

# Supporting the OPCW in its work to investigate chemical weapons use

Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to start by thanking Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu, and Director-General Arias for their briefings to the Council today. The Director-General's attendance alongside Ms Nakamitsu underlines the cooperation between the OPCW and the UN on this issue affecting international peace and security.

I thank Director-General Arias for his 86th monthly report and for his update today on the work of the OPCW. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has spared no effort in attempting to take forward its mandated activities. We are grateful for the professionalism and dedication of the OPCW and its personnel.

We take particular note of updates on the work of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT). The Director General's report raises two important points:

First, we note that the Declaration Assessment Team and Syria were able to close three outstanding issues related to Syria's initial declaration. This shows that contrary to the assertions of some – that the outstanding issues are artificial – they are, in fact, real and eminently capable of resolution.

Second, the report highlights evidence collected by the Declaration Assessment Team since 2014 that indicates the production and/or weaponisation of chemical warfare nerve agents at a production facility that the Syrian regime declared never to have been used for such production. This underlines the serious nature of, and the importance of, resolving the remaining 19 issues.

In addition, the unresolved issues in Syria's declaration include thousands of munitions and hundreds of tonnes of chemical agents, which Syria has not accounted for. Until all the issues are resolved, the complete elimination of Syria's chemical weapons program, as required under resolution 2118 and the Chemical Weapons Convention, cannot be verified. Given that the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) and the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), have established that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons on at least seven occasions since 2013, it is undebatable that the situation represents an ongoing threat to international peace and security.

In light of this, we welcome the resolve shown by the OPCW Executive Council in adopting its decision of 9th of July 2020 in response to the findings of the IIT on the 2017 chemical weapons attacks in Ltamenah carried out by the Syrian Arab Air Force.

In that decision, the Executive Council was explicit that Syria had to declare the chemical weapons and facilities in its possession, acknowledge

its chemical weapons activity, and resolve the outstanding issues with its initial declaration. As Director-General Arias has once again confirmed today, Syria failed to comply with the decision, and this will now be addressed during the next session of the Conference of States Parties in April 2021.

Just as the OPCW Executive Council and Conference of States Parties have a role in upholding compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and its own decisions, so the Security Council has a clear and distinct obligation to address Syria's repeated breaches of resolution 2118.

These breaches include the use of chemical weapons as identified by both the OPCW-UN JIM and the IIT; the retention and/or production of chemical weapons to carry out those attacks and the failure to comply fully with the OPCW, including on its initial declaration and access for the Investigation and Identification Team.

We were unequivocal on the action this Council would take in response to non-compliance with resolution 2118. Not to do so would be a dereliction of this Council's duty.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the UK's trust and confidence in the OPCW, its work and its dedicated staff. We have full confidence in the expertise of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the robust methodologies of its Fact-Finding Mission investigating allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria. It is not surprising that individuals working in the Technical Secretariat hold a range of views, and a robust assessment process should involve debate and challenge. However, as the Director-General has confirmed, the Technical Secretariat took all views, evidence and theories into account in reaching its considered overall judgement regarding the attack in Douma. The OPCW Technical Secretariat and its multinational personnel showed great professionalism and resilience under intense external pressure and scrutiny. This has included, as we've heard, cyber-attacks – for example, the foiled Russian GRU cyber-attack attempt in The Hague in 2018 – and a sustained disinformation campaign designed to undermine its credibility.

Attempts to undermine the OPCW and its staff have intensified since the use of nerve agents attack in Salisbury and Amesbury in 2013; since the OPCW Conference of State Parties voted to give the Technical Secretariat the role of attributing responsibility for chemical weapons attack in Syria in 2018; and since the poisoning of Russian opposition politician, Alexey Navalny, with a nerve agent from the Novichok group this year.

Only a year ago this Council adopted a Presidential Statement which unanimously reaffirmed our strong support for the work of the OPCW. Just two weeks ago, the overwhelming majority of State Parties, from across all regional groups, voted in favor of the OPCW's budget, which included renewed funding for the IIT and other Technical Secretariat teams working on Syria.

As a permanent member of the Security Council, the UK is well aware of the responsibility conferred on us by the members of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security. We will continue to act on

behalf of the vast majority of Member States who believe in the necessity to protect the long-held norm prohibiting the use of chemical weapons and to hold those who violate it to account.

Mr President, I do have questions for the Director-General, which I will indicate now, but he may prefer, as is customary, to answer them in closed session.

