

Press release: PM call with Prime Minister Morawiecki: 18 March 2018

Today the Prime Minister called Polish Prime Minister Morawiecki to discuss the use in Salisbury of a military grade nerve agent developed by Russia.

The Prime Minister said this was another example of an unacceptable pattern of aggressive Russian behaviour, and Prime Minister Morawiecki expressed his full solidarity with the UK in its response to this reckless act.

The Prime Minister thanked Prime Minister Morawiecki for his strong support and they agreed on the importance of a determined response from the European Union and the wider international community.

They looked forward to meeting and holding further discussions on this matter at this week's European Council.

Press release: Investigators from chemical weapons watchdog to arrive in UK

Independent investigators from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) will arrive in the UK tomorrow to kick off their investigation into the nerve agent used in the attempted assassinations of Mr Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury on 4 March.

The team from The Hague will meet with officials from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory and the police to discuss the process for collecting samples, including environmental ones.

These will then be despatched to highly reputable international laboratories selected by the OPCW for testing with results expected to take a minimum of two weeks.

This is the next step in the process to independently verify the analysis carried out by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down. Last Wednesday, the Prime Minister wrote to the OPCW to formally invite them to verify the Government's analysis of the nerve agent used in the Salisbury attack. Subsequently the UK's Permanent Representative to the OPCW wrote to the Technical Secretariat inviting them to come to the UK to take a sample, under Article 8 of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

It reflects the UK's commitment to fully complying with the obligations of the Chemical Weapons Convention. On 12 March the Foreign Secretary summoned the Russian Ambassador and sought an explanation from the Russian Government, as Article 9 of the convention is clear we have the right to do. We received no meaningful response. It is therefore Russia which is failing to comply with the provisions of the convention. We should resist any Russian attempts to muddy the waters.

The Foreign Secretary revealed this morning that we have information indicating that within the last decade, Russia has investigated ways of delivering nerve agents likely for assassination. And part of this programme has involved producing and stockpiling quantities of novichok. This is a violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The start of the investigation by the international chemical weapons watchdog comes as the Foreign Secretary travels to Brussels to brief foreign ministers from across the European Union on the attempted assassinations in Salisbury before meeting with the NATO Secretary General.

As the Foreign Secretary noted this morning, we have been encouraged by the international support we have received to date. More than 20 countries across 6 continents have expressed their solidarity with us and we will continue to work with our European partners and allies around the world to tackle the threat posed by Russia to our collective security.

Background

- Novichok is a nerve agent, which meets the Chemical Weapon Convention's (CWC) definition of a chemical weapon, toxic chemical and precursor. Thus it is covered by the Convention's prohibitions.
- The chemical was positively identified by world-leading experts at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down, which is one of the accredited and designated labs in the OPCW laboratory network.
- Russia is the official successor state to the USSR. As such, Russia legally took responsibility for ensuring the CWC applies to all former Soviet Chemical Weapons stocks and facilities.
- Members of the Convention must declare chemical weapons stockpiles and facilities and destroy Chemical Weapons within ten years of the convention coming into force for that party. In 1997, the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force for Russia and solidified Russian commitments to chemical weapons disarmament and non-proliferation.
- Developing, stockpiling and using chemical weapons are all a breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Press release: British businesses take centre stage on Asia's top e-tailers

Three China and Hong Kong based e-tailers – ttHigo, Goxip, and MyMM – have agreed to run free banner advertising promoting British goods on their platforms as part of the [GREAT Festival of Innovation](#). Together, they have a combined potential audience of 720 million internet users across China and Hong Kong meaning British businesses could reach millions of potential new customers.

The Department for International Trade (DIT) is amplifying these campaigns to Asian consumers across digital channels, highlighting a host of sectors where British firms lead the way.

One hundred and sixty-four leading British brands in fashion, beauty, homeware and general consumer merchandise are benefitting from this initiative, including British fashion designers such as Victoria Beckham and Vivienne Westwood to Waitrose and Wool and the Gang.

The week-long campaign will be timed to coincide with the upcoming [GREAT Festival of Innovation in Hong Kong](#) (21 to 24 March), which will showcase the best of Britain to Asia. Several hundred of the UK's most creative business and institutions will attend, with a packed programme examining how innovation and technology will change the way we live, play, and learn in the future.

International Trade Secretary, Dr Liam Fox, said:

As an international economic department, we are putting British businesses in a position to benefit from the opportunities that global markets provide and the GREAT Festival of Innovation in Hong Kong next week is just one example of this.

Demand for the UK's quality goods and services in key international markets is already growing and as we look to create our own independent trade policy for the first time in over 40 years our businesses stand ready to flourish.

At the GREAT festival of innovation, UK businesses will have the chance to meet with Asian counterparts to discuss possible trade and investment opportunities.

