

# Lord Ahmad: Our support for Ukraine must not waver

Madam President, Secretary General, Your Excellencies, Lords, Ladies & Gentlemen, welcome to the United Kingdom and welcome to Birmingham.

It is a great honour to be here together with Mr Speaker, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, in welcoming you to both our country and our second city.

In my introduction it was said that I am, amongst other things, Minister of State for the Commonwealth and we're looking forward to welcoming 56 countries of the Commonwealth to our sporting event a few weeks from now.

It is also a real honour to welcome all of you. John Whittingdale and I have known each other many years and it was interesting for him to raise the British weather. Part of my title includes 'Wimbledon' where some of you will notice that there's a small tournament is going on. I notice the Ambassador from Kazakhstan is here and is a great tennis player. Wimbledon without rain is a non event so it was no surprise to see the weather here.

As the UK Minister with a wide range of responsibilities it's a huge honour to be the Minister responsible for the OSCE. And to John and the whole of the UK Delegation, I pay tribute to them for their absolute devotion and dedication to the OSCE. I thank them also for their valuable insights they provide to me.

I've seen myself through working with the OSCE, its incredible work, from military transparency, to human rights, to democracy and the environment. The list goes on. But as all of us realise – indeed His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales in his letter to the OSCE reflects on this very issue – today the work and objectives of the OSCE are under greater threat than at any time in its history. And it is for all of us, irrespective of the role we play, to stand up and defend them.

This is why I am delighted to have this opportunity, not only to welcome you to the UK, but to address you, colleagues from across parliament, as to your role which for all of us is extremely vital.

Together, all countries – the UK, our allies across the world – have demonstrated strength and unity in our response to Mr Putin's barbaric, premeditated invasion of the sovereign nation of Ukraine.

For our part in the UK, whether it's diplomacy, humanitarian support, economic reconstruction – indeed the Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss will be attending the Lugano conference next week on this very objective – or indeed standing with Ukraine through support of its military, we stand with Ukraine.

We also continue to support Ukraine. We have colleagues from across different parties, different perspectives here in the UK and across other countries. But one thing I can say with absolute confidence – and I am grateful to

colleagues and Shadow Ministers from Her Majesty's opposition – that when it comes to the issue of Ukraine we are absolutely at one. There is no difference and nor should there be.

The UK stands firm in our support to Ukraine in its fight, and have committed £1.3 billion in military aid and operational support, including support for weapons.

Our economic and humanitarian support totals nearly £400 million. It includes food, medical supplies and shelter kits.

And as the UK Minister for sanctions, we are also ensuring that Mr Putin's regime pays an economic price for its actions, and we have now sanctioned more than 1,000 individuals and 100 entities.

But it is important when we look to act in this particular way – particularly when it comes to the issue of sanctions – that we stand together with our allies and friends from across the world. For sanctions really hit hard when we work together as one.

This unprovoked, illegal war is, of course, far more than an attack on Ukraine. It is also an attack on the very founding principles of the OSCE. The pillars on which European security has been built.

Russia appears to believe that these principles designed to keep us all safe – principles that all sides agreed to, even during the Cold War, and yes, by Russia itself – are no longer in its interest.

Simply put, this is a tragedy.

Yet, even as Russia flagrantly disregards commitments itself signed up to – including the Minsk agreement – the OSCE is still proving its value.

Prior to the invasion, we drew heavily on its confidence-building measures in an effort together to avert this crisis.

The UK strongly supported Ukraine in its use of the Vienna Document, giving Russia the opportunity to explain its build-up of troops.

Yet tragically, every week since the invasion – notwithstanding the fact that we have gathered around the table in Vienna to hold Russia to account – Russia is still continuing its assault on Ukraine.

The UK has twice joined the majority of OSCE states in triggering the Moscow Mechanism, launching missions to document the impacts of the invasion.

As you know, the first report from April exposed the true face of Mr Putin's war, revealing widespread human rights and humanitarian law violations by Russian troops.

The credible evidence the independent experts found of war crimes, from torture and killing of innocent civilians. And as we meet today Madam President, yet again in the last week we have seen a shopping centre with

innocent civilians attacked. And this morning, again we heard further assaults and heard news of credible attacks yet again on the port city of Odesa and its surrounding areas. Russia is attacking and seeking to instil further fear in the innocent civilians of Ukraine, trying to disable its lifelines.

The report that the OSCE has conducted, and those of other independent authorities including the UN, have also captured accounts of devastating sexual violence. This is an issue close to my heart as the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict.

We must work together to ensure that there is no impunity for those perpetrators who commit these crimes and they will be held to account.