Some have argued that Syria verifiably destroyed all of its chemical weapons in 2014 and the OPCW has not been able to find any evidence to the contrary since then. How would you answer this?

Our second question: in some respects, Syria appears to be engaging in process with the OPCW, and yet verification of its declaration has been outstanding for 7 years. How can Syria improve its engagement and how does the Director-General assess the prospects of achieving a complete and accurate declaration of its program by the SAR? What is needed in order to achieve this?

And our third question, does the Director-General know of any other case where it has been necessary for the Technical Secretariat, to engage continually with a state party over several years in order to arrive at a declaration that is considered accurate and complete in accordance with the CWC?

Thank you, Mr President.

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## **Secretary of State announces appointment to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland**

Press release

Secretary of State announces appointment to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland.



The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt. Hon Brandon Lewis CBE MP has announced the appointment of Sarah Havlin as a member of the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland.

## **Notes for Editors**

The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland's role is to review the number, names, designation and boundaries of parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland and to submit reports with recommendations to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is responsible for making appointments to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland in accordance with Schedule 1 of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986.

## **Terms of appointment**

- The position is a part-time appointment for five years. The appointment will end on 10 December 2025.
- The position attracts a daily remuneration of £505.50.
- The position is not pensionable.

## **Biography of Appointee**

Sarah Havlin is a solicitor by profession currently serving as the Certification Officer of Northern Ireland. She holds appointments as the legal member of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority of Northern Ireland, and as a member of the Parades Commission for Northern Ireland. Previous appointments include Assistant Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, Assistant District Electoral Areas Commissioner and she previously served one term on the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland.

## **Political Activity**

All appointments are made on merit and with regards to the statutory requirements. Political activity plays no part in the selection process.

However, in accordance with the original Nolan recommendations, there is a requirement for appointees' political activity in defined categories to be made public.

Sarah Havlin has declared no political activity.

## **Regulation**

This appointment is regulated by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointment (OCPA) and all stages of the process were overseen by an independent panel member.

## **Statutory Requirements**

This appointment is made by the Secretary of State in accordance with Schedule 1 Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986.

Published 11 December 2020

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# **Housing Minister's speech at the Insider Midlands Residential Property Conference**

Good morning and a very warm welcome to everyone attending today's Insider Midlands Residential Property Conference.

It is a real pleasure to be joining you, albeit remotely, which as we all know is the way of the world at the moment.

Can I begin by thanking you, the housing professionals, business owners and executives – those based in the Midlands, a part of the world well-known to me, and those of you further afield – for all of the resilience, perseverance and hard work that you have put in throughout this extraordinary period.

I think all of us today recognise the unique role which the housing sector plays in our economy, working in close partnership with the government. We've sought to do everything that we can to keep the sector running as smoothly as possible during this pandemic crisis.

From the Safe Working Charter launched with the Home Builders Federation back in May when the sector reopened, to the Business and Planning Act in July, we've worked to make sure the sector has remained open and has been able to work safely and effectively to keep our construction and housing economy on track.

Now with the Pfizer vaccine being rolled out, we have a post-Covid world in sight. We also have in sight the greatest economic comeback the country has ever known. The housing industry has been leading that charge and is pivotal in that process of reconstruction.

For the Midlands, that starts with meaningful investment in growth-spurring projects which support regeneration and new development.

That includes over £100 million of investment from our Land Fund for the West Midlands Combined Authority to deliver 8,000 homes across the region.

That is in addition to the significant funding package announced by the Prime Minister on a visit to Dudley earlier this year with Mayor Andy Street, which saw £84 million from the government's Brownfield Fund supporting the West Midlands Combined Authority to build thousands of new homes on former industrial land.

But this is not just about building new homes – important as we all know that is.

We are also investing in shovel-ready, job-creating infrastructure projects which will be key to helping businesses get back on their feet and for the Midlands Engine economy roar back into life.

Local Enterprise Partnerships across the Midlands are receiving in the region of £214 million from our Getting Building Fund to support innovative, growth-spurring projects.

Initiatives like the Warwickshire Green Recovery Project, which is rapidly expanding on-street charging points for electric vehicles, all the way through to a new Digital Advanced Manufacturing Centre in Chesterfield which is pushing the envelope in 3D prototyping and modular construction.

Of course, government cash, however useful and significant and however targeted, can only go so far in our national mission to build back better.

