

Speech: Looking to the new year for progress to peace in Afghanistan

Thank you to the SRSG for his latest report and also to Mr Fedotov and to Ambassador Umarov for their briefings today. And thank you also, may I join other colleagues in thanking Ms Ghizaal Haress for her insights into the elections process and it's very helpful as others have said to have you here as we discuss this important issue.

Mr President I'd like to start by congratulating every Afghan who participated in October's Parliamentary elections in the face of violence and intimidation. I think they show what the Afghan Representative said but also say what the Dutch Representative said; there is a new generation of Afghans knocking on the door of a new Afghanistan. Peace needs to be durable and it needs to increase political, social and economic opportunities for every Afghan as the Afghan Ambassador makes clear. And I think that's a message that the Taliban need to hear loud and clear from all members of this Council because they live in an Afghanistan of the past and they live in an Afghanistan that no one wants to see return, and I think the Council can really help make that message understood and make it loud and clear.

And we call to that end Mr President, we do call on the Taliban to recognise that in the election the wishes of Afghans from across the country to have a say in their country's future and their strong desire for a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan have come through loud and clearly. In contrast we are forced once again to condemn the intimidation and condemn the attacks on civilians.

A number of speakers Mr President have looked forward to next year's presidential elections. It's important that the Afghan people get the transparent and credible presidential elections that they deserve next year. And there are I think, as today's debate and the report have shown, there are a number of technical and operational challenges that affect the election and which need to be ironed out, lessons learned and the necessary reforms implemented so that these issues are resolved before the next presidential elections. And I wanted in this context to welcome UNAMA's support for these efforts and their work to capture lessons learned. And as part of that process, can I urge the Mission to consider what more UNAMA could do and what additional resources UNAMA needs to strengthen support ahead of 2019 elections? And we would welcome Mr President, could I, through you, ask for an update from the UN on this issue in the new year?

Turning to peace, recent developments including the efforts of the new US Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation Ambassador Khalilzad who I used to know in this Chamber. His appointment, the creation of a High Advisory Board for Peace and the announcement of an official Afghanistan negotiation team offer a real opportunity to move the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process forward. And to give it the best chance of success, it's vital that all other peace efforts underpin Afghan efforts in a way that

reinforces the indigenous progress. And can I say that only any parallel process will simply risk undermining progress and empowering the Taleban. And I think the recent GA resolution on Afghanistan made clear that Member States in the UN want the efforts to be driven by Afghanistan and want all other efforts to reinforce the Afghan government's efforts in this respect. And it's critical that the international community gives that its full support. It's also critical that the countries in the region give it their full support.

I wanted to take a moment to commend the efforts of President Ghani and his government so far and to encourage them, as other speakers have said Mr President, to focus on inclusivity, particularly of women and youth and ensuring engagement at community levels in electoral and peace processes. And I think what Ms Haress said about women's rights and human rights is absolutely vital in this connection. It's important that we think about how we might approach supporting Afghanistan's reform and development after any peace settlement even if it seems today some time away. And today's briefing by Ambassador Umarov on the 1988 Sanctions Committee reminds us of the important role sanctions play in the pursuit of peace. But for a sanctions regime to be credible and effective it's essential that relevant procedures are followed at all times and in particular any requests for travel ban exemptions need to be submitted in a timely manner.

Others have mentioned the humanitarian situation. We join them in worrying very much about the dire situation and the food insecurity issue should only add impetus to the peace process. We call on all partners to do more, not just to respond to the current crises – particularly the ongoing drought – but to help strengthen the resilience of Afghanistan's most vulnerable people in the long term.

Mr President, I think we all know 2019 will be a critical year for Afghanistan and has a significant opportunity for progress on her path to peace and democracy. The United Kingdom is fully committed to supporting the Special Representative UN Mission in Afghanistan and the Afghan government to continue their important work to help the Afghan people, to help the government and to help the peace process.

Thank you.

[Press release: UK welcomes resolution of the political situation in Sri Lanka](#)



Following the swearing in of Ranil Wickremesinghe as Prime Minister by President Sirisena on 16 December,

Minister for Asia and the Pacific Mark Field said:

I welcome progress made towards the peaceful resolution of the political situation in Sri Lanka. The outcome is a welcome indication of the resilience of Sri Lanka's judicial and democratic institutions, and of effective checks and balances between state powers. The UK will continue to stand by Sri Lanka as a close partner and friend, supporting Sri Lanka as it works to deliver sustainable and accountable reform to reinvigorate the economy, improve governance, and safeguard human rights across the country.

UK Ministers have made a number of statements since the current outbreak of political tension in Sri Lanka on 26 October, calling on all parties to uphold the constitution and due legal and political process.

