Press release: We need to think differently on cancer to save even more lives says Sir Harpal Kumar at MHRA annual lecture

Updated: Added video of the full annual lecture.

Speaking at the 13th Annual Lecture organised by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency in London tonight, Sir Harpal Kumar, the former CEO of Cancer Research UK outlined his vision for cancer care in the future.

He said earlier diagnosis would enable the UK to catch-up with its international counterparts in terms of survival rates and would also make the NHS more efficient.

Sir Harpal said he would like to see an end to the unacceptable variation in cancer treatment that exists in the UK, whereby some patients have long waits for appointments or tests, depending on where they live.

He also wants to see an improvement in the relationship between research and the NHS so patients receive new treatments much quicker.

Citing recent Cancer Research UK research, Sir Harpal said the evidence showed around 60% of doctors felt they'd experienced a barrier to adopting a new treatment, rising to 83% amongst oncologists, with money being the most frequent barrier.

In his speech to an audience of clinicians and healthcare leaders, he made reference to the ageing population meaning in the next decade, there is likely to be an increase in the total number of deaths from cancer in the UK. Last year, more than 162,000 deaths were cancer-related, representing 28% of all deaths in the UK.

Sir Harpal Kumar said:

> We have the potential to transform outcomes for many thousands of cancer patients, based on what we know now, even if there were no more research.
>
> We have to think and act differently. If we cracked earlier diagnosis, it wouldn't just enable us to catch up with our international counterparts, through the thousands of lives saved. It would also mean a huge increase in NHS efficiency.

Dr Ian Hudson, MHRA's Chief Executive, said:

> As a regulator, we know the important role that research and development plays in bringing new treatments to patients.
>
> Given the ageing population, our work is even more vital to help transform outcomes for many thousands of patients – including cancer patients – to help make sure new and innovative treatments are made available to patients at the earliest, safest opportunity.

MHRA Annual Lecture 2018 – Medical innovation and the battle against cancer

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Office hours are Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 5pm. For real-time updates including the latest press releases and news statements, see our Twitter channel at https://www.twitter.com/mhrapress

Notes to Editor

1. The MHRA Annual Lecture is the Agency's flagship event bringing together more than 200 senior domestic and international leaders from medicine, government, industry, academia, third sector and world health institutions. This year's event took place on 17 October at the Royal Institution, in London.

2. Each year the lecture is delivered by internationally renowned experts to bring their perspective on topics of global importance. This year, Sir Harpal Kumar, ex-CEO of Cancer Research UK delivered a lecture titled "Medical Innovation and the battle against cancer: is the health system keeping pace?" His lecture follows those by Dr Jeremy Farrar, Wellcome Trust, in 2017, Dr Margaret Chan, World Health Organisation, in

2016, and Dr Dan Hartman, Gates Foundation, in 2015.

News story: Surface water: The biggest flood risk of all

Introduction

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What surface water flooding is

I suspect that very few of you signed up to attend this conference on surface water management in order to find out what surface water flooding is. But I'm pretty sure that most the people outside this hall, the general public to whom this speech is also directed, won't. So for them, surface water flooding is what happens when there is too much rain for the drains and the streets fill with water.
This doesn't sound that threatening. Gene Kelly danced through a minor surface water flood in Singing In The Rain. Who doesn't love that?

Why it matters: surface water flooding is a real and growing threat

But the reality of surface water flooding is not nearly as cheerful as the movie. It is a real and growing threat – to life, to property, to the economy, to the country.

Surface water flooding is a risk because of its reach. Of all the flood risks to which our rainy island is subject – from coasts, rivers, groundwater, sewers and surface water – it is surface water flooding which threatens more people and properties than any other form of flood risk. Over 3 million properties in England are at risk of surface water flooding, even more than those at risk from rivers and the sea (2.7 million).
Surface water flooding is a risk because of its effect. It hits not just individual homes and businesses, but the whole infrastructure – road, rail, utilities etc – of a town or city, disrupting pretty much all aspects of modern life.

Surface water flooding is a risk because people don't know it is a risk. If

you don’t live near a river or the sea, it’s not wholly unreasonable to think that you are not at risk of flooding. But reasonableness isn’t the point. Leon Trotsky once said: “you may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you”. Well, you may not be interested in surface water flooding, but it is interested in you. And people who don’t know they are at risk are less well prepared to cope when the risk materialises.