We need regulatory reform as well, and as many of you will know, the government has published its ambitious '[Planning for the Future](#)' White Paper with proposals for a reformed planning system to make it simpler, quicker and more accessible.

Local Plans still need to be prepared by local councils, but will be more map-based, more visual, and more digital – to that extent they will be much more easy to use.

Land will be put into one of three categories: areas for growth, for renewal, or for protection.

And to make sure we get the houses we need, we're proposing a new measure for calculating a housing requirement figure for each local planning authority, which will still be the building block for planning.

There will also be a new time limited statutory timetable for preparation,

rather than the average 7 years it presently takes to adopt a plan.

If you look around the Midlands, something like 40% of local authorities have a plan which was adopted more than 5 years ago – our reforms will mandate everyone to have up-to-date local plans to benefit their communities.

Together, these reforms will inject much-needed agility into the planning system.

It is the greatest overhaul we have proposed in planning in over 70 years since the Town and Country Planning Act was introduced.

It is fair to say the proposals have conjured up some spirited debate. We have had 44,000 submissions to our [consultation](#), which is the beginning of the process of refining our proposals.

Although the consultation is now closed, I am very keen that we maintain connection with all the people and parties that have contributed to the consultation – that we continue to work with professionals across the sector to ensure we approach those reforms on a consensual basis and that we get them right.

Because we know that it is incumbent upon government to equip the housing industry with the right tools, the right regulations and the right resources and funding to build the homes the country needs at pace and at scale.

That also means accelerating delivery of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC), including offsite and smart techniques, to encourage a more innovative, diverse, competitive market.

I think you will be hearing from a host of speakers later today about MMC – we certainly believe in government that MMC could be revolutionary for the industry in terms of improved productivity, build speed, and economies of scale.

That is why we are committed to tackling the barriers to increasing use of MMC – the most common one being a lack of standardisation in components and designs.

Those difficulties add unnecessary costs to the MMC process and hampers the sector from being able to compete with traditional methods of building.

We will shortly engage with industry on this very issue to drive efficiencies and create a more resilient MMC pipeline.

We know that Modern Methods of Construction are thriving in the Midlands too.

We are investing £30 million in a landmark deal between Sekisui House and Urban Splash to build thousands of homes using the latest modular construction techniques from Japan.

So I think MMC can be a tremendously powerful tool for us and can also help us build out those greener, more sustainable homes.

Industry research shows homes built using MMC techniques can have up to 80% fewer defects whilst reducing heating bills by up to 70 per cent.

That's not just important when it comes to fuel poverty, but is important when we consider that housing accounts for around 15% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions through their use of oil and gas for heating and hot water.

Making homes greener, cleaner and better insulated is integral to combatting climate change and is one of the reasons why we have introduced the Future Homes Standard, which by the middle of this decade will see new houses producing at least 75% fewer emissions.

Homes built to those new standards will be future-proofed, with low carbon heating and high levels of energy efficiency.

Crucially, they will be 'zero carbon ready' – so there will be no costly retrofits. MMC has a crucial role to play in the development of those homes and in the Future Homes Standard.

That, I think, is what lies ahead – a modern housing industry truly empowered to build cleaner, greener, more sustainable homes for the communities around the country and around the Midlands that need them – and build those homes faster than ever before.

And you are the integral players in making that vision a local reality.

The Midlands – I was born there, brought up there, have a constituency in the Midlands – was the cradle of the industrial revolution.

It's where the nail makers came together to "gi'it some 'ommer", as we used to say in Wolverhampton.

Now, with its unrivalled expertise, with its skills and its innovation, I think it is perfectly placed to lead Britain's green revolution – to be the new green workshop and tech chamber of the world.

It's a 'once in a generation' opportunity to grasp – to build back greener, to build back faster, and build back better from this pandemic.

And I know you in the Midlands will grasp it.

I hope you enjoy your conference. Thank you for listening.

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**[UK Government provides £31m for flooding and coal tip repairs](#)**



Welsh Secretary Simon Hart and Chief Secretary to the Treasury Stephen Barclay agree funding for coal tip and flood damage remediation work across Wales.



The UK Government has confirmed that £31 million will be made available to repair damage caused by severe floods, including to coal tips, following storms across Wales earlier this year.

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart and Chief Secretary to the Treasury Stephen Barclay accepted the claim for funding from the Welsh Government, which will result in £22 million for local authority flood recovery costs and £9 million to repair vulnerable coal tips across Wales.

