

Speech: Call for the Need to Protect Women's Rights in Afghanistan

Thank you Madame President,

I would like to pay tribute to my Dutch colleagues for their tireless efforts to reach a consensus on this important resolution.

I would also like to thank all our briefers, and the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Ambassador Yamamoto, for his briefing and for his and his team's continued efforts in challenging circumstances.

Madame President,

I am delighted to share the chamber with so many women on International Women's Day. I am especially pleased that we are discussing Afghanistan today, as I had the privilege to spend several years in Afghanistan, working to support education for Afghan girls, and a future in Parliament for Afghan women. As Ms Safi and Dr. Sarabi have demonstrated in their briefings, and their own impressive work, women have a vital role to play in securing Afghanistan's future and we should all stand beside them.

Afghanistan cannot find a lasting peace with only half its population. The UN must maintain a strong role in promoting and protecting the rights of women across Afghanistan, and continue to support the Afghan Government to implement its National Action Plan for women, peace and security. Ensuring accountability and equal access to justice for all are essential to long-term peace and stability. We welcome the adoption of Afghanistan's revised penal code and the clarity it brings. We encourage the Government of Afghanistan to ensure its full implementation in line with the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women which we hope will continue to be used to guarantee Afghan women the protection and accountability they deserve.

Madame President,

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is an essential mechanism to support Afghanistan's recovery from conflict. The continued presence of UNAMA, and the resolve, resourcefulness and skill, with which its staff support the Afghan people, are a strong signal of the international community's commitment.

The United Kingdom welcomes the Secretary-General's decision to host a Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan in Geneva on the 28th of November.

Implementing the findings of the strategic review and the Secretary General's report of August 2017 will allow UNAMA to be as efficient as possible and to adapt as circumstances change. I am pleased to see that this is reflected in the resolution before us today and I hope it will send a strong signal to the Mission's hardworking personnel that we fully support them.

Madame President,

UNAMA's mandate to support peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan remains at the core of the mission. This will only be delivered sustainably through a credible, inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process, where all Afghan citizens, whatever their background, can resolve grievances through dialogue.

Of course, for peace to be sustainable it must be inclusive. The strong focus on the involvement of women in peace and security in this Mandate renewal is particularly welcome. With inclusiveness in mind, we highly commend the bold offer laid out by President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah and Afghanistan's National Unity Government at the recent Kabul Process for Peace and Security meeting. We welcome the credibility, flexibility and openness of this offer, which gives the Taliban the opportunity to be part of a political process towards peace. While the Council was not able to reflect these recent developments in the Mandate renewal, I hope that we will find another opportunity to endorse it and lend our full support to these Afghan-led efforts.

Finally, the UN must play a strong role in supporting free and fair elections. Elections, both this year and next, are an opportunity for the nation to communicate their aspirations to the political parties. These elections are a crucial point at which political trust can be renewed and stability forged. We commend the progress made by Afghanistan's Independent Electoral Commission towards electoral reform, and we encourage them to redouble their efforts to ensure that voter registration is completed according to an agreed timeline. We hope that UNAMA will support these efforts fully.

Madame President,

In conclusion, we fully support UNAMA and we welcome the renewal of its mandate today. As a Council, we have collectively endorsed the importance of inclusion, including of women, and of upholding and promoting human rights. We call on all parties to engage meaningfully in a political process to bring lasting peace and stability to the people of Afghanistan.

Thank you very much.

Speech: The Need for Free and Fair Elections in DRC

Thank you Mr President.

Let me begin by welcoming the presence today of the Deputy Prime Minister and

Minister for Foreign Affairs Okitundu, and thank you also to SRSZ Zerrougui for updating us on the intensifying instability, and the dire humanitarian consequences, in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The United Kingdom is deeply concerned by the proliferation of violence in the DRC, particularly in North and South Kivu, Tanganyika, Ituri and the Kasai and at significant increases in human rights abuses, with 744 violations in January, 60% of which were perpetrated by state agents.

As is too often the case, and as the civilian population of the DRC know all too well, the result of this instability has been devastating. 4.5 million Congolese have now fled their homes and communities; there are more internally displaced people in the DRC than anywhere else in Africa. 40,000 people have fled from Ituri to Uganda in this year alone, bringing the refugee population up to 670,000. This has caused a devastating humanitarian crisis – over 13.1 million are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. This number has doubled since 2017.

