

Press release: James Brokenshire welcomes rise in number of new homes

Figures showing over 222,000 new homes were delivered in 2017 to 2018.

Press release: Somerset haulage firm fined for waste offence

A company has been ordered to pay £10,476 in fines and costs for illegally disposing of thousands of tonnes of waste on agricultural land near Exeter.

Press release: Packaging and print firm fined for turning river purple with hazardous waste

A Somerset company has been ordered to pay more than £13,000 in fines and costs for polluting a river with waste ink.

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.

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.