

# Speech: 54th Special Session of the Executive Council

Thank you, Madam Chair,

The United Kingdom supports the statement made by the Ambassador of Malta on behalf of the European Union. I would like to make a few additional remarks.

It is a matter of huge regret that the Executive Council has to meet in extraordinary session today. This is the latest in a series of meetings the Council has held over the past four years to address the regular use of chemical weapons in Syria. At each meeting the United Kingdom, and many others, has expressed deep concern about continued chemical weapons use in Syria, and about the Syrian Government's failure to account fully for its chemical weapons programme.

What happened in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April was the worst of human acts. As we have heard, at least 72 civilians, including many children, were killed by an attack so awful that many died where they fell. Those facts are not in dispute. This was a war crime. The need to find out who was responsible, and to seek justice for the victims, is the reason we meet here today.

United Kingdom scientists have now analysed samples obtained from Khan Shaykhun. These samples have tested positive for the nerve agent sarin, or a sarin-like substance. The United Kingdom's assessment is that it is highly likely that the Syrian Government was responsible for a sarin attack on Khan Shaykhun on 4 April.

Let me explain why.

There is no evidence to suggest that any party to the conflict in Syria, other than the Syrian Government, has access to a nerve agent such as sarin. Only the Syrian Air Force has the capability to launch a chemical weapons attack from aircraft, and it has already been condemned by this Council for having used chemical weapons deployed from aircraft on at least three occasions in 2014 and 2015.

Other countries have also made assessments. The United Kingdom fully supports the United States action on 6 April, which we believe was an appropriate response to the chemical weapons attack launched by the Syrian Government, and was intended to deter further attacks.

Meanwhile the Syrian Government, and their Russian allies, have told us a simply extraordinary story of an airstrike on a jihadist chemical weapons storage facility on April 4th. We all watched the terrible news footage reporting the early morning attacks in real time, but the Syrians have told us tales of conventional air attacks at midday. Are the Syrians telling us that the people we saw dying last Tuesday morning did so before the attack took place? This is a story which is simply not credible.

Since Syria joined the Convention, in the aftermath of the Ghouta atrocity, the Syrian Government has denied scientific reality and obstructed the truth about the full extent of its chemical weapons programme. Syria and its backers claim that it has destroyed its chemical weapon stockpiles. Yet the Director General has continued to report that the OPCW cannot declare Syria's declaration of its chemical weapons programme as "accurate and complete", and that serious "gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies remain". While the Director General and the Technical Secretariat have worked tirelessly to establish the truth, Syria has failed to reciprocate. The Syrian government has provided limited information, only under pressure and when challenged with evidence that made its position untenable. Syrian engagement with the OPCW has been neither meaningful nor honest. Their supposed cooperation is a facade. The fact that the JIM has found regular Regime use of chemical weapons underscores the fact that Syria has unquestionably failed to account for, and to destroy, its whole chemical weapons programme.

Madam Chair,

It is bad enough that the Syrian government continues to deceive the international community. However, it is shocking that one country, a founding member of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the joint architect of the 2013 agreement to remove and destroy Syria's chemical weapons programme, is joining them in this deception. We saw last night Russia's 8th veto in the Security Council to protect the Syrian government. The draft resolution vetoed by Russia condemned the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and called for a full investigation. How any responsible country could object to that, is truly impossible for us to comprehend.

So what is the way forward? It is clear.

We welcome the Director General's statement this morning about the work of the Fact Finding Mission to date. He rightly tasked the FFM to begin its work on the Khan Shaykhun incident within hours of the reports coming in on 4 April. As we all know, the FFM is professional, independent and impartial, and has unparalleled technical expertise. Calls from Syria's allies, and parties to the conflict, to set up alternative investigations and new bodies are absurd. This is a blatant attempt to delay and distract from the essential task at hand. It also seeks to undermine the integrity and impartiality of the OPCW, and is frankly disrespectful to the ideals we share. The priority now is to support the Director General, and the FFM, in their investigation. When the FFM reports in the weeks ahead, the Executive Council should convene again, as we have agreed this morning, and take the necessary action on its findings. That's our responsibility under the Chemical Weapons Convention. And that's our duty to the suffering people of Syria.

