

The need for all actors to engage in peaceful and constructive dialogue in the Central African Republic

- At Security Council briefing on the Central African Republic, UK welcomes citizens' "determination in exercising their right to vote" on 27 December but condemns intimidation and violence
- UK calls on those responsible for attacks on MINUSCA peacekeepers to be brought to justice
- UK reiterates importance of maintaining UN arms embargo to prevent arms falling into wrong hands

Thank you, Mr President, and thank you to SRSG Ndiaye for today's briefing. I also want very much to welcome Foreign Minister Baipo-Temon. I look forward to hearing her perspective and vision for how the country can be unified.

Mr President, let me start by saying that the United Kingdom commends the Central African people for their determination in exercising their right to vote in the elections on 27 December, despite facing intimidation and violence. We firmly condemn this increase in armed group violence over recent weeks, and stress the need to ensure protection of civilians and humanitarian workers. We urge all parties to renew their commitment to the 2019 Peace Agreement and to cease violations of that agreement immediately.

The United Kingdom also wants to thank the women and men of MINUSCA for their perseverance in such adversity. We again express our deepest condolences to the families and governments of the seven peacekeepers whose lives have been lost since December. Any attack on UN peacekeepers sent by this Council to serve in communities that need them most, any such attack, is reprehensible. We call for those responsible to be brought to justice. Our support for the work of the mission remains unwavering and we stand ready to discuss strengthening of the mission to meet its operational needs.

Mr President, following the confirmation of presidential election results by the Constitutional Court, it is now incumbent upon all parties to respect the Court's ruling. We urge all parties to exercise restraint and to abstain from declarations that may destabilise the situation.

It is imperative that all political actors, from both the government and opposition, engage in peaceful and constructive dialogue on the way forward for the country, with the support of the SRSG and the Peace Agreement guarantors. The needs of the Central African people, including the many thousands displaced as a result of this latest wave of violence, must come

first.

In closing, Mr President, I would like to address the issue of the arms embargo. We have taken note of the points raised today. As others have highlighted, the arms embargo exists to prevent weapons from falling into the wrong hands and from fuelling armed group violence. It is not intended to prevent the government from obtaining the equipment necessary for defence and security sector reform; a number of standing exemptions exist for this very purpose. We believe it is important to maintain these measures, pending further progress on the key benchmarks set out by the Council in April 2019, in particular regarding weapons management.

I welcomed earlier the Foreign Minister of the Central African Republic, who I know is next on the speakers list. And I'd just like to address a question to her:

Madam Minister, given the standing exemptions which exist for the security forces of the Central African Republic and the other procedures for requesting new exemptions when required, and the fact that, to my knowledge, no requests from your government for exemptions on weaponry have been rejected, it would be extremely helpful if you were able to set out clearly whether, and if so, how, the arms embargo is preventing the government or its security partners from acting.

Thank you, Mr President.

Home Secretary's statement on coronavirus: 21 January 2021

Good afternoon.

I am joined today by Dr Vin Diwakar, NHS England Regional Medical Director for London, and Martin Hewitt, Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council.

The rollout of our fantastic vaccination programme continues to make good progress.

The brilliant NHS is vaccinating people at the rate of 200 jabs per minute.

And as of today, four million, nine hundred and seventy-three thousand, two hundred and forty-eight people have been vaccinated across the United Kingdom.

The NHS are working as quickly, efficiently and as fairly as possible to get the vaccine to priority groups.

And I want to take this moment and opportunity to counter some of the

disinformation about the vaccine – especially any messages targeted towards those from an ethnic minority background.

This vaccine is safe for us all.

It will protect you and your family.

It is our best chance of beating this virus.

So I urge everyone across our wonderfully diverse country to get the vaccine when their turn comes to keep us all safe.

But we are sadly not out of the woods yet, this virus remains severe and it is a deadly threat.

Our NHS is under immense pressure and large numbers of people are still falling ill and, sadly, dying.

So it is absolutely crucial that you stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives.

Since yesterday, thirty-seven thousand eight hundred and ninety-two people have tested positive for coronavirus.

As of 19 January, thirty-eight thousand, six hundred and seventy-six people were in hospital with coronavirus. That is up 4.8 per cent from the week before.

Of those who have tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, sadly ninety-four thousand, five-hundred and eighty people have died. That's one thousand, two-hundred and ninety fatalities since yesterday.

Every death is a tragedy and these numbers demonstrate, that this country remains in the grip of a pandemic.

My thoughts go to all of those who have lost loved ones.

The sacrifices that millions of you are making day in, day out are starting to make a difference.

By staying at home, you are helping to keep those you care about safe, and contributing to this national effort.

But there is still a small minority who refuse to do the right thing.

To them, my message is clear: if you do not follow these rules, then the police will enforce them.

Police officers are now moving more quickly to handing out fines when they encounter breaches. And they have my absolute backing in doing so.

As we have done throughout this pandemic, we are constantly reviewing our approach to ensure that we can crack down on the most serious cases of rule-breaking.

And today I can announce that next week we will be introducing a new £800 fine for those attending house parties, which will double for each repeat offence to a maximum level of £6,400.

These fines will apply to those who attend illegal gatherings of more than 15 people in homes.

The science is clear: such irresponsible behaviour poses a significant threat to public – not only to those in attendance, but also to the wonderful police officers who attend to shut down these events.

From the outset, we have given the police the necessary powers to enforce the rules, which are in place to stop the spread of the virus.

As this latest measure demonstrates, we will not stand by while a small number of individuals put others at risk.

I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to our police forces and our fire services for their extraordinary contribution throughout the pandemic.

They are out there each and every day, supporting our communities, risking their own health to keep the rest of us safe.

And we have seen in their own commitment during this whole response to the flooding caused by Storm Christoph.