Ever since parts of Wales were hit by devastating flooding in early 2020, the UK Government has worked with the Welsh Government and local authorities to assess how extra support and protection could be provided for the affected communities.

Although responsibility for flood defences and flood management is devolved, the UK Government agreed to provide funding from the UK Reserve for 2020-21 given the exceptional circumstances.

Following a meeting between the UK and Welsh Governments on Thursday 10 December £31 million funding was agreed and will be provided to the Welsh Government to carry out coal tip and flood damage remediation work.

### **Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart said:**

The devastation caused across Wales by the storms of early 2020 was heartbreaking, while the impact on coal tips in former mining areas was extremely worrying for the those communities.

Ever since, we have been working with Welsh Government, local authorities and others on how we can provide extra support for flood relief and protection for communities which were so badly affected. I'm pleased that this has now been agreed and this much-needed work can be carried out.

## **Chief Secretary to the Treasury Stephen Barclay said:**

Storm Dennis caused devastating destruction across Wales and we've been working constructively with the Welsh Government since then to provide the much-needed support for the communities affected. The funding announced today showcases the strength of our Union and will mean vital repair and remediation work can be carried out.

We have also provided the Welsh Government with an additional £1.3 billion for next year at the recent Spending Review so they are well placed to continue this work.

Published 11 December 2020

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## **Plans for York flood storage area approved by planning chiefs**

Plans to create a flood storage area on the River Foss north of Strensall have now been given the green light by two local authority planning committees.

Work is expected to start next spring on the new flood storage area to better protect 490 vulnerable homes between Strensall and The Groves area of York from flooding.

The scheme, which falls within the boundary of two councils, has been approved by Ryedale District Council's planners this week – and was given the go ahead by City of York Council last month (November).

Located in the rural area 2km north of Strensall, the scheme will also reduce flood risk to key transport routes and result in benefits to the environment including tree planting, wetland creation and improvements to river bank habitat.

The purpose of the storage area is to help reduce peak flows in the river, therefore reducing flooding downstream. During heavy rain, the structure fills with water, temporarily holding back flood water and reducing the flood risk to properties along the Foss Corridor, towards York city centre. Once the flood has passed the water in the storage area will subside.

For the vast majority of time the structure will not need to be used in this way which means that farming practices will be able to continue in the area.

Project manager Richard Lever, from the Environment Agency, said:

We are delighted that Ryedale District Council has approved our plans this week to create a Flood Storage Area on the River Foss which will reduce flood risk for 490 properties as part of the York Flood Alleviation Scheme.

In addition to flood risk benefits, the scheme will also have environmental benefits such as the growth of valuable wetland habitat, creating space for local wildlife and improving water quality downstream.

These areas are not like reservoirs and do not store water permanently. They are designed to be dry in normal weather conditions and only fill up for short periods during large flood events.

Unlike other physical flood defences, a flood storage area can be built at some distance from the communities they protect and therefore have less impact than building formal defences.

During a flood event, the level of the River Foss can rise rapidly exposing properties, roads and land to the risk of severe flooding. This is likely to increase with more extreme weather conditions predicted due to climate change. Currently there are no flood defences along the Foss Corridor and a flood storage area is the only viable option.

Out of all the projects included in the Yorks Flood Alleviation Scheme, this proposal will deliver the largest benefits in terms of numbers of properties protected.

Mr Lever said:

As well as reducing flood risk, the storage area will also have environmental benefits. This scheme will facilitate the growth of valuable wetland habitat, create space for local wildlife and help improve water quality downstream.

Materials for building the embankment for the storage area will be taken from within the site, creating pits which fill with water and act as permanent shallow ponds.

Discussions about the proposals have been held at parish council meetings, public events and with landowners, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, the Foss Internal Drainage Board and Natural England.

Following the severe flooding in York in Dec 2015, where over 600 properties were flooded, central Government committed £45m to fund projects to better protect properties in the city.

Environment Agency flood schemes protected almost 130,000 properties during the winter 2019/20 flooding, even though water levels were higher in some places than the floods of 2007 when 55,000 properties flooded.

Since 2015, the Government has invested £496m flood defences in Yorkshire – more than any other region – better protecting more than 66,000 properties

For more information about York's Flood Alleviation Scheme [visit:](#)

Make sure you are prepared for a flood event and find out if you are at risk [visit:](#)