

Ensuring an inclusive electoral process and a united response to humanitarian crises in Somalia

Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and my thanks to our briefers, to SRSB Swan, to Ambassador Madeira and also to Ms Hassan for that really useful and detailed update.

Madam President, regrettably, I must open on a sombre note because, despite the Secretary-General's calls for a ceasefire, Al-Shabaab continue to launch their attacks. We strongly condemn all terrorist attacks, including the murder of two humanitarian workers just last month. The UK expresses its condolences to victims' families and reaffirms its solidarity with Somalia in fighting terrorism. Let me reiterate, it is vital that all parties ensure unimpeded access and safety of aid workers in line with international humanitarian law.

Madam President, as we near the end of the current political cycle, I would like to reflect on Somalia's progress. And there has been progress. In March this year, Somalia achieved Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) debt relief. They achieved this decision point after impressive economic performance and can now access new international finance. The federal government has increased its revenue base with international support. Somalia is making progress in building resilience to humanitarian shocks and, with support from AMISOM, the Somali National Army has taken back and held territory from Al-Shabaab.

This is a marathon, not a sprint. But at the moment, we are making progress.

As the electoral processes commence in Somalia, we acknowledge the federal government and member states' agreement on an electoral model for 2020-21 and stress the importance of preserving this spirit of consensus. We now urge all stakeholders to work together to deliver an inclusive, timely and credible electoral process, which includes a 30 percent quota for women. And I want to just reiterate to Ms Hassan how useful it was to hear from her on how civil society's activity on this is working to achieve this target, but also the challenges they still face.

Madam President, I want to express deep concern about the growing number of attacks on freedom of expression, including the killing, assault and intimidation of journalists. As Somalia prepares to hold an electoral process, Somali leaders must ensure political space remains open, allowing the expression of a diversity of voices.

Beyond this electoral process, commitment to effective federalism is critical for Somalia's long-term stability. Building institutions of state and ensuring resources and power can be distributed in a way that best serves the Somali people. We urge Somalia's leaders to set out their vision for steps

towards an inclusive political settlement, finalising the constitution and ensuring direct elections in 2024-25. We encourage them to maximise the benefits of debt relief through better federal economic cooperation. And we urge Somalia's leaders to continue to articulate a clear vision for the security transition after 2021.

As we enter the next political cycle, Somalia and the international community should recommit to principles of mutual accountability. The United Kingdom reaffirms its support and commitment to Somalia's long-term stability and growth.

I turn again now to the security situation in Somalia, which remains a significant challenge. Firstly, I would like to restate our tribute to the continued commitment and sacrifices of AMISOM troop contributing countries and to Somalia's security forces. We welcome the renewal of the Somalia sanctions regime and the international resolve to counter Al-Shabaab through tackling their access to arms and illicit finance.

We express deep concern about the worrying statistics on children and armed conflict and sexual and gender-based violence in Somalia. We welcome the tasking in the UNSOM and sanctions mandates to report on human rights. All tools must be used to ensure people do not suffer.

And we welcome also the efforts by the federal government to renew the Somalia Transition Plan. The deadline at the end of 2021 for Somali authorities to take greater leadership from AMISOM is a momentous one. Our partners in the African Union and the AMISOM TCCs have made enormous sacrifices in supporting Somalia as it works to retake control of its own security. It is clear this support will be needed after 2021. But it's also clear we have an opportunity to support AMISOM as it evolves towards a role where it can enable the Somalis to manage their own security.

International conversations, including the upcoming EU Conference on security and critically, the independent assessment mandated by this Council, are necessary for partners to reflect on how we can collectively implement Somalia's security vision. I encourage constructive engagement with these processes as we come to a new mandate next year.

Finally, Madam President, Somalia faces a protracted climate and conflict-induced humanitarian crisis, compounded by what SRSG Swan called the "triple shock" of COVID-19, locusts and floods. The United Kingdom gave 64 million pounds in humanitarian aid in the last financial year to Somalia. We call on the international community to provide more funding for the humanitarian response and efforts to build long-term resilience.

In conclusion, I want to emphasise three points. Firstly, a united international response is crucial to supporting Somalia and its fight against protracted humanitarian crises. Secondly, I reiterate our call for the federal government to ensure the agreed electoral process is inclusive, credible and timely. And finally, that Somalia's long-term peace and stability depends on a clear plan for ensuring its security, a political vision for better federal cooperation, and continued international support

and commitment to mutual accountability.