During such a difficult time for this country, the commitment and courage shown by our emergency services has been truly inspiring.

Everyone has a role to play in our fight against this virus.

So please: stay at home so we can protect the NHS and save lives.

I will now hand over to Martin Hewitt, Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council.

Parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan: UK statement

World news story

Delivered by Nicola Murray, Deputy Head of Delegation, at the OSCE Permanent Council on 21 January 2021.



Madam Chairperson,

I would like to thank Ambassador Umarov for raising the issue of the Parliamentary elections held in his country on 10 January, and to thank Ambassador Domański and his team for their valuable work conducting ODIHR's mission in Kazakhstan. The UK was pleased to support the mission by funding four out of the 24 long-term observers.

Kazakhstan remains an important and strategic partner country for the UK. We look forward to continuing and expanding our bilateral cooperation in 2021, as Kazakhstan marks its 30th anniversary of independence. However, we were concerned to hear ODIHR's preliminary statement on 11 January, which stated that, although the elections process was technically well prepared amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the elections themselves lacked genuine political competition and many procedural aspects, on the day, lacked full transparency.

These elections, sadly, were a missed opportunity for the Government to pilot their announced political reforms and to ensure that the electoral system fully lives up to Kazakhstan's international obligations and commitments.

Madam Chair,

I would like to finish by thanking ODIHR for their work thus far and look forward to receiving their final report. These reports continue to give all participating States a valuable and accurate account of elections across the OSCE region, and set a standard we should all aspire to meet. We hope that the Kazakh government will address the recommendations in ODIHR's final report.

The UK will always support Kazakhstan to strengthen its democratic institutions and the rule of law.

Thank you.

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Presidential elections and referendum in the Kyrgyz Republic: UK statement

World news story

Delivered by Nicola Murray, Deputy Head of Delegation, at the OSCE Permanent Council on 21 January 2021.



Madam Chairperson,

I would like to thank Ambassador Dzhusupov for raising the issue of the Presidential elections held in his country on 10 January, and thank ODIHR for its thorough account of the process, again demonstrating the institution's importance to promoting democracy and the rule of law.

The United Kingdom's support for the Kyrgyz Republic's ambition to strengthen its democratic processes and rule of law is central to our bilateral collaboration. The Kyrgyz Republic stands out in Central Asia for its approach to democratic elections, its active civil society, and freedom of the media.

We congratulate President Japarov on his election and look forward to strengthening the relationship between the UK and Kyrgyzstan during his Presidency. We commend the electoral authorities in Kyrgyzstan for presiding over an orderly and well-administered poll despite the short time frames and the additional challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, we are concerned by the OSCE observer mission's report that highlighted a range of violations that threaten the democratic process in Kyrgyzstan, including the use of administrative resources during campaigning, unbalanced access to state media, and constraints on private media.

We call on the Government of Kyrgyzstan again, to address the longstanding recommendations made by ODIHR. These include completing voter lists, so more Kyrgyz citizens are able to vote, and ending the misuse of administrative resources in electoral campaigning. The Kyrgyz Government must also do more to protect journalists, so that they may provide investigative, analytical

and critical reporting to the benefit of voters and democracy.

The United Kingdom stands ready to do what it can to support the strengthening of democracy and the rule of law in Kyrgyzstan, including through supporting the recommendations of this ODIHR report.

Thank you.

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£1 million to cut drug crime in Swansea Bay

The UK Government has announced that £1 million will be invested in the Swansea Bay area to reduce drug crime.

The money will be invested into piloting Project ADDER – a new intensive approach to tackling drug misuse, which combines targeted and tougher policing with enhanced treatment and recovery services.

Project ADDER (which stands for Addiction, Diversion, Disruption, Enforcement and Recovery) will bring together partners in the local area including the police, councils and health services and run for three financial years.

It will bolster local police force activity and police investigations, targeted at drug supply disruption.

Work will also take place to establish programmes to use the criminal justice system to divert people who use drugs away from offending through programmes such as Drug Testing on Arrest and out of court disposals.

There will also be increased drug outreach, harm reduction, treatment and recovery support services.

Welsh Secretary, Simon Hart said:

The supply and misuse of drugs causes terrible harm to many of our communities across Wales. It is vital that the agencies who are combatting this appalling trade get all the support they need.

The investment in services in Swansea Bay will help police and other partners tackle this problem in the heart of the communities where an intensive approach is most needed.

Crime and Policing Minister, Kit Malthouse, said:

The drugs trade is a poison in our society, devastating lives and destroying communities.

We are delivering on the priorities of the people of Swansea Bay, who do not want drugs blighting their communities. The work delivered through Project ADDER will help in the concerted and coordinated effort to tackle the problem at its root, from disrupting supply right through to rehabilitating people struggling with drug dependence.

We are determined to confront the issue of drugs across the UK and deliver for the public by making our streets safer and protecting those most vulnerable

Swansea Bay is one of the five pilot areas for Project ADDER, which is underpinned by £28 million in funding, and will run across three financial years.

According to the most recent statistics, in 2017-19, Swansea had the highest rate of drug deaths per 100,000 in Wales at 17.6. The rate of drug-related deaths in Swansea is 1.8 times higher than it was a decade ago.

Neath Port Talbot has the third highest rate of drug deaths at 12.7 per 100,000 and has been one of the five highest locations of drug deaths in England and Wales between 2014 and 2017.

Today's funding is part of a £148 million, comprehensive drive by the UK Government to build back safer by helping people break free from the scourge of drug use and cutting drug-fuelled crime and violence.

Some £40 million has been allocated to police forces to take down county lines gangs and tackle drugs supply while £80 million has gone towards drug treatment services to stop reoffending – the largest increase in drug treatment funding for 15 years.