

# Speech: The Potential for the First Free and Fair Elections in DRC History

Thank you Mr President. I would like to thank both of our briefers, SRSZ Zerroughi and Ms Mbela for their briefings. I'd particularly like to thank Ms Mbela for her brave work as a human rights activist in DRC and for making such clear recommendations to the Council, to her government and to the Electoral Commission and I hope to touch on some of those recommendations later.

Mr President as both of our briefers and many of my colleagues today have made clear, the DRC is at a crucial point in her history. The elections scheduled for 23 December could lead to the country's first ever peaceful democratic transfer of power. This would be a huge achievement for the 85 million Congolese people who have faced such devastating conflicts over their history.

These elections are about more than simply democratic rights. Successful elections have the ability to enhance the political security and humanitarian stability in the DRC and the region which will in turn enable future security, growth, trade and prosperity.

A stable, prosperous DRC is vital not only for the Congolese people but also for the region and the world. As we have seen over many years, insecurity in the DRC not only has a negative impact on millions of Congolese, but has devastated the wider region. Therefore it's completely right that we as a Council hold regular discussions, follow the situation closely, and ensure follow-up to the Security Council visit just over a month ago, and in particular to take stock of progress against many of the commitments that we received from the government and other political leaders in the DRC.

Mr President, I do think it's important to register the positive developments that have happened in recent months. We welcome the positive steps taken by the government towards elections, including on voter registration and the publication of the final list of candidates for the elections. We also welcome President Kabila's repeated commitment that he does not intend to stand for a third term as per the Constitution of the DRC. But as Ambassador Haley reminded us earlier today, democracy isn't just about a single event; it's about a process. So we call on all political actors in the DRC to create the conditions for free and fair and credible elections, in particular, by implementing the confidence building measures of the 31 December Agreement, ensuring that civil and political rights are upheld. This includes fully respecting the political space and allowing political parties to gather peacefully.

We welcome President Kabila's commitment to this Security Council during our visit that his government would allow peaceful protests by the opposition. We are therefore deeply concerned by the reports of further arrests and detentions of protesters and the continued detention of political prisoners.

We call on President Kabila and his government to live up to their commitments to allow peaceful protest by the opposition and to release all political prisoners.

Political parties and their leadership must also do their part and encourage their supporters to engage in the democratic process peacefully. Any violence will diminish the credibility of elections in the eyes of the Congolese people and the international community.

We also call on the key political actors, including the opposition, to engage constructively with the electoral process, including on the vexed question of voting machines and the voter register. The efforts of the Electoral Commission are crucial to deliver a credible election. And we join Ms Mbela in calling on the electoral commission to engage with key stakeholders, to address concerns and restore confidence in the electoral process.

One way of restoring confidence in the electoral process and the elections, and in particular in the voting machines, would be through the implementation of the recommendations of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. We were encouraged that during the Council's visit to Kinshasa, the Electoral Commission said that they were determined to implement the recommendations by the Westminster Foundation. We would encourage the Electoral Commission to continue to implement those recommendations as soon as possible to increase confidence in the voting machines.

Mr President, we commend the logistical support that MINUSCO has provided so far for the upcoming elections and welcome that they stand ready to give further support if needed on request from the government of the DRC. We call on the electoral commission to engage with MINUSCO as soon as possible on any logistical assistance that may be required.

The United Kingdom stands ready to support the political process both in the region, where we've provided funding on voter education, civil society engagement, and women's participation and domestic observation, and here at the United Nations.

Mr President, in conclusion it's not the politicians that stand to win or lose the most in these elections. It is the people of the DRC. The people who have seen devastating levels of conflict and resulting humanitarian suffering since independence. So we call on all leaders to put aside their personal ambition and to do what is right for their people: participate in and support potentially the first of many credible elections in the DRC.

Thank you.

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# News story: Britain's top armed forces-friendly employers honoured

51 businesses were last night honoured for their commitment to the military, including employing former service personnel, their families and reservists.

The MOD's Employer Recognition Scheme 'Gold Awards' awards were handed out by the Defence Secretary and HRH Prince Edward, the Earl of Wessex, to businesses and organisations who have shown outstanding support for the military community and the Armed Forces Covenant.

Employers won awards for initiatives such as employing veterans, supporting individuals transitioning out of the armed forces into a new career, and providing flexibility for reservists.

The 51 winners have been recognised for their long-term commitment to the armed forces, with organisations from the public and private sector achieving the top grade. Each has signed the Armed Forces Covenant, and where possible, engages with the MOD's Career Transition Partnership (CTP) to promote the recruitment of service leavers, as well as honouring individual pledges of support.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Those who have served our country so courageously deserve the full support of organisations across the public and private sector.

The breadth and diversity of this year's Gold Award winners shows how business support for the armed forces continues to flourish. I offer my gratitude and congratulations to all the winners.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said:

When people leave the armed forces, they do so with unique skills and experiences that can benefit businesses and organisations across the country.

These awards show just how valued and in demand these skills are. I encourage more businesses to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant and show their support for our brave service leavers.

This week the Government will launch its first UK wide Veterans Strategy which brings together aspirations and commitments from across government for

championing the needs of the ex-service community.

The Government has a wide range of schemes in place to support service personnel and veterans. From encouraging employers to recognise the value the military community to business through the Armed Forces Covenant to committing £22million of funding for mental health over the next decade for service personnel and £10million for veterans.

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## [News story: Improvement plan proposed for Northamptonshire children's services](#)

The Government has proposed to appoint a commissioner to oversee improvements at Northamptonshire children's social care services, following concerns raised by existing commissioners and Ofsted about how the council supports vulnerable children and families.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government James Brokenshire have written to the leader of Northamptonshire County Council in a move designed to take swift and early action to improve its children's services.