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# [News story: Winners of Pensions Dashboard Techsprint revealed as FinTech Week 2017 draws to a close](#)

The event, hosted at Aviva's Digital Garage in Hoxton, brought together over 20 leading technology firms with consumer groups and industry experts to develop the best ideas for how pension dashboards can revolutionise retirement planning for ordinary pension savers.

Using the Pensions Dashboard prototype unveiled by the Pensions Dashboard Project Group on Wednesday morning as a starting point, the participants worked overnight to develop their ideas.

The winners were:

- Wobi, Sigma, Pension Portal and Pension Hub – the 'Consumer Champion' award for their personal pension timeline combined with life event nudges
- Bravura, MyFuture Now and True Potential – the 'Eureka' and 'People's Choice' awards for their 'Act Your Age' financial age comparison tool
- Digital Space, GBST, NEST, Sprint Enterprise and SSP Advisor – 'Speed-build' award for their 'Lifeline' holistic savings tool incorporating pensions alongside other finances

The TechSprint was part of [FinTech Week 2017](#) which saw thousands of firms, investors, regulators and authorities from around the globe meet in London to celebrate the UK's world leading FinTech industry.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Simon Kirby, said:

I am delighted at the success of FinTech Week 2017. It has been fantastic to see how Britain is leading the way in this crucial sector. I am clear that the government will do everything it can to help firms seize the opportunities FinTech presents as we forge a bold new role for ourselves in the world and build the highly skilled, highly productive economy we all want.

I want to congratulate the TechSprint winners on their fantastic ideas and thank everyone for taking part. It is great to see the potential FinTech has to help consumers now and in the future.

Team 'Act Your Age', the winners of two TechSprint awards, said:

A fantastic event which showed what a group of strangers can achieve in one day if they are collaborative and open. Our approach to give people more information about their pension was to keep it

simple – and keep it effective.

FinTech Week 2017 ran from Monday to Thursday with events organised by government, regulators, trade bodies and industry. It underlined the UK's status as the best place in the world to build a FinTech firm and showcased the country's most cutting-edge FinTech firms – and the impact they have on real people.

On Wednesday over 800 people attended the government's first ever International FinTech Conference. Over 100 UK FinTech firms mixed with hundreds of investors from every continent, in a bid to increase investment in the sector.

### [Video highlights of the International FinTech Conference 2017](#)

Speakers travelled from far and wide to attend the event, including Adrienne Harris, special assistant to President Obama for economic policy, flying from the United States of America.

The conference featured a series of workshops covering topics like payments, open-banking, how to co-invest with the BBB, roboadvice, cyber security and financial inclusion. It closed with 14 UK firms, including Plum, Disperse and Onfido, pitching directly to hundreds of investors on the main stage.

Opening the International FinTech Conference, Chancellor Philip Hammond highlighted the importance of exciting new sectors like FinTech and artificial intelligence in driving a modern, productive economy.

The Chancellor said:

We can't remain the number one place for FinTech and other technologies of the fourth industrial revolution by simply relying on our ingenuity, talent and openness, we have to go out and get the business.

Responsible for innovations like contactless payments, banking apps and online crowd funding, the sector is worth nearly £7 billion to the UK economy and employs over 60,000 people in the UK.

It is changing the way we bank and, thanks to Britain's entrepreneurial spirit and our world leading financial sector and regulatory environment, independent experts rank the UK as the best place to start and grow a FinTech firm anywhere in the world.

### **Further information on Pension Dashboard:**

- pension dashboards have the potential to revolutionise retirement planning by allowing people to see all of their pension savings in one place
- at the moment there is no easy way for people to see the value of all of

their pensions, with people having to track down their data themselves, locate missing records and wait for up to date estimates

- research has shown that over a third of people approaching retirement find it difficult to keep track of their pension pots and there is currently around £400 million worth of pension pots laying unclaimed
- pension dashboards should change this by helping people access their pensions information more easily

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## **News story: New maritime exam centre opens on Tyneside**

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) has officially opened the new North East Exam Centre, which is based at South Tyneside College. The centre will provide a location for Deck, Engineering and other Oral Examinations for the maritime community.

