

UK statement on 3 March: Conference on Disarmament

Madam President

Thank you for convening this plenary this morning. It is a valuable opportunity to reflect on what we have heard from our high level visitors this week, and what it means for the work of our Conference.

As Lord Ahmad told this Conference on Monday, Russia's unprovoked and premeditated attack against Ukraine, a sovereign, democratic state, casts a dark shadow over our work. The ultimate objective of this Conference is to contribute to international peace and security and to prevent war. So when one member of this Conference invades another member, we cannot stay silent.

In the last week, Ukraine has suffered horrific attacks. Missiles and air strikes have torn through apartment blocks. Innocent people including children have lost their lives and the Ukrainian people have endured widespread suffering. The invading Russian armed forces have bombarded civilian targets, including residential areas. They are responsible for hundreds of civilian casualties, including growing numbers of children.

As President of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the United Kingdom is in particular gravely concerned about reports of the use of cluster munitions. More generally, we have been working closely with a large number of partners to expedite an International Criminal Court investigation into Russian war crimes in Ukraine, including its use of indiscriminate force against Ukrainian civilians.

As a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council, Russia has a particular responsibility to uphold international peace and security. Instead, it is violating the borders of another sovereign country and repudiating the principles that every country has committed to uphold. It is now vital that Russia urgently de-escalates and withdraws its troops. It must be held accountable and stop undermining democracy, global stability, and international law.

The UK and our international partners stand united in condemning the Russian government's reprehensible actions, which are an egregious violation of international law and the UN Charter and show flagrant disregard for its commitments under the Budapest Memorandum and the Minsk Agreements.

The UK stands with Ukraine and will always defend the Ukrainian people's right to choose their own destiny. We are joined in our outrage by friends and allies around the world. We will work with them – for however long it takes – to ensure that the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine is restored, and that Russia is held accountable for its aggression.

We also condemn Russia's campaign of disinformation, which has included

numerous attempts at staging false pretexts for war. Most notable amongst them for this Conference is the ridiculous claim, repeated by the Russian Foreign Minister here on Tuesday, on nuclear weapons. It is important to re-state the facts. Ukraine acceded to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1994 as a non-nuclear weapon state, and voluntarily returned to Russia the nuclear weapons that were on its territory from the time of independence from the USSR. In doing so, Ukraine received security assurances from the United States, the UK and Russia in the Budapest Memorandum against threats or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine – assurances which Russia has flagrantly disregarded. There is no evidence whatsoever that Ukraine has been developing or seeking to develop nuclear weapons, and it is shameful that the Russian government continues to conduct this sort of misinformation operation in a transparent attempt to justify the unjustifiable. No, let us be clear: this is President Putin's war of choice.

In a similar vein, Russia's false statements in the lead-up to their premeditated invasion about chemical weapons attacks being prepared by Ukraine are another example of this type of disinformation. If any country represented in this room has a track record of using, or covering for others' use of chemical weapons, it is the Russian Federation. Let me remind them that the world is watching their actions closely.

Let me now offer some reflections on the implications of these developments for our work here in the Conference on Disarmament, and in the disarmament machinery more generally.

First, as we all know, it is impossible to disentangle work on disarmament from the prevailing security environment. That cuts both ways: Russia's aggression will clearly have an impact on the security calculations of other countries. But it also makes it more important than ever for the international community to revitalise our commitment to arms control and disarmament.

That must start with consolidating and strengthening our existing frameworks, and with calling out non-compliance. This year, we very much hope to finally hold the Tenth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Ninth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention. We must seize the opportunity to strengthen both those vital Conventions.

Second, in periods of heightened international tension we must continue to build trust and reduce the risk of conflict and escalation through misinterpretation and miscalculation. Nowhere is this more important than on nuclear issues. The UK remains firmly committed to making progress with other NPT Nuclear Weapon States on disarmament and strategic risk reduction. All States Parties to the NPT recognise the "devastation that would be visited upon all mankind by a nuclear war and the consequent need to make every effort to avert the danger of such a war", as the preamble to that Treaty puts it. Reducing the risk of nuclear war is amongst the foremost responsibilities of the Nuclear Weapon States. The UK takes its responsibilities seriously and calls on the other nuclear powers to stand by

those words, and the statement we jointly adopted only two months ago, and engage seriously in efforts to reduce the risk of misinterpretation and miscalculation.