Thank you, Madam President.

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 23 November 2020

It seems that almost every week we learn of some new scientific breakthrough to help us beat Covid

last week it was good news about the vaccine from Pfizer BioNTech

and then Moderna

This morning we heard the fantastic news that the Oxford Astra Zeneca vaccine has been highly effective in clinical trials

there are more tests to be done, but the signs are that this vaccine

- financed partly by British taxpayers, working in partnership with a great British company –

This vaccine could be both affordable and easy to use and highly effective

We have ordered 100m doses

and thanks to the work of the Vaccines Task Force we have secured more than 350m doses of potential vaccines of all kinds

but we are not out of the woods yet

we can hear the drumming hooves of the cavalry coming over the brow of the hill

but they are not here yet

Even if all three vaccines are approved, even if the production timetables are met and vaccines notoriously fall behind in their production timetables

it will be months before we can be sure that we have inoculated everyone that needs a vaccine

and those months will be hard

they will be cold

they include January and February when the NHS is under its greatest pressure and that is why when we come out of lockdown next week we must not just throw away the gains we have all made

So today we have published our Covid Winter Plan which sets out a clear strategy to take the country through to the end of March

We will continue to bear down hard on this virus

we will use tough tiering – in some ways tougher than the pre-lockdown measures and details of those tiers are on the gov.uk website later this week when we have the most up to date data and we will be sharing details of which tier your area is going to be in

I should warn you now that many more places will be in higher tiers than as was previously the case

and we will simultaneously be using the new and exciting possibilities of community testing – as they have done in Liverpool

and there will be a clear incentive for everyone in areas where the virus prevalence is high to get a test, to get one of these rapid turnaround lateral flow tests and do your best for the community

get a test to help to squeeze the disease and reduce the restrictions that your town or city or area has endured

and that way – through tough tiering and mass community testing

we hope to let people see a little more of their family and friends over Christmas

Now I know that many of us want and need Christmas with our families

we feel after this year we deserve it

but this is not the moment to let the virus rip for the sake of Christmas parties

it's the season to be jolly but it's also the season to be jolly careful

especially with elderly relatives

and working with the Devolved Administrations we will set out shortly how we want to get the balance right for Christmas and we will be setting this out later this week

Christmas this year will be different and we want to remain prudent through Christmas and beyond into the new year

but we will use the three tools that I have described to squeeze the virus in the weeks and months ahead

tiering, testing and the roll-out of vaccines

employing all three techniques together so as to drive down R and drive down the infection rate

and I really am now assured things really will look and feel very different indeed after Easter

and that idea of an end goal or date is important because at last – if the promise of the vaccines is fulfilled – we do have something to work for

a timescale, a goal around which businesses can begin tentatively to plan

and with luck and with hard work we will be seeing improvements before then

but for now the problem is not a shortage of hope

or a lack of optimism

not with the amazing news that we are getting from the laboratories in this country

the challenge now as we face this difficult winter ahead

is to fight down any over-optimism

to master any tendency to premature celebration of success

that success will come all the faster if we work together to follow the guidance

maintain the basic disciplines as people have done so heroically over the last few months

hands, face, space and get a test if you have symptoms

because that is the way we will beat it together

[Housing Minister's speech at Savills Annual Housing Seminar](#)

Thank you for that warm introduction, Mark. It's a great pleasure for me to join you today, all be it virtually, given that Savills brought together such a diverse mix of key players such as housing associations, councils, developers and groups from right across the housing industry.

Can I first of all begin by saying how grateful I am to everyone in the

sector for the tremendous support that you have given and the forbearance that you have undertaken during what has been some of the most difficult years in our lifetime.

I know it's been very challenging for you all professionally. I expect it will have been very challenging for some of you personally. So I just want to say firstly thank you for all that you have been doing, will be doing and will continue to do for the sector, for the industry, and for your clients and customers.

I know the imposition of this second national lockdown has been especially challenging with many businesses, once again, seeing jobs and people's wellbeing on the line and certainly for many smaller businesses it is a very challenging time.

But with the arrival of the new vaccines onto the scene and into the pipeline and given the resilience the housing market has shown in the last few months since it reopened in the middle of May, I think that there are glimmers of light for the recovery to come – to begin to reclaim our way of life.