Speaking at the opening, Katy Ware, Director of Maritime Safety and Standards at the MCA said: 'The Marine School at South Tyneside College is a world-renowned centre of excellence for marine education and training, and so we are delighted that the college is now also home to this new exam centre, the first of its kind in the UK.'

'This new centre not only represents a significant change in the way the MCA delivers our Survey and Inspection responsibilities, but it also means maritime students no longer need to spend time and money travelling to a Marine Office for an examination, everything they need to get qualified is right on their doorstep.'

The Exam Centre has been opened as part of a new way of working for the MCA's Survey and Inspection, replacing the Tyne Marine Office which closed on 3rd March. Surveyors who worked at the Tyne Marine Office are now working remotely, a move which follows a period of extensive consultation in 2016

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## **Press release: Waste scam now sees Boston targeted**

This time a Boston farmer faces the cleanup bill for 250 tonnes of waste after being approached and asked if he wanted tarmac road planings that can be used to repair roads and farmyards on their land.

The Environment Agency issued a [warning last week](#) after 2 farmers in the Grantham area suffered the same fate, with one of them facing an estimated bill of £300,000 to dispose of the waste after they found baled rubbish on their land instead of the promised tarmac road plannings.

In the recent Boston case, a neighbour made the farmer aware of the scam warnings issued last week after the initial 250 tonnes of waste were left, and this ensured that no further waste was dumped on the site.

The Environment Agency is urging all landowners to be wary and not become the next victim of illegal waste disposal and dumping.

Advice from the Environment Agency includes:

- use reputable agents and brokers
- carry out suitable checks and due diligence, i.e. get the individuals details, vehicle registration, ask where the waste is coming from (address, permit number, waste carriers registration)
- inform them you'll be contacting the Environment Agency or call us whilst they are there
- don't agree to accept any waste until you have carried out some checks and had a cooling off period to fully consider the offer

Peter Stark, Senior Enforcement Officer, said:

Waste criminals can be very convincing and persuasive, sometimes offering £1000s in cash up front. Don't be tempted by quick money because you could end up with not only a massive disposal bill but also harm to the environment, flies, polluting liquids running out of bales of waste and increased risk of fire.

We will investigate the illegal waste incidents fully and take enforcement action where necessary. The recent case shows that farmers in the region are particularly at risk of this scam.

However, the landowners may have to pay significant sums to remove the waste legally. Waste crime is a serious issue diverting as much as £1 billion per annum from legitimate businesses and Treasury.

Although these specific incidents occurred in Lincolnshire, we want landowners and farmers everywhere to be vigilant.

The Environment Agency provides impartial advice to customers, individuals and businesses to help them grow. Our local officers will be happy to talk to you, can make public register checks whilst you are on the phone or you can make checks on the [GOV.UK website](#) for free, or you can call the Environment Agency's customer contact centre on 03708 506 506.

The Highways Agency and county council's highways department and their contractors will always use legitimate waste carriers and sites for the reuse or disposal of waste. They may approach farmers and landowners to see if they

want to reuse tarmac road planings or crushed rubble and concrete to repair road and yard areas, but farmers need to register the [Ul waste exemption](#) with the Environment Agency and abide by the rules.

The vast majority of waste sites that the Environment Agency regulate are well run and provide essential waste management services. The Environment Agency are there to help the legitimate businesses. Waste stored inappropriately can create issues for neighbours like smells and pests. It can also have a detrimental effect on the environment and impact on rivers and streams. There is a high risk of waste fires due to the waste not being stored in the correct manner.

Everybody has a part to play to help solve the waste crime problem and make sure waste is managed responsibly. If you see or suspect illegal waste activities, report it anonymously to [Crimestoppers](#) or call 0800 555 111.

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## [News story: Refreshed and updated guidance](#)

We've been redeveloping our guidance publications over the [past year](#) and these are now all available as online content.

They cover debt relief options, company liquidation, and investigation and enforcement.

You can visit the [index page](#) to see a collection of refreshed content including detailed and summarised guidance.