Finally, we need to look again at those areas of arms control where the rules are weakest, or where escalations are most likely to break out. For the Conference on Disarmament, there are two key areas; they are familiar, but they bear repeating. First, we must immediately commence negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. Second, it is particularly important to make progress on work to prevent an arms race in outer space in a holistic manner and avoid a narrow focus on the placement of weapons in space. The UK-led approach on responsible space behaviours aims to avoid miscalculations and escalation that could lead to conflict and ensure that our discussions and negotiations keep pace with fast-moving technology developments and includes all State threats in space and on Earth.

It is down to all of us to work together on the issues we face with a constructive attitude to secure a safe, peaceful and more prosperous world for generations to come. The Subsidiary Bodies give us a good opportunity to get into the detail of these and other related points.

For today, though, let me conclude by reiterating the UK's solidarity with the President, government and people of Ukraine in their hour of extreme need. Their courage and determination is an inspiration to us all. As yesterday's vote in the General Assembly showed clearly, the world stands with them.

Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine: UK statement, 3 March 2022

Thank you Mr Chair. We meet here today to discuss the war that Russia has unleashed against Ukraine – its sovereign and democratic neighbour. A war that was unprovoked, premeditated and entirely unjustifiable, and for which President Putin and the Russian government bear the sole, heinous responsibility.

The United Kingdom condemns in the strongest terms the Russian government's bombardment of Ukrainian villages, towns and cities. We are deeply saddened by the death of Maryna Fenina, who was killed by shelling in Kharkiv. Our thoughts are with all the victims and their families.

Since we last met in this hall on Sunday, the Russian military has intensified its use of rocket artillery, including in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Kherson and Mariupol, and as we have heard from the distinguished mayor, Zhytomyr. On the night of the 27th-28th February, the SMM reported hearing explosions and heavy shelling, including fire from multiple launch

rocket systems in areas north and north-east of Kharkiv city.

Russia's use of heavy artillery in densely populated areas is causing civilian casualties. Since Russia further invaded Ukraine last week through to the 1st March, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has reported that 227 civilians have been killed, including 15 children, and 525 injured. Tragically, the real figure is certain to be far higher.

Russia's indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on civilian areas have also affected critical civilian infrastructure. Schools and kindergartens have been damaged and residential buildings destroyed. Critical infrastructure such as gas and water supplies, fuel depots and communications, have also been affected, particularly in eastern Ukraine. UN OCHA have highlighted that the continued operation of critical hospital services is being threatened by constant power outages and the persistent risk of ambulances and health personnel being caught in the crossfire. We were appalled at the strike on the Kyiv TV tower which killed civilians and damaged the Babyn Yar Holocaust memorial. It is vital that the horrors we are witnessing in Ukraine are fully investigated and that those responsible are held to account. That is why the UK and 37 of our allies and partners have referred atrocities in Ukraine to the International Criminal Court.

Mr Chair, we are grateful to ODIHR Director Mecacci for sounding an early alarm about the human impact that Russia's attack on Ukraine is taking on civilians. We welcome ODIHR's readiness to keep monitoring the situation. This will be important for ensuring accountability, including for violations of international humanitarian law.

Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian civilians are fleeing the violence perpetrated by Russia. UNHCR estimates that nearly 900,000 Ukrainians have already fled to neighbouring countries and more than 100,000 have been displaced within Ukraine.

We reiterate the 27th February call that we, together with the Polish Chair and 44 other participating States, made on the Russian Federation to implement an immediate ceasefire to allow humanitarian aid to access those in need and prevent hostilities against civilians. International organisations, including the dedicated staff of the SMM who remain in Ukraine, must also be provided safe passage. We are deeply grateful to the Secretary General, the OSCE Secretariat, the SMM leadership and the Polish Chair for their efforts to fulfil the OSCE's duty of care towards staff in Ukraine.

We are also grateful to the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media, Teresa Ribeiro, for denouncing the Russian government's attempts to limit the information on Russia's attack on Ukraine that Russian people can receive through the media.

Despite President Putin's efforts, he and his government cannot hide the brutality of their attack on Ukraine, either from the world or from the Russian people themselves. We are deeply concerned at the arrest of thousands of peaceful protesters in Russia, including even children, simply for voicing

their opposition against this war – this is a grave violation of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. ODIHR have reported on numerous arbitrary arrests and police intimidation, with riot police on some occasions outnumbering protesters. Human rights defenders and journalists have also been arrested.