The UK is committed to supporting the Sri Lankan Government's efforts to improve the human rights situation in the country. The UK is providing Sri Lanka with £8.3 million of Conflict, Stability and Security Fund funding over three years, to include support for police reform and training, reconciliation and peace building, resettlement and demining in the north of the country.

Further information

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[**News story: UK to remain in Common**](#)

Transit Convention after Brexit

The UK is set to remain in the Common Transit Convention (CTC) after Brexit, ensuring simplified cross-border trade for UK businesses exporting their goods.

The CTC is used for moving goods between the EU member states, the EFTA countries (Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland) as well as Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia.

The UK is currently a member of the CTC while it is in the EU, and has successfully negotiated membership in its own right after Brexit. This would apply to any new trading relationship with the EU or in the unlikely event of a no deal.

Membership of the CTC will help ensure that trade moves freely between the UK and CTC members after the UK leaves the EU. It will provide cashflow benefits to traders and aid trade flow at key points of entry into the UK, as traders will only have to make customs declarations and pay import duties when they arrive at their final destination.

Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Mel Stride said:

We are a great trading nation and our goods are in demand all over the world.

That's why we are committed to ensuring that trade can continue to flow with as little friction as possible when we leave the EU.

Membership of the convention will support traders both under a new trade agreement with the EU, or in the unlikely event of no deal.

This gives businesses the continuity and certainty they need to plan for the future.

Membership of the CTC, and its supplementary convention the Convention on the Simplification of Formalities in the Trade of Goods, reduces administrative burdens on traders by removing the need for additional import/export declarations when transiting across multiple customs territories. It also provides cashflow benefits by allowing the movement of goods across a customs territory without the payment of duties until the final destination – countries who are not in the Convention would have to pay each time their goods crossed a border.

Speech: Actions on Ocean Acidification – the Other CO2 Problem – Towards Realising Sustainable Development

Distinguished guests,

It is great to be part of Oceans Action Day and this important programme of work to advance ocean issues such as ocean acidification within the climate context.

It is important we provide a clear vision and direction to mobilise the ocean agenda at the UNFCCC.

Why does it matter? Because our planet is changing, our oceans are changing too and we have the opportunity to work together, using cutting-edge science and innovative policy, to realise our ambition for the ocean.

Our seas and ocean make up around two thirds of the planet – and the UK is at the forefront of scientific research to improve our ocean observations and understanding of the marine environment.

The UK is an island nation, half of us live within 40 miles of the coast, so our lives are inextricably linked with the ocean. It is our global life-support system.

Where I represent in the UK Parliament is a constituency called Suffolk Coastal – the only constituency with the word coast in it – and we look out across the North Sea to the world with a rich marine environment supporting tourism, renewable energy and also have enterprise like fishing, Felixstowe port, which is key for transporting goods from around the world into and out of the UK.

These are the tangible relationships we have with our seas.

We see today the effect of climate change and the climate projections reflect that the challenges ahead that we see directly are stark. While the rising sea levels that risk flooding to communities and to agricultural land are obvious, we should also worry about what is happening in the depths of the ocean.

The ocean stores carbon but we are still unsure how much carbon is permanently removed from the climate system. In the past 150 years, it has absorbed half of all the carbon dioxide that human beings have generated. This has led to ocean acidification, which is happening fast and threatens marine life.

Coral reefs are being damaged by this acidification and by the rise in the temperature of the water that surrounds them. Corals provide vital habitats; they sustain some of the richest biodiversity on this planet and hundreds of

millions of people depend on them for food, fishing and tourist revenue, and protection against storms.

In the UK we are concerned by the recent special report by the Inter-Government Panel on Climate Change, specifically where the Panel predicted that even if temperature rise were limited to 1.5°C, 70% of coral reefs would disappear. With a 2°C rise, virtually all would be lost.

This is why Australia, Belize and Mauritius are leading the Commonwealth Blue Charter action plan on Coral Reef Protection and Restoration, and today I am very pleased to say that we are joining them. This action group will be a platform to promote collaborative research, workshops and seminars, showcasing successful case studies among the Commonwealth partners.

The ongoing warming of the ocean is reducing its ability to absorb carbon dioxide. Recently published work on the UK Shelf Seas highlights the key processes that maintain their status, variability and response to impacts.

The UK recently joined the International Partnership for Blue Carbon to help improve understanding of the importance of the carbon stored in our seas and coastal ecosystems and the lessons for policy in monitoring, managing and valuing these precious habitats.

Mangrove forests, which we should rebrand “blue forests”, are some of the most carbon rich and productive habitats on earth. As well as playing a critical role in supporting endangered biodiversity and carbon sequestration they have other benefits including storm protection, erosion prevention and climate change adaptation and resilience; hundreds of millions of coastal people rely on mangroves for their day to day livelihoods as they enable sustainable aquaculture.