Surface water flooding is a risk that tends to fall particularly on communities that can least afford it. Urban areas are more susceptible, because they have more concrete. Poor urban areas with high density housing are the most susceptible of all, because there are a lot of people and a lot of paved drives and parking spaces which don’t absorb the rainwater, not big surburban lawns which do.

Surface water flooding is a risk which doesn’t just affect our own country. The flash flood in Majorca last week, which tragically killed two British nationals, was a surface water event. The Dutch, who have been so successful in fighting sea flooding and are rightly regarded as world leaders in the field, are themselves struggling to manage a serious surface water risk building behind their mighty sea walls.

Most important of all, surface water flooding is a risk which is growing. An increasing population means more people are at risk. An increasingly urban population means more people are in cities, where the effects are starker. Development means more concrete, which means fewer places for rainwater to drain safely away. And the more frequent and intense rainfall which climate change is bringing will make flash flooding and overloading of the sewer network more likely and more frequent. That is why the government decided for the first time in 2016 to include surface water flooding on the national risk register.

Imagine this. It’s another beautiful hot summer day in the South East. Gradually it turns humid, with thunderclouds building up over central London. Then the clouds burst with astonishing intensity. Within minutes water is overwhelming the drainage system. The underpasses start to fill up and the roads become impassable. The Tube stops running as parts of it flood. The city starts to grind to a halt. Then the power goes out. It’s dark, and water starts coming into thousands of homes. It is inches not feet in most places. But in parts of the city it pours into basements, where it’s several feet deep, and people start to drown.

This nightmare could happen. London is prone to high intensity thunderstorms and has an ageing Victorian sewer system. A smaller version did happen, in Hampstead in 1975 when in a localised thunderstorm it got more than three months of rain in three hours. Four of London’s main-line railway stations were flooded and closed. Much of the Underground was brought to a standstill as tunnels were inundated and the electrics failed. 250 people were made homeless. One day, a much bigger rainfall event than that will happen somewhere in this country. We need to be ready.

The story so far: Pitt and after

The 2007 summer floods were a wake up call for all of us. They left 13 people dead, 44,600 homes flooded and £3bn damage. The rescue effort was the biggest in peacetime Britain. That event led to the 2008 Pitt Review, which concluded that much of the flooding had arisen not from rivers over-topping but from surface water pouring off the land.

The Pitt review led to the Flood and Water Management Act (2010), which provided clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the Environment Agency, local authorities, water and sewerage companies and others who manage flood risks. It gave the EA responsibility for the strategic overview of flood and coastal erosion in England and powers to manage that risk, which we exercise with our direct responsibility for managing the risk of coastal and main river flooding. And it established Lead Local Flood Authorities (the unitary authority or county council), responsible for managing flood risk from surface water, groundwater, and ordinary watercourses in their areas.

The Environment Agency has made many changes in the light of the Pitt review:

We now give people better information so they can see whether they are at risk. In 2008, we produced the first map of areas at higher risk from surface water flooding. In 2013 we produced the Risk of Flooding from Surface Water maps. Check out whether your own house is at risk online.
We have improved how we forecast flooding. In 2009 the Environment Agency and Met Office jointly established the Flood Forecasting Centre. It provides a 24/7 flood forecasting service to the Environment Agency, the Government and the emergency responders.

We have completely overhauled how we warn and inform people of an imminent flood risk. Over 1.4 million people can now receive direct warnings from our flood warning service. We automatically register properties with landlines and mobile operators.

We've upgraded how we respond when flooding threatens, to deploy more people more quickly to more places to help. We've invested in new kit, including 40km of temporary flood barriers, 250 high volume pumps, and 4 incident response vehicles. We now have 6,500 staff trained to respond to incidents. And we regularly exercise with the military to ensure that we can call on their support when required.
And by the way, in responding to a flooding incident we don't distinguish between surface water flooding (the local authorities' responsibility) and river flooding (ours). To the public it is all water, and there is anyway often a mix of both kinds of flooding when it rains. So we will turn out to help local authorities with significant surface water flooding if they need us.

We are making record levels of investment in flood defence construction projects: £2.6 billion to better protect 300,000 homes by 2021.

We've changed how we deliver those flood defence projects. We now work in

partnership with local authorities, businesses, the water companies, and local people to design and deliver the schemes that work for those local communities.