There have also been unacceptable crackdowns on protests in Belarus, whose government has dragged an unwilling people into the Russian Federation Government's war against Ukraine. We are deeply concerned at the holding of a referendum, which fell far short of any international standards of democratic best practice, on changes to the Belarusian constitution, including the dropping of Belarus' neutrality and non-nuclear status. Combined with President Putin's instruction to Russian nuclear forces to move to high alert status, this is once again elevating risk for no justifiable reason. Due to the role that Belarus is playing in facilitating Russia's further invasion of Ukraine, the UK announced on 1st March that we would be implementing the first tranches of sanctions over the conflict against Belarussian individuals and organisations. We condemn the role that Belarusian authorities have played so far and urge them to step back from this appalling path being charted by President Putin.

We are also determined to ensure that the Russian government pays the price for their appalling violation of international law and the UN Charter. This is why, the UK, together with our allies, have implemented the biggest sanctions package ever imposed against a G20 nation. And we are not alone in this. Across the world we've seen organisations from banks to oil companies, to football leagues make it clear that President Putin and his regime must be isolated from the international community for his actions. At yesterday's UN General Assembly, 141 countries voted in favour of a resolution condemning Russia's attack on Ukraine. Russia is now an international pariah.

The UK stands together with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. We will make the Russian government pay the price of its actions, and we will hold them accountable for their crimes, for as long as it takes. We do not and will never accept the Russian government's attempts to change borders or impose its influence by force.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

[Water is the most important thing there is](#)

Water is about the most important thing there is: it's essential for life and everything else. Water – its quantity and its quality – is the single biggest X factor for the state of nature. And as someone said to me a few years ago, the thing about water is that it gets everywhere. So you'd better make sure

you have the right amount, of the right quality, in the right places.

If we want to fix water we need to fix the climate

Let's start with the strategic picture. The biggest determinant of the state of our waters in fifty years won't be what the Environment Agency or Parliament or the government or the water companies do but what happens to our climate.

That's because climate change is driving heavier and more violent rainfall which is overloading our sewage systems more frequently, leading to more discharges into rivers; overwhelming urban drainage systems more often, causing more surface water flooding in our towns and cities; raising sea levels, causing higher risks of dangerous coastal flooding; washing more contaminants into our rivers, causing greater pollution; and driving hotter temperatures and lower summer rainfall, causing higher drought risk, damaging water quality and killing river wildlife.

So if we want to fix water, we need to fix the climate. The Environment Agency is playing its part in that, by regulating down the emissions of greenhouse gas that cause climate change, by helping communities adapt to its effects through building more flood defences and by helping create more resilient cities through our planning role. We are also walking the walk ourselves with our own commitment to make the EA a net zero carbon emitter by 2030.

Water quality

Water quality is a big issue.

Some things are better than they were. Largely down to tougher regulation, there are now far fewer serious pollution incidents damaging our waters than three decades ago, sewage treatment works now discharge much lower amounts of harmful chemicals into our rivers, and the bathing waters around our coasts are in the best condition they have been since we started monitoring them. As our waters have improved, nature has recovered. Otters, which were almost extinct by the 1960s due to the pesticides then in our rivers have now returned to every county of England.

Some things are flatlining. Only 14% of our rivers meet the criteria for good ecological status, and that number has stayed the same for the last several years. That's because we are still seeing too much pollution from sewage, farming, industry and road-run off. And some things are getting worse, with new threats to our waters, including microplastics and so-called forever chemicals.

How do we get our water quality to the state we want? Everyone has a role to play. The polluters – largely water companies and farmers – need to obey the law, stop polluting, and pay the full cost of cleaning up any damage they do. The politicians, the public and the media need to keep the pressure on the polluters to clean up their act. The EA and the other regulators need to regulate robustly and have the powers and resources to do so. And all of us

need to treat water better and use it wisely.

Water quantity

Water quantity – too much or too little – is an even bigger issue.

Let's start with too much. We face a growing risk of catastrophic flooding as the climate changes.

Flood defence works: last month the nation faced something we have not seen before – three named storms inside a week. While some 400 properties did sadly flood over that period, our flood defences meant that over 40,000 homes and businesses which would also have flooded did not. And nobody died. Compare that with 1953, when an East Coast storm surge killed over 300 people.

The good news is that over the last decade, while storms and rainfall have progressively worsened, we have actually seen a reduction in the numbers of properties flooded as a direct result of the government's investment in flood defence. That is why the EA is proud to have completed on time, on target and on budget our last six year flood defence building programme which has better protected 300,000 homes, and why we are now embarking on a new six year programme that is twice the size in terms of cost, more than 50% bigger in terms of the numbers of flood defence schemes we will build, and which will better protect well over 300,000 additional homes and businesses as well as a lot of national infrastructure.

