

Oral statement on Rwanda

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and with permission, I would like to make a statement about the Government's world-leading Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda.

The British people have repeatedly voted for controlled immigration and the right to secure borders, Madam Deputy Speaker.

This is a government that acts and hears that message clearly, and we are determined to deliver that.

Last night Madam Deputy Speaker, we aimed to relocate the first people from our country who arrived here through dangerous and illegal means, including by a small boat.

Over the course of this week, many and various claims to prevent relocation have been brought forward.

Now Madam Deputy Speaker, I welcomed the decisions of our domestic courts, the High Court, Court of Appeal, and Supreme Court, to uphold our right to send the flight.

However, following a decision by an out of hours judge in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg minutes before our flight's departure, the final individuals remaining on the flight had their removal directions paused while their claims were considered.

I want to make something absolutely clear today, Madam Deputy Speaker. The European Court of Human Rights did not rule that the policy or relocations were unlawful, but they prohibited the removal of three of those on last night's flight.

Those prohibitions last for different time periods but are not an absolute bar on their transfer to Rwanda. Anyone who has been ordered to be released by the courts will be tagged while we continue to progress their relocation.

While this decision by the Strasbourg court to intervene was disappointing and surprising given the repeated and considered judgements to the contrary in our domestic courts, we remain committed to this policy.

These repeated legal barriers are, Madam Deputy Speaker, very similar to those that we experience with all other removal flights.

And we believe that we are fully compliant with our domestic and international obligations, and preparations for our future flights and the next flights have already begun. Our domestic courts were of the view that the flight could go ahead.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the case for our partnership with Rwanda bears repeating. We are a generous and welcoming country, as has been shown time

and time again. Over 200,000 people have used safe and legal routes to come to the UK since 2015.

And most recently Madam Deputy Speaker, Britons have opened their hearts and their homes to Afghan nationals and Ukrainian nationals.

But our capacity to help those in need is severely compromised by those who come here illegally and, as we have discussed in this house many, many times who seek to jump the queue because they can afford to pay the people smugglers.

It is illegal.

It is not necessary – because they are coming from other safe countries.

It is not fair – either on those who play by the rules, or on the British taxpayers, who have to foot this bill.

We cannot keep on spending nearly £5 million a day on accommodation including that of hotels.

We cannot accept this intolerable pressure on public services and local communities.

It makes us less safe as a nation – because those who come here illegally do not have the regularised checks or even the regularised status.

And because evil people-smuggling gangs use the proceeds of their ill-gotten gains to fund other appalling crimes that undermine the security of our country.

It is also lethally dangerous for those who are smuggled. People have drowned at sea, suffocated in lorries, and perished crossing territories.

The humane, decent, and moral response to all this is simply not to stand by and let people drown or to be sold into slavery, or to be smuggled, but to stop this.

And with that Madam Deputy Speaker, inaction is not an option – or at least not a morally responsible one.

This is, as I have said repeatedly, a complex, longstanding problem. The global asylum system is broken. And between 80 to 100 million people are now displaced and others are on the move seeking better economic opportunities.

And an international problem requires international solutions.

The UK and Rwanda have shown the way forward by working together.

And this Partnership sends a clear message that illegal entry will not be tolerated Madam Deputy Speaker while offering a practical, humane way forward for those who arrive to the UK by illegal routes.

It has saddened me, Madam Deputy Speaker, to see Rwanda so terribly

misrepresented and traduced in recent weeks.

It is another example of how – all too often – critics not only don't know what they're speaking about but seek to vilify another international country that has a good track record when it comes to refugees and stepping up to international responsibility.

Rwanda, Madam Deputy Speaker, is a safe and secure country with an outstanding track record of supporting asylum seekers.

And indeed, we are proud that we are working together.

Proud that the UK is investing in Rwanda and helping that great country to thrive.

And proud that those who are relocated to Rwanda will have an opportunity to thrive, as well.

They will be given generous support – including language skills, vocational training, and help with starting their own businesses or finding employment.

But of course, I'm afraid Madam Deputy Speaker, that the usual suspects have set out to thwart and even campaign against these efforts and with that, Madam Deputy Speaker, the will of the British people.

It would be wrong to issue a running commentary over ongoing cases, but Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to say this.

This government will not be deterred from doing the right thing.

We will not be put off by the inevitable legal, last-minute challenges, nor will we allow mobs, Madam Deputy Speaker, to block removals.

We will not stand idly by and let organised crime gangs – who are despicable in their nature and their conduct, evil people – treat human beings as cargo.

We will not accept that we have no right to control our borders, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We will do everything necessary to keep this country safe.

And we will continue our long and proud tradition of helping those in genuine need.

Now many of us have met refugees – both abroad and on British soil and listened to the stories that are quite frankly, chilling and heart-breaking.

But of course, it suits the benches opposite to pretend that this side of the House doesn't care. But Madam Deputy Speaker, as you referred to in the earlier point of order, on this side of the House, such accusations are a grotesque slur.

And let me tell you Madam Deputy Speaker, what is truly chilling is listening to opponents going on about how awful this policy is while offering no

practical solutions, while lives are being lost.

Helping develop safe and legal routes to this country for those who really need them is absolutely at the heart of this government's work.

And having overseen efforts to bring to the UK thousands of people in absolute need, including from Hong Kong, Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine.

I am the first to say that controlled immigration is good for our country, outstanding for this country – including that by refugees.

But Madam Deputy Speaker, we simply have to focus our support on those who most need it the most.

And not those who have picked the UK as a destination over a safe country like France.

And it is no use pretending that they are fleeing persecution when they are travelling from a safe country.

Because our capacity to help is not infinite, and public support for the asylum system will be fatally undermined if we do not act.

The critics of the Migration and Economic Development Partnership have no alternative proposal to deal with uncontrolled immigration.

That is irresponsible and utterly indifferent to those who we seek to help and support.

Now Madam Deputy Speaker, I have always said that I will look at all proposals to reduce illegal migration and illegal entry into our country, and even those that the opposite benches might prepare to put forward, but we still wait for them.

However fundamentally they don't think there is a problem and that's why they don't have a solution, because they still stand for open borders – pure and simple.

Meanwhile, this government wants to get on with delivering not just what the British people want but reforming our systems so yes, they are firm but equally Madam Deputy Speaker, so they are fair to those who pay for them and fair to those who need our help and support.