That includes schemes which reduce surface water flood risk. For example, the £14m Willerby and Derringham Flood Alleviation Scheme completed in 2016, led by East Riding of Yorkshire Council and Hull City Council. It better protects approximately 8,000 homes and 200 businesses from surface water flooding through a series of lagoons for rainwater storage. These lagoons resemble flat pasture and for the majority of the time will remain dry, only to be filled during severe wet weather.

We've also taken up the Pitt Review recommendation that we improve the way we work with natural processes. Using nature to help manage flood risk, and adopting greener approaches to engineering, can help us to achieve better reduction of flood risk and create better habitats for wildlife and greater beauty for people.

The future: the challenges and how to meet them

So things are better than they were. But we cannot afford complacency. Because as all of us seek to improve our performance, the future challenges are growing. The challenge of climate change, which will bring more extreme rainfall. The challenge of development, which requires us to build more houses, all of which have potential to increase the risk of surface water flooding. The challenge of constructing modern infrastructure which does not increase the risk of surface water flooding and is more resilient to it when it happens.
How do we meet those challenges? By pressing all the buttons that are available to us, and by doing it together.

Pressing all the buttons means several things:

It means improving how we manage surface water now. Defra's Surface Water Management Action Plan (published in July 2018) seeks to strengthen the current arrangements by improving our collective understanding of the risks and helping those responsible to manage them effectively. It promotes better partnership working across all the flood risk management authorities, better risk assessments, better data sharing, and better guidance. We in the Environment Agency will help take this forward by leading work to produce a national picture of skills and capability in our risk management authorities, by giving guidance on asset registers, and by putting in place mechanisms to allow better sharing of data and communication of forecasts.

It means thinking about how we should manage surface water flood risk in future. Michael Gove recently commissioned a review of the Multi Agency Flood Plans produced by the Local Resilience Forums. Major General Tim Cross led that review and reported this summer. He underlined the need for the Environment Agency, the local authorities and the emergency responders to work even more closely together in the Local Resilience Forums to plan for and respond to surface water flooding and other local flood events. We in the EA agree with that, and will redouble our efforts over the coming months.

It means improving our forecasting, so that communities get more accurate and earlier warning when flooding threatens. Our flood forecasting is now much better than it was even a few years ago. We can usually predict coastal flooding like an East Coast storm surge 2-5 days before it arrives; and river flooding 12-48 hours before. But surface water flooding is the hardest of all to predict, and at present is sometimes just not possible at all. We can predict that there will be thunderstorms in a particular area. But precisely where the rain will fall, the duration and the effect on the ground often can't be predicted until it's happened. Getting better at this is a huge technical challenge. But we are working with our partners to make progress.
It means designing resilience into our towns and cities. Part of this is about Sustainable Drainage Systems, which can make communities more resilient to surface water flooding and deliver a host of other benefits – public spaces with more green and blue; more beautiful surroundings in which people can live, work and play; enhanced habitat for wildlife, greater biodiversity, improved water quality, and so on. The EA is working with developers, local authorities and the water companies to support the integration of SUDs into as many locations as possible, and I have seen some great examples.

One of my favourites is Slough Salthill Park SUDS, a project which the EA supported with the local school, the local authority and Thames Water. Together we turned part of an inner city school's playing field into a sustainable drainage lake, filled with plants and animals. It was a win for everyone. It reduced flood risk to Slough. It helped Thames Water: like other water companies, they don't want any more water than necessary going into the main drains, because that risks flooding and/or sewage contamination. Most of all, it gave those schoolchildren a first hand and now permanent experience of nature.

But designing in resilience is about a lot more than SUDs. It means starting far upstream in the planning process so that new developments are themselves laid out in ways which reduce surface water and other risks. Milton Keynes is a good example – a city that was planned to be decentralised, without high concentrations of concrete in one centre with the attendant risks, with green and blue spaces designed in where they already existed and new ones created where not. All over the country now we are working with developers and local authorities to seek to emulate that.

It means innovation and new technology. Engineers, inventors, housebuilders, the construction companies, those who design utilities and all the other things which contribute to or can suffer from surface water flooding, all have a part to play.

It means recognising that some of the causes of surface water flooding are neither urban nor to do with concrete. The wrong kind of farming in the wrong place can cause significant surface water flooding. Example: Maize. There has been a dramatic increase in maize production over the last few years, primarily to feed Anaerobic Digestion plants. The problem with maize is that it's harvested in late autumn, when the ground is wet. This, combined with the use of heavy harvesting machinery, tends to compact the soil. And compacted soil can't absorb rainwater, which causes surface water runoff, which in turn can cause local flooding and pollute watercourses.