But in the face of the climate emergency, building more flood defences is no longer enough on its own. The Environment Agency's new flood strategy which we launched in 2020 sets out a new approach: that in addition to continuing to reduce the risk of flooding by building and maintaining flood defences, which we will, we will also help make communities more resilient to flooding when it does happen so lives are not endangered and life can get back to normal quickly afterwards.

We are doing that through our own flood schemes, which also now include property level protection and natural flood management to slow the flow of water and the impact of flooding; by working with water companies and other utilities and with partners like Network Rail and National Highways to help make the country's infrastructure more resilient; and through our statutory planning role by helping design and build places which are resilient to flooding and other climate shocks.

But the biggest of all risks is not too much water but too little. This is about avoiding what I have called The Jaws of Death: the point on water companies' planning charts some 20 years from now when if we don't intervene, the demand for water in this country will outstrip supply. We face that risk due to a toxic combination of the changing climate making water supply more erratic and increasing demand as our population grows.

There's good news here too. We know how to avoid the jaws of death: reduce demand by using less water more efficiently; and improve supply, including by

investing in the right infrastructure. And we have a plan to do that: an initiative the Environment Agency has launched with the water companies, the other regulators and the government, called the National Framework for Water Resources.

This includes hard targets which the water companies have pledged to meet: that the risk of needing severe water restrictions will be limited to no more than 0.2% in any given year; that we will get water consumption down to 110 litres of water per person per day from the current average of 150 litres or more; that water companies will halve leakage, which currently loses around 20% of water put into the public water supply; and develop new supplies through reservoirs and transfers. We are working with the water companies, the other regulators and the government to ensure all this gets done. It's vital that it does, because while good water quality is essential, the right water quantity is existential.

HMRC customers have one month left to switch their Post Office card account

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is reminding about 7,500 tax credits, Child Benefit and Guardian's Allowance customers they have just one month left to switch their Post Office card account.

HMRC will stop making payments to Post Office card accounts after 5 April 2022 so customers must notify HMRC of their new account details, so they don't miss out on vital payments.

In November 2021, HMRC extended the deadline to the end of the financial year. The one-off extension to the contract meant customers could temporarily continue to receive their payments into their Post Office account, giving them extra time to set up new accounts and notify the department.

Nearly 138,800 customers have already switched their accounts and provided HMRC with updated bank account details. Time is running out for the remaining 7,500.

Customers can choose to receive their benefit payments to a bank, building society or credit union account. If they already have an alternative account, they can contact HMRC now to update their details.

Myrtle Lloyd, HMRC's Director General for Customer Services, said:

We want to make sure that no customer misses out on the benefit payments they are entitled to. If you still need to switch your Post Office card account, contact HMRC to update your bank account

details by 5 April.

Child Benefit and Guardian's Allowance customers can use their Personal Tax Account to provide revised account details, [change their bank account details via GOV.UK](#) or by contacting the Child Benefit helpline on 0300 200 3100. Tax credits customers can [change their bank account details](#) by contacting the tax credits helpline on 0345 300 3900. If customers cannot open a bank account, they should contact HMRC.

If a customer misses the 5 April deadline, their payments will be paused until the customer notifies HMRC of their new account details.

The Money Helper website, provided by the Money Advice and Pensions Service, offers information and advice about [how to choose the right current account](#) and [how to open an account](#).

HMRC has been contacting customers recently to encourage them to take action and will continue to contact them to remind them.

HMRC has been writing to affected customers since October 2019 to notify them that their Post Office card accounts will be closing, urging them to take action so their payments are not affected.

The agreement enabling HMRC to make payments into Post Office card accounts was due to end on 30 November 2021. HMRC agreed a one-off extension with the Post Office to temporarily continue making payments into HMRC customers' accounts until 5 April 2022.

[Change to pre-2012 income contingent \(ICR\) student loans interest rate](#)

News story

The Department for Education (DfE) has announced a change to the pre-2012 income contingent (ICR) student loans interest rate.



Pre-2012 income contingent (ICR) student loans have an interest rate of either RPI (from the March prior to the September when the new interest rates are implemented) or the Bank Base Rate + 1%, whichever is the lower (this is known as the “low interest cap”). The low interest cap mechanism means that the interest rate on Plan 1 loans may change in-year, if the Bank Base Rate changes.

On 3 February, the Bank Base Rate changed to 0.5%. This means that the Bank Base Rate + 1% is now 1.5%.

In line with this, from 3 March 2022 the interest rate for pre-2012 ICR loans will increase to 1.5%.

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