Mr President,

There is clearly a link between the ongoing political uncertainty and the increasing insecurity. The Congolese people cannot express their legitimate concerns with the political situation without risking their lives. On 21 January and 25 February, security forces once again violently repressed demonstrations leaving at least 9 people dead, dozens wounded and hundreds arrested. This must stop.

The holding of credible and constitutional elections by 23 December this year leading to a democratic and peaceful transition of power is essential to ending the political crisis. Without this, there is a significant risk of further violence destabilising not just the DRC, but the wider region also.

We welcome the progress made towards elections so far, including the completion of voter registration, the passing of electoral laws and the announcement of an electoral budget. However, this is no time for complacency. There is much more to do.

It is essential that the election calendar is honoured and that key dates set out in the electoral timetable are met, including the completion of the Voter Register List by 5 April, the Audit for the electoral list by 25 May, convocation of the electoral process in June and registration of Presidential candidates in July.

But, Mr President, holding credible elections is about more than complying with timelines, it is also about creating the conditions that enable free and fair elections to take place. In order to do this, we call on the Government to implement the 31 December Agreement in full, including full implementation of the confidence-building measures set out in this agreement.

The Government must also respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people of the DRC, opening political space and allowing peaceful demonstrations and freedom of expression. The UK is extremely concerned at

the high numbers of violations of political rights and fundamental freedoms in January. And we were appalled by the disproportionate use of force against churchgoers and peaceful protesters on 31 December 2017, 21 January 2018, and 25 February 2018 and the subsequent loss of life.

We recognise that the onus is not only on the Government to deliver credible elections and in this context we call on the opposition to engage constructively in the process on the basis of the 31 December Agreement, which will demonstrate their credibility and potential to govern.

Mr President,

MONUSCO has a crucial role to play in this crucial year in the DRC in protecting civilians and supporting the implementation of the 31 December Agreement.

We welcome the efforts to improve MONUSCO's ability to carry out these tasks more efficiently and more effectively. In particular we welcome efforts to enhance the flexibility and mobility of MONUSCO's forces and to improve their performance. It is important that these reforms are implemented swiftly.

Mr President,

In conclusion, let me be clear: the violence and resulting dire humanitarian situation in the DRC are the result of continual disappointment of the people in the political process and the political leaders responsible for this process. The only way to avert further violence is for free and fair elections to take place in December and for the 31 December Agreement to be fully implemented. Further excuses and delays will only lead to more violence and despair. The Security Council cannot allow this to happen. The people of the Democratic Republic of Congo cannot afford to wait any longer.

Press release: European business leaders' roundtable: 8 March 2018

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

This afternoon the Prime Minister hosted key business leaders from across the EU at Downing Street to discuss progress in the UK's exit from the EU.

The Prime Minister opened the roundtable by welcoming the opportunity to discuss her vision for an ambitious future partnership with the EU following her speech at Mansion House last Friday.

Within this discussion she provided reassurance on the UK's commitment to maintain high regulatory standards and to seek arrangements which will support industries across the EU and the UK.

The roundtable attendees also discussed the implementation period, with the Prime Minister reaffirming the commitment on both sides of the negotiation for the terms to be agreed at the upcoming March European Council, which the business leaders welcomed.

The meeting was also attended by Robin Walker, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Exiting the European Union, and John Glen, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury.

ATTENDEES:

José María Álvarez-Pallete López, Chairman & CEO, Telefónica S.A.

Dr. Steffen Hoffmann, President of Bosch UK, Bosch

Daniel Křetínský, Chairman of the Board of Directors, EPH

Véronique Laury, Chief Executive Officer, Kingfisher

Angelique Magielse, Managing Director, Abellio

Francesca McDonagh, Group Chief Executive Officer, Bank of Ireland

Dr. Ian Robertson, Member of the Board of Management of BMW AG, Sales and Brand BMW, Aftersales BMW Group

Søren Skou, Chief Executive Officer, A.P. Møller Mærsk

József Váradi, Chief Executive Officer, Wizz Air

Speech: PM's International Women's Day **Speech: 8 March 2018**

For more than 100 years, International Women's Day has called on us to stand together and celebrate the tremendous achievements of women in every country around the world.