It means mitigating climate change. There is a direct connection between chaos on the streets of Birmingham or Newcastle, both of which have been affected by major surface water flooding events in recent years, and man-made climate change. This is not a speech about climate change. (That was last month, if you are interested). But the more we can stop the activities that cause climate change, the easier we will make it to tackle the greater flood risk it will otherwise generate.

Finally, there is one more button we need to press if we are to tackle the surface water flooding issue: public awareness. If people know they are at risk they are more likely to do something about it, whether that means ensuring they put in property level protection in their own house, or encouraging their local council to ensure that the risks are mitigated. So just talking about surface water flooding, letting people know it exists and has consequences, as we are doing today, is an important part of the mitigation.

Conclusion

A wise environmentalist once said to me: “The thing about water is that it gets everywhere“. This is a simple but profound truth. Water does get everywhere, and when it gets where it’s going there are always consequences, good or bad.

So if there is somewhere you don’t want water to be, like people’s houses or the local supermarket, a community centre, a power station, a railway line, an underpass or a road, you’d better make sure that you have the right measures to stop it going where it wants to go.

Today’s event, and the debate I’m sure it will launch, is an important step in thinking through together how we can ensure water only goes where we want it. I wish you all well in your deliberations. Because this really, really matters.

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Surface water flooding is a risk because people don't know it is a risk. If you don't live near a river or the sea, it's not wholly unreasonable to think that you are not at risk of flooding. But reasonableness isn't the point. Leon Trotsky once said: "you may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you". Well, you may not be interested in surface water flooding, but it is interested in you. And people who don't know they are at risk are less well prepared to cope when the risk materialises.

Surface water flooding is a risk that tends to fall particularly on communities that can least afford it. Urban areas are more susceptible, because they have more concrete. Poor urban areas with high density housing are the most susceptible of all, because there are a lot of people and a lot of paved drives and parking spaces which don't absorb the rainwater, not big surburban lawns which do.

Surface water flooding is a risk which doesn't just affect our own country. The flash flood in Majorca last week, which tragically killed two British nationals, was a surface water event. The Dutch, who have been so successful in fighting sea flooding and are rightly regarded as world leaders in the field, are themselves struggling to manage a serious surface water risk building behind their mighty sea walls.

Most important of all, surface water flooding is a risk which is growing. An increasing population means more people are at risk. An increasingly urban population means more people are in cities, where the effects are starker. Development means more concrete, which means fewer places for rainwater to drain safely away. And the more frequent and intense rainfall which climate change is bringing will make flash flooding and overloading of the sewer network more likely and more frequent. That is why the government decided for the first time in 2016 to include surface water flooding on the national risk register.

Imagine this. It's another beautiful hot summer day in the South East. Gradually it turns humid, with thunderclouds building up over central London. Then the clouds burst with astonishing intensity. Within minutes water is overwhelming the drainage system. The underpasses start to fill up and the roads become impassable. The Tube stops running as parts of it flood. The city starts to grind to a halt. Then the power goes out. It's dark, and water starts coming into thousands of homes. It is inches not feet in most places. But in parts of the city it pours into basements, where it's several feet deep, and people start to drown.

This nightmare could happen. London is prone to high intensity thunderstorms and has an ageing Victorian sewer system. A smaller version did happen, in Hampstead in 1975 when in a localised thunderstorm it got more than three

months of rain in three hours. Four of London's main-line railway stations were flooded and closed. Much of the Underground was brought to a standstill as tunnels were inundated and the electrics failed. 250 people were made homeless. One day, a much bigger rainfall event than that will happen somewhere in this country. We need to be ready.

The story so far: Pitt and after

The 2007 summer floods were a wake up call for all of us. They left 13 people dead, 44,600 homes flooded and £3bn damage. The rescue effort was the biggest in peacetime Britain. That event led to the 2008 Pitt Review, which concluded that much of the flooding had arisen not from rivers over-topping but from surface water pouring off the land.

The Pitt review led to the Flood and Water Management Act (2010), which provided clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the Environment Agency, local authorities, water and sewerage companies and others who manage flood risks. It gave the EA responsibility for the strategic overview of flood and coastal erosion in England and powers to manage that risk, which we exercise with our direct responsibility for managing the risk of coastal and main river flooding. And it established Lead Local Flood Authorities (the unitary authority or county council), responsible for managing flood risk from surface water, groundwater, and ordinary watercourses in their areas.

