these symptoms should book a test at nhs.uk/coronavirus or by calling 119. The UK Government is committed to continue expanding the capacity of the network of UK test sites and laboratories to make it even easier to get tested and reduce the time it takes to receive test results. Appointments at both sites are made available each day.

These sites are part of the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities created in British history which has the capacity to process more than 700,000 tests a day and includes more than 800 sites across the UK, including 89 drive-through sites, 511 walk-through sites, six Lighthouse laboratories, home testing and satellite kits, and a large number of mobile units.

Secretary of State for Wales, Simon Hart, said:

There are now more than 50 UK Government testing facilities in Wales, all of which are contributing to our continued fight against the virus. We are grateful to the NHS and its partners for their continued hard work in setting up new testing centres quickly and efficiently to meet demand.

With more and more test centres opening in Wales it is becoming easier for people to get tests close to home, which is very important in helping stem the spread of the virus and putting fewer people at risk of catching and spreading Covid-19.

Dr Kelechi Nnoaham, Director of Public Health at Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board, said:

I'm pleased to see two new drive-through COVID-19 testing sites opening to the public in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region. Getting a test when you have coronavirus symptoms is one of the best ways to keep your community safe. These new sites will help to ensure that testing facilities are available to anyone who needs them.

We encourage everyone to self-isolate and book a test if they have any of the symptoms of coronavirus: a new, continuous cough, a high temperature, or a change to your sense of smell or taste.

Health Minister, Lord Bethell, said:

To respond to the coronavirus, we have built a major testing and tracing system from scratch. We are constantly working to expand and improve it with new technologies and innovations so everyone with symptoms can get a test.

New drive-in sites like these make it even easier to get a test no matter where you live. If you have symptoms of coronavirus, I urge you to book a test today and follow the advice of NHS Test and Trace if you are contacted to protect others and stop the spread of the virus.

Baroness Dido Harding, Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection, said:

Drive-through sites offer communities better access to coronavirus testing, so everyone with symptoms can get a test. This new site is

part of our ongoing work to expand our testing network across the UK which now has the capacity to process more than 700,000 tests a day. We will continue to expand capacity to improve test turnaround times and push forward testing innovations to make sure anyone who needs a test can get one.

Please book a test if you have coronavirus symptoms: a new continuous cough, a high temperature and a loss or change in sense of smell or taste, and follow the advice of NHS Test and Trace if you are contacted.

The testing centres are being operated in partnership with PHW and will offer assisted tests.

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