The pandemic has, undoubtedly, made us think about the way we live our lives at every level. You, in the housing sector are at the forefront of these profound changes as we attempt to build back the economy, build back our lives, and build both back better.

Keeping the housing market open

Throughout the pandemic, since it began in February and we began our first lockdown in March, we have done everything that we can, not just to protect people's lives, but also to protect their livelihoods. That includes the package of measures that we have launched, and refined, and continued to roll out to support jobs and businesses across the country.

The Prime Minister and the Chancellor have both said that we will do whatever it takes to keep businesses and their employees afloat – though tax cuts, tax deferrals, direct grants and the Furlough Scheme – we will do whatever it takes to protect our economy.

The tough national measures that we have taken are part of that approach, but they are also, I think we'll all agree, distinctly different from those we took in the Spring.

I think we all recognise that the housing sector is a bellwether of confidence in our wider economy – what General Motors is in the United States, what Birmingham Yardley constituency used to be in terms of bellwethers in politics. The housing sector is a bellwether in the United Kingdom for our economy. And that is why – more than with any sector – we have done all we can to keep the industry open. Working closely with the CLC, the HPF, the Federation of Master Builders, to allow flexible working hours, to allow planning permissions are extended to ensure that safe working practices are baked into work onsite to keep the economy working and to keep workers safe.

That really is exemplified in the Safe Working Charter which the HBF developed way back in March, and which was a signal to the reopening of the housing economy.

Mark said we haven't been furloughed in MHCLG – that's absolutely right. We've been doing our bit to provide both financial support and stimulus to the economy.

We have the £450m Home Building Fund which we announced before the summer, supporting the delivery of 7,200 new homes, right through to our Private Rented Sector Guarantee Scheme which has green-lighted £415m in loans to help the industry bounce back from this pandemic stronger and more resilient than before.

With so many of us spending so much more time in our homes right now, the pandemic reinforced the need to double our efforts to build more quality homes with strong and sustainable communities, which we need now more urgently than ever.

That means keeping up the pace on supply. We need to make up for ground lost – the emergency and the challenges to the economy notwithstanding we must meet our target of building 300,000 new homes of all types and tenures each year by the middle of this decade so that people can afford to buy or afford to rent the sorts of homes that they want to be able to provide them with the security and the opportunity that they want and need.

Building Safety

To that end, we are delivering the biggest improvements to the building safety regime that we have seen for a generation and pressing ahead with remediation work, which is absolutely critical to safety. I am absolutely clear that remediation must continue through these lockdowns where it is safe to do so. We've set aside £600 million for the remediation of ACM-clad high-rise buildings to make those homes safe. I want to thank everybody involved in the sector for their work on that.

The Chancellor made available £1 billion at the budget for the remediation of non-ACM type cladding in tall buildings to make those safe as well, and work is advancing to make sure that that money is distributed and dispersed effectively.

We are also introducing some of the biggest improvements in regulation ever seen through our Building Safety Bill which was published in draft in July and which will be introduced shortly to Parliament. That Bill complements very significant work that has been done over the last three or four years – the Fire Safety Act for example, building on the Fire Safety Order Act 2002 – to make sure that everybody, irrespective of who they are, where they are from, where they live, feels safe and secure in their home.

I know that you will be hearing from Dame Judith Hackitt later on and I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for her tireless efforts to support our work, and we want to support her work as well. The good news is that now almost 80% of buildings with ACM cladding have either been fully

remediated or are close to completion – and that rises to above 95% of those buildings in the social housing sector. It's good news that progress has been made, but clearly there is much more to do. We are determined that we must do it and also the building owners, developers and warrantee holders much play their part as well.

Building Greener

So many people have spent so much time living at home for the past several months, and for many people the pandemic has been made tolerable at least by a good home and a garden shared with the people that they care about.

But for too many people – people in tiny accommodation, substandard accommodation, people unable to walk to shops or green spaces or services – their homes are less like castles and are more like prisons. We have learned that spacious, well-equipped homes which offer green spaces in plentiful supply, with access to vital amenities and vibrant neighbourhoods that surround those amenities and those services – must be the standard if we are to recover from the social effects and the economic effects of Covid-19.

That's just what our planning reforms are aimed at delivering – greener, cleaner, more beautiful homes and neighbourhoods that we can be proud to live in, but also, more importantly, we can be proud to call a legacy for future generations.