The Environment Agency has made many changes in the light of the Pitt review:

We now give people better information so they can see whether they are at risk. In 2008, we produced the first map of areas at higher risk from surface water flooding. In 2013 we produced the Risk of Flooding from Surface Water maps. Check out whether your own house is at risk online.
We have improved how we forecast flooding. In 2009 the Environment Agency and Met Office jointly established the Flood Forecasting Centre. It provides a 24/7 flood forecasting service to the Environment Agency, the Government and the emergency responders.

We have completely overhauled how we warn and inform people of an imminent flood risk. Over 1.4 million people can now receive direct warnings from our flood warning service. We automatically register properties with landlines and mobile operators.

We've upgraded how we respond when flooding threatens, to deploy more people more quickly to more places to help. We've invested in new kit, including 40km of temporary flood barriers, 250 high volume pumps, and 4 incident response vehicles. We now have 6,500 staff trained to respond to incidents. And we regularly exercise with the military to ensure that we can call on their support when required. And by the way, in responding to a flooding incident we don't distinguish between surface water flooding (the local authorities' responsibility) and river flooding (ours). To the public it is all water, and there is anyway often a mix of both kinds of flooding when it rains. So we will turn out to help local authorities with significant surface water flooding if they need us.

We are making record levels of investment in flood defence construction projects: £2.6 billion to better protect 300,000 homes by 2021.

We've changed how we deliver those flood defence projects. We now work in partnership with local authorities, businesses, the water companies, and local people to design and deliver the schemes that work for those local communities.

That includes schemes which reduce surface water flood risk. For example, the £14m Willerby and Derringham Flood Alleviation Scheme completed in 2016, led by East Riding of Yorkshire Council and Hull City Council. It better protects approximately 8,000 homes and 200 businesses from surface water flooding through a series of lagoons for rainwater storage. These lagoons resemble flat pasture and for the majority of the time will remain dry, only to be filled during severe wet weather.

We've also taken up the Pitt Review recommendation that we improve the way we work with natural processes. Using nature to help manage flood risk, and adopting greener approaches to engineering, can help us to achieve better reduction of flood risk and create better habitats for wildlife and greater beauty for people.

The future: the challenges and how to meet them

So things are better than they were. But we cannot afford complacency. Because as all of us seek to improve our performance, the future challenges are growing. The challenge of climate change, which will bring more extreme rainfall. The challenge of development, which requires us to build more houses, all of which have potential to increase the risk of surface water flooding. The challenge of constructing modern infrastructure which does not increase the risk of surface water flooding and is more resilient to it when it happens. How do we meet those challenges? By pressing all the buttons that are available to us, and by doing it together.

Pressing all the buttons means several things:

It means improving how we manage surface water now. Defra's Surface Water Management Action Plan (published in July 2018) seeks to strengthen the current arrangements by improving our collective understanding of the risks and helping those responsible to manage them effectively. It promotes better partnership working across all the flood risk management authorities, better risk assessments, better data sharing, and better guidance. We in the Environment Agency will help take this forward by leading work to produce a national picture of skills and capability in our risk management authorities, by giving guidance on asset registers, and by putting in place mechanisms to allow better sharing of data and communication of forecasts.

It means thinking about how we should manage surface water flood risk in future. Michael Gove recently commissioned a review of the Multi Agency Flood Plans produced by the Local Resilience Forums. Major General Tim Cross led that review and reported this summer. He underlined the need for the Environment Agency, the local authorities and the emergency responders to

work even more closely together in the Local Resilience Forums to plan for and respond to surface water flooding and other local flood events. We in the EA agree with that, and will redouble our efforts over the coming months.

It means improving our forecasting, so that communities get more accurate and earlier warning when flooding threatens. Our flood forecasting is now much better than it was even a few years ago. We can usually predict coastal flooding like an East Coast storm surge 2-5 days before it arrives; and river flooding 12-48 hours before. But surface water flooding is the hardest of all to predict, and at present is sometimes just not possible at all. We can predict that there will be thunderstorms in a particular area. But precisely where the rain will fall, the duration and the effect on the ground often can't be predicted until it's happened. Getting better at this is a huge technical challenge. But we are working with our partners to make progress.
It means designing resilience into our towns and cities. Part of this is about Sustainable Drainage Systems, which can make communities more resilient to surface water flooding and deliver a host of other benefits – public spaces with more green and blue; more beautiful surroundings in which people can live, work and play; enhanced habitat for wildlife, greater biodiversity, improved water quality, and so on. The EA is working with developers, local authorities and the water companies to support the integration of SUDs into as many locations as possible, and I have seen some great examples.