And the advertising deal will build on recent positive Office for National Statistics trade figures which show that trade in goods and services between the UK and Hong Kong reached £19.6bn in 2017, up 15.1% from 2016.

DIT's [E-Exporting Programme](#) helps UK retailers and brands to accelerate their global growth via e-commerce. It supports UK businesses by partnering with marketplaces to deliver online promotions, raising awareness for British exporters selling products on these platforms.

One UK business benefitting from the campaign is Little Butterfly London, a multi-award winning mother and baby beauty brand founded in 2015. Working with DIT on their export plans for the last 2 years, the brand has rapidly grown in overseas markets, including the US, Middle East, and Asia.

Gudrun Wurm, Founder and Director of Little Butterfly London, said:

Asia has been a fantastic market for us – consumers there really appreciate that our products are made in the UK, are high quality and organic certified.

We currently sell our products on various platforms including MyMM's mobile commerce app and we are delighted to be receiving increased brand awareness through the UK Government's GREAT campaign. We look forward to seeing more traction as a result of the advertising.

John Steere, President of MyMM, said:

We very much look forward to promoting UK brands among Chinese consumers as part of the GREAT Festival of Innovation. MyMM are delighted to be supporting an event which demonstrates UK excellence and seeks to drive future prosperity for UK exporters by strengthening trade links between the UK and Asia.

To complement their online campaign, ttHigo, a Chinese marketplace owned by Newegg, will run a networking session at the GREAT Festival of Innovation, as well as a global seller event for over 200 attendees in Huangzhou.

- ENDS -

The E-Exporting Programme

DIT's [E-Exporting Programme](#) helps UK companies to accelerate their global growth through e-commerce. The programme provides access to the [Selling Online Overseas tool on great.gov.uk](#). It's a free-to-use, online service that allows businesses to click, connect, prepare and sell on global marketplaces such as MyMM, Goxip and ttHigo. The tool provides access to discounts and benefits, including reduced commissions and special marketing packages.

The GREAT Festival of Innovation

The [Great Festival of Innovation Hong Kong](#) will be the third of its kind,

following successful events in Istanbul (2014) and Shanghai (2015). Its vision is to create long-term partnerships that drive the future of free trade and prosperity between the UK and Asia.

Several hundred invited delegates will attend the Hong Kong event, which takes place at the Asia Society Hong Kong Centre and will feature more than 60 panels and events over its 4 days. For more information, please visit great.gov.uk/innovation or follow the hashtag [#GREATinnovation](https://twitter.com/GREATinnovation).

The Department for International Trade

The UK's Department for International Trade (DIT) has overall responsibility for promoting UK trade across the world and attracting foreign investment to our economy. We are a specialised government body with responsibility for negotiating international trade policy, supporting business, as well as delivering an outward-looking trade diplomacy strategy.

The GREAT Campaign

The [GREAT Britain campaign](#) is the government's most ambitious international marketing campaign ever, and showcases the very best of what Britain has to offer. It aims to encourage audiences to visit, study, invest in and do business with the UK, generating jobs and growth at home. The campaign has delivered £2.7 billion of benefit to the UK economy to date, with a further £2.6 billion in the pipeline and has been commended by the National Audit Office.

[Press release: Salisbury attack: statement following British Ambassador's meeting with Russian government](#)

Our Ambassador in Moscow has just been informed by the Russian government that they will expel 23 diplomats, close the British Consulate-General in St Petersburg and close the British Council in Moscow.

This follows the action we have taken, alongside other measures, to dismantle the Russian espionage network operating in the UK as a consequence of the attempted assassination of two people here in Britain using a nerve agent.

In light of Russia's previous behaviour, we anticipated a response of this kind and the National Security Council will meet early next week to consider next steps. Our priority today is looking after our staff in Russia and assisting those that will return to the UK.

Russia's response doesn't change the facts of the matter – the attempted assassination of two people on British soil, for which there is no alternative conclusion other than that the Russian State was culpable. It is Russia that is in flagrant breach of international law and the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We have no disagreement with the people of Russia and we continue to believe it is not in our national interest to break off all dialogue between our countries but the onus remains on the Russian state to account for their actions and to comply with their international obligations.

Government response: EU consultation: questionnaire on proposed US tariff increases on certain steel and aluminium products

The Commission has today (16 March 2018) issued a consultation for stakeholders affected by the announced US tariff increases, or by the possible EU commercial policy measures that the Commission may take in response. Stakeholders should [send comments on this consultation to the Commission](#).

On 8 March the US President announced the imposition of a 25% tariff on steel and a 10% tariff on aluminium imports. These increased tariffs are expected to take effect on 23 March 2018.

Dr Liam Fox, Secretary of State for International Trade, responded to this announcement in a [statement to Parliament](#) on 12 March 2018.