The reforms we've set in train mandate for more parks, more playing fields and greener spaces in new developments.

They encourage developers, with the Environment Bill currently going through parliament, to think much more creatively about biodiversity. About the way bee bricks, green roofs and even community orchards can be used. They ensure that all new streets will be tree-lined, contributing not just to a neighbourhood's aesthetic but also to its air quality.

There are some really good examples of this sort of design around the world: Marina One in Singapore; Bosco Verticale in Milan which boasts, I'm told, a vertical forest which removes something like 44,000 pounds of carbon from the atmosphere each year.

If they can be bold, we can be bold and daring the new developments that we envisage. And through our Home of 2030 Competition we launched earlier this year – in fact I think it was the first thing that I did when I became Housing Minister back in the middle of February – the Government is incentivising designers, architects and developers to do exactly that. Think like Milan, think like Singapore.

We have six very impressive finalists who have developed their cutting-edge designs for the Homes of 2030 competition.

I would like to thank particularly Nick Walkley, the CEO of Homes England, and I think he's going to join us today. He has provided ready-to-go sites in which the winners can make their visions a reality. The Prime Minister has

made very clear that he wants more technologically sophisticated, sustainable housing to be developed, and that is what we are going to do. We're going to meet Net Zero targets and we are, through the Future Homes Standard, going to reduce the emissions of carbon dioxide from buildings by the middle of this decade by at least 75% compared with today.

Building Beautiful

As much as we want to build greener and more sustainably, we also want to build more beautifully. In championing innovation and encouraging the industry to respond to the changing needs of residents, it is also right that we celebrate beautiful design and provide trailblazing design that others can follow.

I was lucky enough at the end of last week to go on a virtual tour of the Barking Riverside development on the site of the former power station, which is delivering something like 10,000 new homes of mixed tenures, it also offers fantastic views of the River Thames, there is a clipper service as well as a rail station going in, and making best use of an innovative new waste disposing technology called 'Envac', and all of this is encapsulated within a well-designed, beautiful and sustainable housing district which is in-keeping with the history, the identity of the community in which it is built.

We have other great examples of that too – Marmalade Lane in Cambridge; Goldsmith Street in Norwich, which thank to lockdown restrictions I've had to cancel two visits to, but I'm rather hoping that 2021 will be a better time to visit that 2020.

But still we know some developers pay too little attention to the character of the houses they are creating and the character of the environment in which they are creating those houses.

Only six per cent of new homes in our country are designed by architects. Cutting back on the time and attention spent on architectural design may be a good way to save some money... But I also think that it is definitely short-sighted and, ultimately, more costly... Because building better, building more beautifully, in-keeping with an area and its aesthetic, builds in and buys in local communities' support for those buildings.

And that can save expensive delays, save on legal challenges and feed that developers have to pay out, and then they can focus on what really matters – building homes that community needs, building them really well, not building the sort of identikit 'Anywheresville' housing that perhaps we have seen too often. And that's why we want to introduce the National Model Design Code, which will advise councils on how they can set clear expectations for the design of new development and give residents a genuine say in the future of their area.

At their heart, these reforms are about letting communities have greater say and have more power over what is built for them and around them.

The Planning White Paper which launched in August, with 84 pages of proposals

– we’ve had 44,000 consultation responses as a result which we are working through and which we will share the results of as soon as we can and then kick off more work to refine our proposals on the back of that consultation feedback – fundamentally those reforms are designed to make our 73 year old planning system more speedy so that decisions and results can be made much more quickly.

So that it is less opaque so that more people can navigate it more effectively which is good for local communities as well as good for SMEs.

And we want it to be much more engaging by having strategic, upfront planning using map-based systems which zone areas, allowing people to see what is proposed for their communities and have a say on what goes where, how it’s going to look, the sorts of infrastructure that should be provided for the community. It’s much more strategic and far less tactical. It’s much more up front and far less reactive. Therefore, I think it’s much more empowering and much more democratic, and I believe that communities will see that and that they will appreciate the power that we are placing in their hands.

‘Build, Build, Build’

Because fundamentally we need to build more homes. More homes around the country in places that they are needed because demand is high, in places that they are needed because the level of stock is poor, in places that they are needed because we need to reimagine our town centres and our city centres as we emerge through the Covid epidemic.