I had the opportunity to visit Poland in recent months where I paid tribute to the Polish Government and other Governments around Ukraine who are providing vital support. I met directly with those fleeing – young women especially, who were the majority of cases, the elderly, young children fleeing the war – and sitting down with them. There were many poignant moments but there was one particular incident which stays with me – that of a young boy who followed me around one of the centres where Ukrainians were being housed and supported. He was the age of one of my own children, only 10 years old. He kept with us and I liked his resilience. We didn't speak the same language but I knew he was taken by the fact that someone was visiting. Equally reflecting all the countries represented here and beyond was the important issue which he said to me, that you being here meant you care.

I didn't have anything to give him but a smile, then I remembered my lapel badge of a Union Jack, which I knelt down and gave to him. This young child who had lost everything didn't know what to do. He smiled, took it gratefully and then disappeared. Five minutes later he returned with a key ring with a Georgian flag on it – the George's cross. Through a translator he explained that in Ukrainian tradition and hospitality, when you are presented with a gift, you give a gift. And that, your excellencies captures the spirit of Ukraine, and of its children. The reason we are standing up for Ukraine today. We must never lose sight of that vital effort.

In March, the UK led efforts to ensure those perpetrators are held to account, and together we other countries we referred the situation in Ukraine to the International Criminal Court, which has now secured the support of 42 other countries.

I am glad that the ICC investigation is now underway, under the ICC Prosecutor, Karim Khan. And again the UK is playing its part to assist and work with all other internal and international investigations to ensure we can provide justice.

We will also support efforts by the Ukrainian authorities to investigate war crimes, in particular conflict-related sexual violence.

At tomorrow's session you will hear how the UK is working with partners to ensure evidence of Russia's crimes is documented in a way that ensures

prosecution. This includes providing funding and law enforcement support to reinforce the ICC's investigation, and the UK has appointed an experienced and renowned ICC judge Sir Howard Morrison as an independent adviser to Ukrainian Prosecutor General.

When she visited in London, we were pleased to not only offer her technical support, and support for experts, but also financial commitments to ensure that the prosecutions start taking place.

What's most crucial to that is evidence and it is crucial that we put the survivors' rights at the heart of our evidence gathering.

Ensuring that survivors have their experiences recorded safely, in a way that strengthens the pursuit of justice, is an important step towards accountability. It is an important step towards healing.

Our collective approach should be guided by the principles laid out in the Murad Code, the global code of conduct for collection of information from survivors of systematic and conflict-related sexual violence.

I was proud and honoured to accompany the brave Nadia Murad, herself a survivor of sexual violence from the despicable organisation that is Daesh in Iraq. Who is now amongst the most powerful advocates of this particular issue, and indeed recognised through a Nobel prize.

And together with her, in April we launched the Murad Code at the UN Security Council. And we are deploying it. And we immediately ensured it was translated into Ukrainian to help those incredible, courageous survivors who are fleeing Russian onslaught, to ensure they are informed of their rights, and that we can secure their testimonies in a way that allows for successful prosecutions.

Let me also add that the UK will be hosting an international conference in November on this very issue. We must rally international support behind further action to tackle these heinous crimes.

Ukraine will, of course, be integral to our thinking and planning.

To conclude, Madam President, Mr Speaker, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I share your revulsion at the unrelenting horror Russia is inflicting upon the Ukrainian people. Russia itself is rich in history and tradition, and we must ensure also that the people of Russia – many brave Russian souls who have taken to the streets – also know that the fight is not with them but with the Government – Mr Putin's Government – who have inflicted this war, whose impacts are being felt across the world.

I also share the fact that through attacking ports such as Odesa, we are seeing Russia's attempt to weaponise global hunger.

And I'm sure I speak with everyone in this hall, in our support for Ukraine we will not waver. We will not yield to those who complain of war fatigue, who agitate for an unfair and unsustainable negotiated settlement.

We will continue to stand in solidarity with Ukraine and we will work with you in your efforts to push back Russia, to push back Mr Putin's intent, through military support, through diplomatic isolation, sanctions and indeed acting at the heart of Russia's economy through its energy imports.

Ukraine's victory – god willing – will be not just a victory for Ukraine, it will be a victory for democracy. It will be a victory for the integrity and sovereignty of every nation. It is a victory in all our interests, and we will be with you, however long it takes.

There is much work ahead. Over the next four days you will be debating and reaching important decisions on how this institution – set up to look at issues of conflict and averting conflict, to look at issues of security across Europe, but ultimately to see how we can strengthen cooperation across Europe – will have deliberations on the important and challenging path it currently confronts

On this I can assure you that the UK has been, and will remain a steadfast partner in these efforts.

I wish you well in this vital task, and look forward to the outcome. Thank you.

ENDS