

# Speech: Humanitarian situation in Syria

Before I start may I make a request to the Secretariat? It would be very helpful I think for the Council to have either a briefing or a brief account of where the OPCW, FFM and the UNDSS currently are and what their forward plans are and if there has been any delay in their getting into Douma an account of what has caused that delay. So if it were possible to have that within the next 24 hours Mr President, I would be very grateful.

Turning to the issue before us in this session, I'd like to join others in thanking the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing.

It's a pity that some speakers have used today's account of the humanitarian situation to make political points and I recall Mr. President, an English philosopher Edmund Burke who said; "It's generally a popular error to imagine that the loudest complainers for the public are those who are most anxious for its welfare." And I think that might apply rather too much today.

We're talking about Resolution 2401. I don't have the full compendium of the British government's activities on the humanitarian side in Syria but I can say that in 2017 we gave a \$160 million to the UN appeal and in 2018 we are giving \$138 million. This compares to \$5.5 million in 2017 from Russia and as far as I know zero in 2018. We are one of the top three donors to the Syrian humanitarian response plan and we are the second largest bilateral donor to the humanitarian response in Syria since 2011.

To date we have committed \$3.5 billion dollars in response to the Syria crisis and this Mr. President, is the United Kingdom's largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. We encourage all of us to do what we can to support the UN appeals and we too will be playing an active role in the Brussels conference which is to come.

Turning to Raqqa Mr. President, we welcomed the first U.N. assessment mission. The United Kingdom continues to provide humanitarian support to Raqqa and surrounding areas. Last October, we stepped up our support to north-east Syria and this was to restock hospitals and mobile surgical units. It was to provide a 145,000 medical consultations and 31,000 relief kits. This included cooking equipment and blankets and we helped improve access to clean water for 15,000 people. We are also contributing to the clearance of mines and explosives in Raqqa and we are looking at ways to provide additional support to mine clearance across Syria.

Turning to Rukban, I would like to take the opportunity to commend the government of Jordan for providing humanitarian access to the population including a distribution of essential aid and this was in January 2018. We commend the efforts of the UN humanitarian agencies who have been negotiating access from Damascus.

I would like to emphasize the right to displaced civilians in Rukban, in the so-called Berm, to protection and sustained humanitarian services and distributions. Whether these are cross-line and cross border and this is in accordance with humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law.

We urge the Regime and its backers to facilitate access for the UN and humanitarian partners to deliver desperately needed assistance to the estimated 70,000-80,000 people in Duoma and all those remaining in the Eastern Ghouta. Like other speakers Mr President, we too are concerned about the poor conditions in these camps and sites where people from Eastern Ghouta there have fled.

We look forward to a position where they can have freedom of movement and where they can be allowed to return home. In the meantime, they must be protected against regime reprisals and we have in consultations Mr President, in an earlier stage asked for more attention to be given by the UN but also by the Syrian government to giving visas to UN staff who can go in and help form a protection function.

Mr President, I had intended to speak about the political resolution and next steps but the French Ambassador has laid this out very clearly and I have nothing to add to that but to say, I wholeheartedly support what he said and I think we call on all members of the Council to rally to the notion that we should use what has happened as an opportunity to get the political process back on track.

We want to have a very good discussion of possible ways to do so. As our retreat in Sweden where we will have the benefit of a Secretary-General as well. Mr President, in closing let me end with one of Edmund Burke's more famous pleas; "All that is needed for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Mr. President, we can all do something and I hope we will use the next days wisely.

Thank you.

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## **[News story: Foreign Secretary commits £4m to democracy in the Commonwealth](#)**

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has committed £4 million to support democratic accountability in parliaments across 18 Commonwealth developing countries.

The new funding will support work with democratic institutions such as national parliaments and local authorities to help improve transparency and foster more stable, democratic societies. The programme will focus on how institutions are accountable and inclusive of all their citizens, and on

driving efforts to widen participation by women, minorities and other underrepresented groups.

**Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:**

Britain is a champion of democracy and human rights across the world.

This £4 million will bring together experiences from across the Commonwealth, making democratic institutions more accountable and more inclusive.

Standing up for democracy and human rights is not only the right thing to do, robust democracies are essential to prosperity and help create a safer, more stable and progressive world.

The Inclusive and Accountable Democracy programme will set out guidelines on how parliaments can strengthen their processes. The two-year programme will cover Commonwealth developing countries across Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

Safeguarding, promoting and defending human rights internationally is an important UK priority. This announcement follows Mr Johnson's £1 million commitment in November, to support and protect journalists and media professionals in countries where press freedom is under threat.