This year, it is particularly significant for us here in the UK because it coincides with a very significant centenary, the moment when some women were given the right to vote here in the UK.

Today, it may seem extraordinary to us that women in this country were not only denied the right to vote until that time, but had to fight so hard for it.

And yet despite the huge political, social and economic strides that we've taken forward since, we know there are areas where things are simply not right.

Over the past year we have seen something of a watershed moment.

I am of course referring to the women who have broken the silence on pervasive sexual harassment with the powerful "Me Too" movement;

Spoken out about instances where – incredibly – a pay difference still exists between themselves and men carrying out the same work.

And called out the bullying and harassment some – particularly those in public life – face online.

Much work remains to be done in all those areas, but today I want to turn to another issue.

Because today everybody gathered in this room is here because we are all united in one single aim: bringing an end to abhorrent and life-shattering domestic abuse.

Across the country thousands of women endure unimaginable abuse in their homes, there are women who know what that means on a daily basis, often at the hands of those they are closest to, every single day.

I believe we need nothing short of a complete change across the whole of society in the way we think about and tackle domestic abuse. That's why today we are launching a consultation on our proposals for new laws, stronger powers and new prevention measures.

And the trouble is too often women and men – although mainly women – suffer in silence and endure the most terrifying behaviour.

We've tended to always think of it in terms of violence, but sometimes it means other forms of abuse that may not involve physical harm but certainly should be criminal. And so for the first time the Bill will provide a statutory definition of domestic abuse that includes non-physical abuse such as economic abuse. And we won't let anyone trivialise these forms of abuse.

The Bill will recognise the devastating impact domestic abuse has on families, by creating a statutory aggravating factor which will allow for tougher sentences in cases involving children. For too long, the approach was taken that children are not affected. It is time we recognise that they are.

It will create new Domestic Abuse Protection Orders, drawing on the strongest powers from existing orders to allow police and courts to intervene earlier.

It will establish a Domestic Abuse Commissioner, to hold public bodies to

account, and act as a national champion for victims.

And we will build upon the work I started at the Home Office – putting Clare’s Law – the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme which allows anyone to ask if their partner has a violent history – onto a statutory basis; giving victims of domestic abuse the same range of protections in courts as those who have suffered from modern slavery or sexual offences; and further strengthening the ground-breaking offence of controlling and coercive behaviour in a family relationship, which we introduced in 2015.

I am grateful for the work that so many of you do with the police, and those in the criminal justice system and other public services, to ensure that victims are given the support that they need, when they need it. I know that, for too many years, too many people in power did not take this issue seriously. That is why, as Home Secretary, I commissioned Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary to inspect every police force on their response to domestic abuse, ensuring that each force took action wherever the law enforcement response fell short of what it needed to be.

I also understand just how important it is for those fleeing violent partners to have a safe place to go, and our recent injection of £20 million for accommodation-based services is already providing 2,200 additional beds in refuges and safe accommodation benefiting 19,000 victims.

But I know there are concerns about our proposals on how supported housing will be funded in the future. So I want to make clear that I am committed to delivering a sustainable funding model for refuges and to ensuring that there is no postcode lottery when it comes to provision across the country. That is why I want to work with all the charities and organisations working on the front line to get your ideas on how we can get this right.

And we want your input. Those working with those affected and those who have gone through it. You know what will work and what will not.

This morning I visited Safe Lives and heard first-hand the harrowing accounts of women who have suffered at the hands of abusers.

And I would like to pay tribute to all those survivors here today and beyond who show such bravery in speaking out, and to all of you working so hard to support victims and raise awareness. Thank you. You do an incredible job, often in very difficult circumstances.

This is an issue that unites us all – whatever your background or political party. I am grateful to MPs and Peers of all parties for their tireless campaigning on behalf of survivors, and hope that we can work together to build a real consensus around these proposals.

We need to get this legislation right. We need to hear from the widest range of voices possible: experts, charities, frontline professionals, and as many people affected by abuse, from as many walks of life, as possible. So I urge all of you here today to encourage others to contribute with this consultation.