One of my favourites is Slough Salthill Park SUDS, a project which the EA supported with the local school, the local authority and Thames Water. Together we turned part of an inner city school's playing field into a sustainable drainage lake, filled with plants and animals. It was a win for everyone. It reduced flood risk to Slough. It helped Thames Water: like other water companies, they don't want any more water than necessary going into the main drains, because that risks flooding and/or sewage contamination. Most of all, it gave those schoolchildren a first hand and now permanent experience of nature.

But designing in resilience is about a lot more than SUDs. It means starting far upstream in the planning process so that new developments are themselves laid out in ways which reduce surface water and other risks. Milton Keynes is a good example – a city that was planned to be decentralised, without high concentrations of concrete in one centre with the attendant risks, with green and blue spaces designed in where they already existed and new ones created where not. All over the country now we are working with developers and local authorities to seek to emulate that.

It means innovation and new technology. Engineers, inventors, housebuilders, the construction companies, those who design utilities and all the other things which contribute to or can suffer from surface water flooding, all have a part to play.

It means recognising that some of the causes of surface water flooding are neither urban nor to do with concrete. The wrong kind of farming in the wrong place can cause significant surface water flooding. Example: Maize. There has been a dramatic increase in maize production over the last few years, primarily to feed Anaerobic Digestion plants. The problem with maize is that

it’s harvested in late autumn, when the ground is wet. This, combined with the use of heavy harvesting machinery, tends to compact the soil. And compacted soil can’t absorb rainwater, which causes surface water runoff, which in turn can cause local flooding and pollute watercourses.

It means mitigating climate change. There is a direct connection between chaos on the streets of Birmingham or Newcastle, both of which have been affected by major surface water flooding events in recent years, and man-made climate change. This is not a speech about climate change. (That was last month, if you are interested). But the more we can stop the activities that cause climate change, the easier we will make it to tackle the greater flood risk it will otherwise generate.

Finally, there is one more button we need to press if we are to tackle the surface water flooding issue: public awareness. If people know they are at risk they are more likely to do something about it, whether that means ensuring they put in property level protection in their own house, or encouraging their local council to ensure that the risks are mitigated. So just talking about surface water flooding, letting people know it exists and has consequences, as we are doing today, is an important part of the mitigation.

Conclusion

A wise environmentalist once said to me: “The thing about water is that it gets everywhere“. This is a simple but profound truth. Water does get everywhere, and when it gets where it’s going there are always consequences, good or bad.

So if there is somewhere you don’t want water to be, like people’s houses or the local supermarket, a community centre, a power station, a railway line, an underpass or a road, you’d better make sure that you have the right measures to stop it going where it wants to go.

Today’s event, and the debate I’m sure it will launch, is an important step in thinking through together how we can ensure water only goes where we want it. I wish you all well in your deliberations. Because this really, really matters.

Speech: Calling on the Syrian Authorities to Engage with the UN and the Broader Political Process

Thank you very much Mr President. Thank you Special Envoy for your briefing and for all the work that you and your teams do on the ground. I learn with

personal regret of your intention to move on, much as I understand the reasons, and I'll come back to that if I may. But I think this Council and all the United Nations owe you a tremendous debt because you have stuck with one of the most difficult portfolios that I think any representative of the Secretary-General can have in any conflict, and you've done it for four long years, so we thank you very much for that. And as I say, I'll come back to that later.

The war itself of course has gone on even longer than your tenure. I think you're the third Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and the war has gone on for seven very long, very gruesome, very awful years for the Syrian people.

And I'll start with Idlib. Idlib is a terribly important moment because three million civilians remain at risk there and we salute the work that the Turkish government have done, working with the Russians, to get the current situation in Idlib under control. And if I can quote the Emergency Relief Coordinator; we hope that it is a reprieve and not a stay of execution. But I think everyone on the Council remains fearful that the delivery agreement won't hold. So I think my first point is that this Council should do everything it can to support you and support Turkey in having that Idlib agreement be preserved.