The UK recognises that the IPBC drives vital enhancements in the understanding of, and accelerates action on, the important role that mangroves and other blue carbon ecosystems play in bringing biodiversity, climate change resilience and economic benefits.

And, this is why yesterday I announced that the UK will also join the Fiji-led Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Group on ocean and climate change to raise ambition for ocean health and climate action and restoration of carbon-sequestering ecosystems such as mangroves, coastal swamps and seagrass.

The truth is that the ocean is trying to tell us something. This is no distant threat that can be put off and dealt with later – we need to tell the story of the damage carbon emissions are having on the ocean now. We need to raise these issues and to do something about it here in Poland.

That’s the challenge to live within our carbon means and the means of our biodiversity and our ecosystems that support us.

So what can we do about it?

The UK’s commitment to the Paris Agreement and to tackling global climate change remains steadfast. The Talanoa Dialogue is a critical moment for the

world to take stock of progress and to discuss opportunities for further action. It will be vital that countries update their international commitments (NDCs) in light of the Dialogue, as well as the IPCC's 1.5 Special Report.

And to help us do that, we need the best science to turn the best understanding we have into the best steps we can take.

This is why HMG is supporting Plymouth Marine Laboratory in leading the first European hub as part of a global network to observe and assess ocean acidification and its impact upon the world's ocean.

This initiative is part of a wider research community action, the Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network (GOA-ON), which has encouraged the formation of regional hubs in North America, Latin America, Africa and the Western Pacific to collaborate on all aspects of OA monitoring research. This new hub for the NE Atlantic will complement these existing hubs and is a brilliant example of how we will continue to drive global efforts to improve ocean acidification monitoring and ensure we best understand how the ocean and marine life will adapt to these changes.

Collaboration is essential and the UK is supporting the work others are doing to coordinate on ocean observations and science through the G7 Future of the Seas and Oceans Working Group as well as initiatives such as New Zealand's Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Group on Ocean Acidification. And I am happy to announce that that the UK is joining the New Zealand-led Commonwealth Blue Charter Ocean Acidification action group.

The role of science and data was underpinned by Canada in their G7 Presidency. This matters because we need to help protect our marine environment from the multiple stresses we have put upon it.

A recent publication from The UK Marine Climate Change Impacts Partnership (MCCIP) has examined the impacts climate change will have on our unique UK habitats, from coral gardens to seagrass beds....from saline lagoons to saltmarshes and the links between plankton, fish and birds.

That is not to say that we abandon sustainable blue growth.

But we do have to stop behaving as if the riches the ocean gives us is inexhaustible. In the UK, we have committed £26.5 million to the Commonwealth Marine Economies programme to support sustainable economic growth in the most vulnerable Small Island Developing States.

We must all learn how to sustainably use and protect these precious assets. And that's why we need this Oceans Action Day to remind us of the importance of the two thirds of our world blue spaces that are just as precious as our green spaces.

Now, what we are discussing here today, is a powerful reason why we need to continue to build the momentum and raise the awareness on the relevance of ocean-related issues in the climate change realm.

Science is the spur to action but it will require a huge amount of political will. This is challenging as we balance the consequences of the carbon-based development that we've enjoyed with trying to secure these benefits for all of the world's people.

So we need:

- To build on the excellent examples of coordination to strengthen partnership working across the globe on ocean observations
- To promote our excellence in science beyond the scientific community
- To recognise the importance of ocean-climate scientific research and the role it plays in climate action

Let us work together to for a better marine environment.

That's the task facing us – you can count on the UK to work with you to achieve it.

Thank you.

[News story: Vehicle hire companies to reduce terrorism risk](#)



[The Rental Vehicle Security Scheme](#) (RVSS) is voluntary and is open to all UK hire firms who offer long and short-term rentals to consumers.

RVSS requires participating companies to meet a set of requirements included in a 10-point Code of Practice, which includes a commitment to:

- Lawfully share data and information with law enforcement
- Train staff to identify and report suspicious behaviour
- Appoint a recognised security contact
- Only accept electronic payment for all or part of the transaction

Counter Terrorism Policing, National Coordinator for Protective Security, Chief Superintendent Nick Aldworth said:

The police work closely with Government, local authorities and businesses to look for new and innovative new ways to keep people safe. Officers from the Counter Terrorism Policing network have been working with industry and Government to support the development of a security culture within the vehicle hire industry.

The introduction of the scheme shows a real commitment by industry to increase the levels of security awareness, promote the reporting of suspicious behaviours, enhance security checks and encourage support for law enforcement activity against crime and terrorism across the industry. This can only be a positive thing when helping keep people safe.

Companies are encouraged to [apply and sign up to the scheme](#).

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