In addition to the Inclusive and Accountable Democracy programme the UK's Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy supports crucial frontline work across the globe.

**Notes to editor:**

- The programme will be managed by the FCO through a consortium led by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, partnering with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's UK Branch and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum.

**Further information**

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**[News story: Help for nursing students affected by loan overpayments](#)**

New measures have been put in place by the government to ensure nursing students are not unfairly penalised by the recovery of overpayments to their student loans.

Additional payments of up to £1,000 and a deferred re-payment scheme have been set up after overpayments were made to nursing students by the Student Loans Company (SLC).

The SLC will be contacting the affected students and the Department for Education has acted swiftly to put additional short-term measures in place to ensure no student nurse is disadvantaged as a result.

Affected students can apply for this additional, non-repayable, maintenance support for the rest of this academic year if they are facing hardship. The SLC has also agreed to defer the recovery of the overpaid funds until affected students have finished their courses and can afford to repay.

Universities Minister Sam Gyimah said:

My priority has been to ensure none of the affected student nurses should suffer hardship as a result of an administrative error.

These short-term, practical steps will provide immediate help for those who need it so they can concentrate on their studies and their future careers without concern.

Students who have been affected can make a claim with the Student Loans Company when they are contacted so that they can access this financial support. Affected students will be eligible for normal support as per usual in the next academic year.

Alternatively, we would encourage anyone affected to email [discretionary\\_payments@slc.co.uk](mailto:discretionary_payments@slc.co.uk)

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## **[Press release: New Director General of the Propriety and Ethics Team: Helen MacNamara](#)**

The Cabinet Secretary, with the approval of the Prime Minister, has today announced that Helen MacNamara, currently the Director General for Housing in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, will be appointed to the role of Director General, Propriety and Ethics Team in the Cabinet Office.

The role oversees the provision of advice to all government departments on standards and ethics issues, corporate governance in public bodies, and manages public appointments. The purpose of the role is to ensure the highest standards of propriety, integrity and governance within government.

Helen will take on the role in May when Sue Gray, the current Director General for the Propriety and Ethics Team, moves to the Northern Ireland Civil Service to begin her role as Permanent Secretary.

Speaking about the appointment, Sir Jeremy Heywood, the Cabinet Secretary said:

I am delighted to announce Helen's appointment to the role of Director General of the Propriety and Ethics Team. She is a highly experienced civil servant who has worked in many senior roles across government. Her appointment will bring a wealth of knowledge and understanding of how government works, that will assist her in this crucial role.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Sue Gray for her outstanding contribution. She has shown extraordinary commitment and integrity in this challenging role. She has earned huge respect and admiration across government for her wise counsel, strong leadership and excellent judgement. I wish her all the best in her next position.

Helen MacNamara said:

I am delighted to be returning to the Cabinet Office to take on this important role. I'm looking forward to building on the excellent work of Sue Gray, and supporting the Prime Minister and Cabinet Secretary in upholding the highest standards of integrity and propriety within government.

This appointment has been agreed by the Prime Minister, and follows an extensive recruitment competition.

Helen MacNamara has been Director General, Housing in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government since July 2016.

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## [News story: Gemalto awarded the new passport contract](#)

The new blue passport will be delivered under this contract and it will be the world's first carbon neutral passport. It will include a complete redesign of the inside pages that will incorporate the latest developments in secure technologies to keep ahead of forgers and fakers.

The 11.5 year contract has been awarded to Gemalto after a rigorous, fair and open competition. With a contract value of approximately £260 million this will deliver significant savings compared to the £400 million contract awarded in 2009, and provide value for money to the taxpayer.

Mark Thomson, Director General for HM Passport Office, said:

I am delighted that we have awarded the contract to design and produce the new blue passport.

I look forward to working with Gemalto to continue to deliver a world-class service to British nationals around the world, and keep the UK passport as a global leader of document security.

This passport contract will further extend Gemalto's presence in the UK, where it has operated for the last 25 years, and will add approximately 70 jobs to its existing British workforce.

They are an experienced and trusted company and work with over 40 countries around the world on their passport production. They already work with the UK government in a number of areas including the production of UK driving licenses, UK biometric residence permit cards and on e-gates at the border.

HM Passport Office would like to take the opportunity to thank all the bidders for their efforts throughout the procurement process, in particular to De La Rue with whom we look forward to continuing to work closely and successfully with for the remainder of the current contract.