Secondly, as the French ambassador said, the humanitarian situation still remains very difficult and very challenging. There has been progress in certain areas but it is not the case that aid is going to all the people who truly are in need. And so we also call upon everyone and the Council to redouble efforts to support OCHA, the ICRC and others in getting aid through. And we call on the Russian and Syrian governments to ensure that the aid gets delivered on the basis of impartiality and need.

As you said Special Envoy, Idlib does represent not only the potential salvation of three million civilians, but also a window of opportunity on the peace process, and my American and French colleagues set out very clearly how that might be taken forward. And I just want to add the United Kingdom's voice to what they said. You have described, Special Envoy, exactly how the Constitutional Committee should be constituted, how it might work, what sorts of things it could look at. Now under 2254, this was supposed to have all been set up within six months. And frankly, I think on our side, it beggars belief that the Syrian government cannot work with what you have set out. And I agree with the American representative that the fact that the Syrian government cannot work with the Constitutional Committee as you have set out calls into question either Russian good faith in brokering that deal at Sochi in the first place or it shows that the Russian government does not have power and influence in Syria. And I think both of those two things are quite dangerous for the potential of the Syrian political process and I think we should spend some time thinking through the consequences of there being no progress at all on the Constitutional Committee. And even at this stage, we would appeal to the Syrian authorities to make every conceivable effort to work with the UN to bring the Constitutional committee into being on the lines you have set out to set out. We completely agree with you and the Secretary-General; the UN cannot be involved in this charade. This

Constitutional Committee must be a genuinely credible and representative process.

As the French ambassador said, it isn't the only part of the political process. It isn't a threat to Syria's sovereignty or her territorial integrity or her unity to work with the United Nations on a broader political process. All the experience of this Council, over very many decades, but in recent times from the Balkans to Africa to the Middle East, shows that when you have conflict as divisive and as awful and as damaging as the Syrian conflict has been for the last seven years, you need to have a representative political process if you want a country to be stable, if you want it to be coherent and above all, if you wish to reintegrate back into the international community. And I assume that the Syrian people really want those things.

So we take the opportunity today to call on the Syrian authorities to put aside self-interest and to engage with the United Nations and the broader political process. We call on them to ensure sustained humanitarian access as I said earlier, but we also call on them to put an end to policies and practices that create obstacles for displaced people and refugees returning home and rebuilding their lives. And we call on them to start progress towards creating a safe and neutral environment in which all of Syria's communities, regardless of religion or ethnicity, can thrive and be fairly represented.

Moving on to your visit to Damascus, I hope that you go with the Council's full support in delivering the Secretary-General's clear and direct message to the Syrian authorities.

We thank you for the offer to come back to the Council and to brief us further, and I think as others have said, it's of such vital importance that we seize this opportunity. You'll always be welcome in the Council any time, but I hope you will err on the side of keeping the Council updated as to how your talks are going.

You mentioned the Brussels Conference. I want to be very clear again: the sort of reintegration of Syria into the international community, the coherence and stability that need to flow from a genuinely representative political process, will need reconstruction money and it will need reconstruction money from the West. This is also a lesson of all conflicts that we have been dealing with collectively over the last few decades. And I take this opportunity to reiterate, as I am sure the Brussels event will do so, we will not provide reconstruction assistance for Syria absent a credible political process leading to a settlement that is genuinely in the interests of all of Syria's communities. To do otherwise would be to see the awful seven years that have bedeviled Syria be repeated time and again until we are all locked in the most vicious of spirals. Syria needs to overcome the factors that led in the first place seven years ago to the conflict that we are now all struggling with and that cannot be done by ignoring help from the United Nations. It cannot be down by turning your back on the international community. And I hope that the Syrian representative will be able to transmit these messages to his authorities in advance of your visit to Damascus.

I’ll save a fuller tribute to your work, Special Envoy for when we get your final thoughts and advice on what follows in the future after November. I welcome the fact that you have said you will be honest and direct and clear. We look forward to that. We hope you will give us unvarnished advice on what to do next. We hope that the outcome of that will be a way that the United Nations can assist the people of Syria in coming to a political settlement, but we must also contemplate other scenarios unless we see movement from the Syrian authorities. It is a defining moment. I hope the Council will be able to support you to the full. I look forward to hearing your future account, but I do just want to close by expressing our deepest thanks on behalf of all the British government for everything you have done to work for the United Nations on this most difficult of dossiers. Thank you.