They have today confirmed they are ['minded to'](#) appoint Malcolm Newsam CBE as a children's services commissioner, following Ofsted's [findings](#) that the quality of services have deteriorated.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

We must make sure that vulnerable children and families are kept safe and instead of waiting for failure, we can prevent it by acting quickly to intervene where concerns have been raised about the quality of care.

Appointing a commissioner for Northamptonshire's children's services will help stabilise and improve the support for the children and families who need our protection.

Secretary of State for Communities Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

Keeping vulnerable children safe is one of the most important duties local authorities carry out. Ofsted's report highlights serious concerns about the current performance of children's services in Northamptonshire and this cannot continue.

We are taking action today by recommending a children's commissioner joins the existing commissioner team at the Council. This will help to stabilise and improve the service so each and every child receives the protection they deserve.

The proposal to appoint a commissioner for children's services is part of the Government's children's social care strategy to spot early warning signs and take action quickly to support councils to make the necessary improvements where there is a risk of failure.

Malcolm Newsam CBE is an experienced director of children's services and has worked with many underperforming councils to oversee improvements with successful results. He was awarded a CBE in 2017 for services to children's social care.

Two commissioners, Tony McArdle and Brian Roberts, were appointed in May to oversee council services in Northamptonshire, following the discovery of serious failings and financial problems. The appointment of a children's commissioner would build on their initial work and provide additional support and expertise to tackle Ofsted's concerns, working with Lincolnshire County Council, which is providing peer support to the council as one of the Department for Education's Partners in Practice.

Through the work of this team, local government services in Northamptonshire could undergo a reorganisation and the new commissioner would look at how children's services could be delivered in the future. Findings will be reported back to the MHCLG and DfE Secretaries of State next year.

Since May 2010, 44 local authorities have been lifted out of intervention and have not returned – including Doncaster and Rotherham which were both rated 'Good' by Ofsted this year.

Northamptonshire County Council will now have the opportunity to make any representations to the Government on the appointment of a commissioner before a final decision, expected later this month.

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## **[News story: Fishing without a licence costs owner, master and fishing company over £75,000](#)**

The master of a fishing vessel, a director of the company that owns the vessel and the company itself were sentenced at North Shields Magistrates Court on Friday 9 November in a case brought by the Marine Management

Organisation (MMO).

E&J Shellfish Limited, which owned the vessel Catatonia, company director Ewan Inglis and master of the vessel Chris Ferguson were ordered to pay a total of over £75,000 by North Shields Magistrates' Court.

The court heard how sales notes showed that between January and September 2017 the Catatonia made 31 fishing trips when the vessel did not have a valid licence from the MMO for commercial fishing.

The MMO provided advice to E&J Shellfish Limited on completing the necessary paperwork prior to and after the transfer of the vessel to their ownership in January 2017. 18 of the fishing trips made without a licence were after the MMO had sent a letter to the vessel owners making it clear that it was unlicensed and that using it to undertake commercial fishing would be an offence.

As a result of the trips 18,458kg of razor clams were landed with a total value of £103,979.50.

The offences arose under sections 4 and 12 of the Sea Fish Conservation Act 1967 ("the Act") and Regulation 3 Sea Fish Licensing (England) Order 2015. The Act provides for directors of companies to also be found liable for offences.

E&J Shellfish Limited, Ewan Inglis and Chris Ferguson all pleaded guilty in court.

E&J Shellfish Limited was ordered to pay a total of £65,010 – a fine of £12,000 plus a further £50,000 in respect of the value of the fish, plus a victim surcharge of £170 and costs of £2,840.00. Ewan Inglis was fined £9,850 plus a victim surcharge of £170 and Chris Ferguson was fined £383 and order to pay a victim surcharge of £38.

The vessel later became licensed in November 2017 after the owners completed the relevant paperwork and took the necessary steps for a fishing vessel licence to be issued.

A spokesperson for the Marine Management Organisation said:

"Commercial fishing by English fishing vessels, wherever they may be, is only permitted under the authority of a licence issued by the Marine Management Organisation.

"The outcome of this enforcement action shows that the MMO can detect non-compliance with legal requirements by carrying out cross-checks of information such as sales notes.

"We're pleased the Magistrates recognised that undermining the regulatory regime is a serious matter."

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## [News story: New guidance for fishermen ahead of full discard ban](#)

The final phase of the [landing obligation](#), also known as the 'discard ban', comes into force in from 1 January 2019.

The Marine Management Organisation has provided guidance for the fishing industry to help them comply and to manage challenges with quota. Under the full [discard ban](#), fishermen must retain and land all quota species; non-quota species can continue to be discarded as can any fish that may represent a health hazard.

There are also specific optional exemptions to the discard ban for some quota species and these are set out in the regulations. Prohibited species and undersized specimens of non-quota species must be discarded.

There are also a number of specific gear technical requirements being introduced in 2019. These are mandatory for some Irish Sea fisheries from 1 January 2019 and for Celtic Sea fisheries from 1 July 2019. In addition, other optional technical gears can be used if fishermen want to meet exemptions which allow fish to be discarded.

For 2019, the UK Government has worked to maintain, and in some cases extend, exemptions allowing fish with high survival rates to be discarded as well as some unwanted catches that are difficult to avoid. In addition, the MMO will continue to apply a fair and proportionate approach to enforcement.

This the final phase of the discard ban and will bring an end to the practice of throwing dead fish back into the sea. The landing obligation was initially introduced in January 2015 for certain pelagic fisheries.

Fishermen are advised to check the guidance regularly as there may be further changes to the regulations following the December Council. Guidance on the landing obligation can also be found on the [European Commission's website](#).