

# Addressing the pressing humanitarian need in Syria

Thank you very much, Mr President.

Let me just start, if I might, Mr President, by saying that I think it's really important that we try to keep the politics out of our humanitarian discussions. That's one reason why we separate out into political, chemical weapons and humanitarian sessions each month on Syria is to enable us to focus on the evidence and the facts as we grapple with how we keep people alive, which is surely the most vital responsibility that this Council faces. So I have to say I listened with sadness today to one delegate whose intervention was an attack on those providing aid across Syria and those paying for it. And I want to remind everybody that the biggest donors to the Syria appeal are the US, the UK, Germany and the EU, including those areas under Assad's rule.

So, Mr President, what does an evidence-based approach tell us? Well, the UK is deeply concerned about the potentially catastrophic impact of COVID-19 in Syria, as highlighted by the World Health Organization. There are 48 confirmed cases in areas controlled by the Syrian authorities, as well as confirmed cases in the north-east and reported cases in the north-west. There are probably already many more. We cannot know because of the lack of testing capacity. And as the United Nations scales up prevention and protection against COVID-19 in areas controlled by the Syrian authorities and in the north-west, it follows that it must be allowed to do the same in the north-east. So it is gravely concerning the gaps in medical supplies in the north-east have in fact widened at a time when facilities should be urgently scaling up to prepare for the virus.

The UN has confirmed that in terms of coverage or reach, cross-line access in the north-east has not improved since 2019, when the Yaroubiya crossing was still operational. It's for this reason that in his latest report, the Secretary-General said, "The pressing need to prepare for a COVID-19 outbreak in the north-east has further and starkly highlighted the gap left by the removal of the Yaroubiya authorisation."

Colleagues, this could not be clearer. There is a clear problem in the north-east and the United Nations and humanitarian organisations have told us what the answer is. We must not play politics with this virus when it's in our gift to enable aid to get through and save lives. We believe the mandate for the Yaroubiya crossing should be re-authorised as a matter of great urgency for as long as COVID-19 remains a threat to Syria.

Now, Mr President, let me turn to the north-west. If our objective is to save life, then it is absolutely necessary that this Council renews UNSCR 2504 in a timely manner. Monthly truck crossings in March and April of this year have been more than double what they were at the same time last year. This increase in aid is in response to the increased humanitarian need within the

region. So the renewal of Resolution 2504 remains essential. There is no alternative. And I'd just like to emphasise that if Resolution 2504 were not to be renewed, then no one should have any illusions that the United Kingdom's considerable humanitarian funding for the north-west would automatically transfer to delivery via Damascus – particularly, while such serious questions remain about assistance getting from Damascus to those most in need.

A number of colleagues have talked about sanctions. Goods and medical supplies used for humanitarian purposes are not subject to EU sanctions, which are now part of the United Kingdom's national legislation, and additional exemptions from sanctions are available for humanitarian activities in Syria.

In conclusion, Mr President, the evidence is clearly set out in the Secretary-General's report. There remains a pressing humanitarian need across Syria. We must remember the millions of lives at stake. COVID-19 has changed the world we all live in. It has changed the situation on the ground in Syria. And I believe that it means we must be ready to change our approach. We must put aside our political differences and act on the basis of humanitarian needs to authorise temporary cross-border access through Yaroubiya. And we must, of course, renew Resolution 2504. There is no other responsible course of action any of us could take.

Thank you, Mr President.

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## [PM call with Bill and Melinda Gates: 19 May 2020](#)

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to Bill and Melinda Gates today via video call.



The Prime Minister spoke to Bill and Melinda Gates today via video call. He was joined by Kate Bingham, Chair of the UK's Vaccine Taskforce.

They discussed the UK's contribution to helping countries around the world tackle coronavirus and the important work of the Gates Foundation in this area.

Both parties expressed their hope that a viable vaccine will be found as soon as possible.

They also shared their commitment to the vital work of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and looked forward to the upcoming UK-hosted Global Vaccine Summit on June 4th.

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## [Supporting the financial health of the United Nations](#)

Thank you Mr Chair,

I would like to thank Under Secretary-General Catherine Pollard for her presentation last week on the current financial situation of the United Nations.

The United Kingdom shares your concern about the severe liquidity problems that the United Nations continues to face for both its regular budget and peacekeeping operations. We cannot emphasise enough the importance of the United Nations having the right resources and tools needed to deliver effectively its mandates and programmes, in particular in support of the 2030 Agenda.

This Committee spends a lot of time every year carefully evaluating and agreeing the United Nations' budgets. It is therefore incumbent on us all to follow through with that commitment and meet our financial obligations to the United Nations. We owe it to the Organisation and the people it serves. We call on all member states to pay their assessed contributions in full and in good time. Those member states with arrears, we encourage you to take steps to address these.

The financial situation this year looks comparatively better than this time last year. Although a modest improvement, this is nonetheless welcome. We hope to see this improve further.

The United Kingdom commends the Controller and the rest of the Organisation for their efforts to prioritise how the United Nations uses its resources to

keep mandate and programme delivery on track. We would welcome an evaluation of the impact of these measures on mandate and programme delivery.

We welcome the Secretariat's pledge to use the funds entrusted to it in a cost-effective manner. In this regard, we encourage the Secretariat to continue to prioritise and use its resources effectively, and where necessary agilely in response to new and emerging challenges and priorities.