Every year many lives are ruined. Children witness appalling scenes and suffer lasting trauma and emotional damage.

No woman and no child should ever spend their days living in fear, suffering domestic abuse and fearful of speaking out.

A century ago, women fought for their independence, for their right to be heard. Today, we have come a long way but the fact we are gathered here today to talk about the continued issue of domestic abuse shows we still have a long way to go.

We also have a great challenge. So, a hundred years on, let's fight with the same vigour, the same determination. And let's be the ones to consign domestic abuse to the past.

Press release: UK Government to table devolution amendments to EU Withdrawal Bill

The decision to proceed with the amendments to the Bill in the UK Parliament came after today's meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee on EU negotiations where Mr Lidington said it was now imperative for the UK Government to fulfil the commitment given to Parliament to table changes to Clause 11 of the Withdrawal Bill.

The Minister said that discussions with the devolved governments would continue in the hope of reaching an agreement but the need for Parliament to have a detailed debate on the issues that have been discussed for some time now between the various governments had to be respected. The House of Lords are due to debate Clause 11 of the Bill in just over a week.

The proposed amendment will mean that all EU powers that intersect with devolved competencies will go directly to the devolved parliaments and assemblies at the time of Brexit. In addition, there would be a provision for the UK Government to maintain a temporary status quo arrangement over a small number of returning policy areas where an agreement for a UK framework had not been reached in time for EU Exit. This is to protect the UK common market and ensure no new barriers are created for consumers and businesses.

Speaking after the JMC (EN) meeting in London, The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, David Lidington, said:

The UK government has put forward a significant proposal on Clause 11 and it is now imperative that Parliament is given the chance to

have a proper, open and informed discussion on it.

While I remain hopeful that a deal can still be done, we have a longstanding commitment to Parliament to bring forward an amendment and will now table it – as discussed with the devolved administrations.

I strongly believe our proposal would respect and strengthen the devolution settlements across the UK and do so in a way that still allows the UK Government to protect the vitally important UK common market, providing much-needed certainty and no new barriers for families and businesses.

The UK government has a proven track record on devolution, our amendment is reasonable and we have moved a considerable way on it. We will continue to have close and regular discussions with the devolved administrations in the hope of reaching agreement around how this relatively small number of EU powers are managed in the early days of Brexit.

Present at today's meeting were ministers from the devolved administrations, including Welsh Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Mark Drakeford AM and the Scottish Government's Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe, Michael Russell MSP.

The aim of the JMC (EN) was to find an agreed way forward for returning EU powers to the UK, that both respected and strengthened the devolution settlements, while also providing certainty on how laws will work and minimising change for businesses and families as UK departs the EU.

The UK government will now shortly publish the frameworks analysis. JMC(EN) noted and agreed the UK Government's intention to publish its frameworks analysis and committed itself to continuing work towards agreements on common frameworks.

08 March 2018

The eighth Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations) met today in 70 Whitehall. The meeting was chaired by the Rt Hon David Lidington MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office.

The attending Ministers were:

From the UK Government: the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, Rt Hon David Lidington MP; the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP; the Secretary of State for Wales, Rt Hon Alun Cairns MP; the Secretary of State for Scotland, Rt Hon David Mundell MP; the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, Robin Walker MP; and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Shailesh Vara MP.

From the Welsh Government: the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Mark Drakeford

AM.

From the Scottish Government: the Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe, Michael Russell MSP.

Dr Andrew McCormick, Director General International Relations from the Northern Ireland Civil Service attended the meeting in the continued absence of a Northern Ireland Executive.

The Chair opened the meeting by summarising official level engagement since the Committee last met, including discussions on the proposed amendment to the EU (Withdrawal) Bill. The Committee discussed the UK Government's proposed amendment to clause 11 and progress made towards reaching agreement. The Committee noted the timings for the Committee Stage debate in the House of Lords. All administrations remained committed to reaching agreement on the EU (Withdrawal) Bill. Discussions on further detail on the proposal would continue between the UK Government and Scottish and Welsh Governments in the coming weeks.

JMC (EN) noted and agreed the UK Government's intention to publish its frameworks analysis and committed itself to continuing work towards agreements on common frameworks.