We have travelled quite some way in the last 10 years. We have built hundreds of thousands of new homes – 241,000 in the last year alone before Covid struck.

But there is much more to do. Whether it be building new homes for people to buy or get a stake in through shared ownership, whether it be building more affordable homes for rent or socially rented homes – and our £12.2bn affordable homes programme, the biggest cash injection to affordable homes since the 2006-2011 cycle is aimed to do just that.

Conclusion:

I hope it demonstrates that the government is absolutely steadfast in our determination to help communities pull through what remains an extremely challenging time, but to emerge into a post-Covid world where we can look forward with optimism and determination and confidence.

We want to overhaul a planning system which is 70 years old and which needs to change, to become steadier and more transparent and more democratic.

We want to build more homes in the places that they are needed. We want those homes to be built sustainably. We want them to be built beautifully. We want the infrastructure around them to be provided quickly and to be right, and we want to make sure that the build environment around those communities is attractive for people today and for the future.

We are going to work in close collaboration with councils, planners, designers, and the construction industry to make sure that the reforms we proposed are right and to make sure that they work. We are prepared to investment time and money to make sure that all these things happen.

Because if we do that, we can build a built environment, we can build communities which people are proud to call their homes, build communities and environments that developers can be proud to say 'we designed and built out', which planners can be proud to say 'we planned', and which the future will be able to say thank you to us for doing what we did to give them the legacy that they deserve.

I am very grateful for the time that you have given me to speak to you today. I trust that you have a great conference. That you're able to meet up, albeit virtually, with old friends. Pick up new ideas. Be reminded of important concepts.

And before too long we'll all be able to do this all over again in a much more physical and friendly format. I'm sure whatever changes in that future, there will be the next Savills conference and I look very much to seeing everyone else then again.

Thank you.

British Ambassador visits municipal markets in the province and delivers supplies to prevent COVID-19

The Guatemalan Exporters Association, AGEXPORT, and the British Embassy are implementing the project "Business and Municipal Leadership for COVID-19 Emergency and Economic Reactivation". This project develops and implements a strategy to prevent the spread of the virus and mitigate the risk of infection, ensuring the health of people and allowing the continuity and reactivation of economic activities at a municipal level.

The Ambassador visited the municipalities of Sumpango, in Sacatepéquez, and Parramos, in Chimaltenango, to deliver a donation of supplies to the municipal markets. Representatives of AGEXPORT, export companies, municipal authorities, vendors and local health representatives also participated in the event.

Following the protocols set out in the "Guidance of recommendations for COVID-19 prevention in markets and public squares" of the Guatemalan Government, gel hydro-alcoholic, facemasks, cleaning supplies, thermometers and other equipment were given to the residents of the area so that they

could continue with their economic activities while complying with all biosecurity protocols.

The project, worth more than Q500,000 and being implemented over a period of six months, also includes other actions delivered jointly with the municipalities and with export companies, and include:

- Training and implementation of biosecurity protocols to municipal staff, vendors in markets and public squares.
- Local communication strategies to inform and educate inhabitants and small businesses in the municipalities on how to prevent COVID-19 through printed protocols.
- Implementation of an action and sanitation plan that allows the strengthening of municipal and community capacities in COVID-19 issues and the safe operation of economic activities.
- Donation of supplies for sanitation and service personnel to ensure that biosafety protocols are correctly implemented in the markets.

The British Ambassador in Guatemala, Nick Whittingham, said:

At a municipal level, it is vital to support producers, exporters and vendors by providing them with clear protocols that guarantees their health and safety, complying with the government measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19, and that allows them to continue their economic activities.

These donations represent a starting point for all the donations that will be delivered in other municipalities, which are:

- Santiago, Sacatepéquez
- Chimaltenango, Chimaltenango
- San José Pinula, Guatemala
- Jutiapa, Jutiapa
- San Cristóbal Verapaz, Alta Verapaz
- San Pedro Sacatepéquez, San Marcos
- San Marcos, San Marcos
- Sanarate, El Progreso

[Flyer sent to businesses on how to prepare for new rules from 1 January 2021](#)

The flyer from the Business Secretary was sent to businesses. It provides

general advice on what businesses must do after the transition period ends on 31 December 2020. The letters contain QR codes and URLs which direct readers to GOV.UK, where they can view the online transition checker, sector specific webinars and access further guidance.