We were pleased to hear that the measures that this Committee agreed in July last year for peacekeeping budgets have improved the overall liquidity of active peacekeeping operations and reduced the need for the Secretariat to resort to drawing on the money sitting in closed peacekeeping missions accounts. We are pleased also that these measures have enabled you to reimburse more promptly troop- and police contributing countries their contributions to United Nations peacekeeping operations.

We regret that it was not possible last year to agree any measures to help address the issues faced with the regular budget. We encourage the Secretary-General to come back to us in the near future with new and innovative proposals for measures that could help alleviate the liquidity challenges faced by the Secretariat and address their underlying causes.

Finally Mr Chair,

Let me reassure you that the United Kingdom remains committed to supporting the financial health of the United Nations.

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## [Secretary of State Co-Chairs Joint Ministerial Covid-19 Conference Call](#)

News story

A Joint statement following a COVID-19 virtual meeting chaired by Secretary of State and Tanaiste.



Today the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Brandon Lewis, and the Tánaiste, Simon Coveney, jointly chaired a fourth conference call, with the First Minister, the Rt Hon Arlene Foster, deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill, Health Minister Robin Swann and Minister for Health Simon Harris to discuss the ongoing response to COVID-19.

They reviewed the latest developments in the collective effort to combat COVID-19 and the ongoing cooperation between the Ministers of Health and Chief Medical Officers through the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding.

They discussed respective plans for the gradual and controlled easing of restrictions given the importance of implementing consistent approaches wherever possible and strong collaborative arrangements.

They welcomed the shared commitment to a phased approach to easing restrictions and roadmaps – recognising that these measures will need to be implemented with flexibility based on the constant monitoring of the transmission rate of the virus in communities and strong data-sharing arrangements North/South.

It was agreed that our approaches will be aimed at avoiding a second wave of the virus and that the cooperation of the public everywhere will be crucial to this in the long-term in implementing social distancing, carrying out good hand hygiene, and following self-isolation guidance for those experiencing symptoms.

They agreed to continue to meet regularly in this format, in addition to the ongoing regular engagement between Health Ministers, Chief Medical Officers and between relevant Ministers on specific issues.

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## [Environment Secretary's statement on coronavirus \(COVID-19\): 19 May 2020](#)

Good afternoon and welcome to today's briefing where I'm joined by Angela McLean, the deputy chief scientific advisor.

I want to begin by updating you on the latest data relating to the coronavirus outbreak.

\*2,772,552 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 89,784 tests carried out yesterday; \*248,818 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 2,412 cases since yesterday; \*10,025 people

are currently in hospital with the coronavirus in the UK, that's down 17% from the 11,716 this time last week; \*And sadly, of those who have tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, 35,341 have now died. That's an increase of 545 fatalities since yesterday.

And of course our thoughts are with the families of all of those who have lost their lives to this virus.

Before I turn to some of the work that Defra is doing to ensure that we are able to harvest this year's farm harvest I want to remind people of the details of the next phase of our fight against the coronavirus.

Firstly on slide one, as you can see, in order to monitor our progress we are establishing a new COVID Alert Level System, with five levels, each relating to the level of threat posed by the virus.

The alert level will be based primarily on the R value and the number of coronavirus cases.

And in turn that alert level will determine the level of social distancing measures in place.

The lower the level the fewer the measures; the higher the level the stricter the measures.

Throughout the period of lockdown, which started on March 23rd, we were at Level 4.

Thanks to the hard work and sacrifices of the British people in this lockdown, we have helped to bring the R level down and we are now in a position to begin moving to Level 3, in careful steps.

Turning now to slide two, We have set out the first of three steps we will take to carefully modify the measures, gradually ease the lockdown, and begin to allow people to return to their way of life – but crucially do this while avoiding what would be a second peak that overwhelms the NHS.

After each step we will closely monitor the impact of that step on the R value and the number of infections, and all the available data, and we will only take the next step when we are satisfied that it is safe to do so.

So in step one, as the Prime Minister announced last week:

\*Those who cannot work from home should now speak to their employer about going to work. \*People can now spend time outdoors and exercise as often as they like.

Finally, turning to slide three, having taken the first step in carefully adjusting some of the measures and our advice to people on what to do, our clear advice is to stay alert, control the virus, and save lives.

And staying alert means:

\*Staying at home as much as possible and working from home if this is possible. \*Limiting contact with other people and where contact is made with other people, keeping your distance. \*Washing your hands regularly and also staying at home and self-isolating if you or a household member show symptoms of the virus.

My final point today relates to the availability of labour this year for the farming harvest. Every year large numbers of people come from countries such as Romania and Bulgaria to take part in the harvest, harvesting crops such as strawberries, and salads and vegetables.

We estimate that probably only about a third of the people that would normally come are already here and small numbers may continue to travel. But one thing is clear and that is that this year we will need to rely on British workers to lend a hand to help bring that harvest home.

Over the last couple of months we have been working with industry on a plan to support and help people taking second jobs, particularly those who are furloughed, and we have launched a new 'Pick for Britain' website that enables people to go online, check (what job issues there are) what job availability there is and to marry up job opportunities from growers and employers with those people seeking a second job, particularly those that are furloughed.

We believe that those who are furloughed may be getting to the point that they want to lend a hand and play their part. They may be wanting to get out and they may be wanting to supplement their income with an additional job and if they do feel that way I would urge them to visit that website and to look at the opportunities that are there.

I will now turn to Angela McLean who will give you further updates on the coronavirus.