

Press release: Parole Board Chief Executive's Blog – 1st Edition – August 2018

The last few months have been an exceptionally busy and challenging period for the Board and for me as Chief Executive. Heightened scrutiny and significant change bring their own challenges, but they also bring opportunities to better explain the work we do and focus on lasting changes that are going to improve the experience of prisoners and victims.

Two weeks ago, [I presented at the University of Cambridge](#) to academics and practitioners who are interested in parole. I talked about where we are now and how we can ensure we are effective and efficient in our independent decision making. It was particularly interesting to hear their thoughts and ideas about where things are working well, but also how the Board can improve its practice whilst focused on our primary duty; making independent and fair decisions which ensure the protection of the public.

We have also published our [2017-18 Annual Report and Accounts this month](#). Last year we held a record number of hearings and have made good progress on IPPs. One of the Parole Board's biggest achievements over the last year has been the steady elimination of the backlog. This means prisoners are not waiting unnecessarily for their case to come before a Parole Board. However, some cases are still being delayed through unnecessary deferrals and adjournments. This is a priority and we are working hard to look at how we can progress cases more effectively and there are a number of initiatives ongoing within the Board to tackle this problem – trying to bring cases to a fair and early resolution.

The Government is considering potential options for an internal review mechanism and possibly changing the rules that we are governed by. These will take some time to work through, I am keen to ensure that any changes improve the way we do things and are properly thought through and resourced. The Board [has submitted its formal response](#) to the Ministry of Justice but in essence, we think it is important to have a simple and process, that doesn't create unnecessary delays for victims or prisoners.

This month has also seen our annual staff and members strategy day, outlining where we are focusing our efforts for the year ahead. 2018-19 will see us being a more transparent organisation, so the public can really understand our work and the decisions from our members. I would also like to pay special tribute to Sir Brian Leveson who round off our 50th anniversary celebrations [with a fantastic speech dedicated to the work of the Board](#).

Whilst Sir Brian's speech makes for excellent reading one of the things he said resonated with me:

At a fundamental level, however, Parole Board decisions should be treated with the same respect for integrity and independence as any other judicial decision.

Independence is the bedrock of all that you do and should be the bedrock of the Parole Board.

There should be no improper influence or interference, whether from the media, the public, or politics, in your decision-making process.

Decisions should be, as I said earlier, made without fear or favour.

[Speech: UN Security Council signals support for Special Envoy on Yemen](#)

I thank the representative from Kazakhstan for his statement and I now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom. First of all, to Mr Ging, thank you very much for your briefing. You heard the words of appreciation from Council members today to your team and for everything you do and I'd like to add the United Kingdom's voice to that. We will continue to disperse over \$200 million to the people of Yemen to support your efforts.

To the Special Envoy, thank you too for your amazing efforts and also those of your team. I hope the strong unity you have heard from the Council today can be a real spur to efforts in taking this forward:

- I think it's been very good that we've all been able to express concern about the reports we have heard today of the attack on the hospital and on the fish market;
- Very strong reassurance from members of the Council that it's important to uphold the International Humanitarian Law and protection of civilians, and I think that was absolutely unequivocal from the Council, and obviously the United Kingdom joins that;
- Very strong condemnation too for the attacks by the Houthis on the Saudi oil tanker and other attacks in the Red Sea and concern about arms shipments that are coming through the Red Sea. I think we all look forward to the forthcoming panel of experts report;

- And a call from the Council to the Houthis to come and work with you and follow the Security Council Resolutions even as we recognise the commitment to halting attacks in the Red Sea, I think we all feel that it is now time to take this to the next stage.

There was unconditional support for your efforts, Special Envoy, and a real hope that the 6 September talks in Geneva can start a very viable process and I think you could count on all members of the Council to unify around your efforts and build momentum for what you have started.

Thank you very much.

Press release: UK responds to Syrian Regime releasing names of deaths in detention

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Mr Burt, said:

Tens of thousands of Syrians have been forcibly disappeared, detained and tortured since the beginning of the conflict. The issuing of thousands of prisoner death notices by the regime authorities provides another clear indication of the brutality the Assad regime has inflicted on the Syrian people.

For many families this brings to an end several years of waiting and hoping, not knowing the fate of their loved ones. My condolences are with the Syrian families who have learnt of the deaths of their loved ones, and my thoughts are with the many others who do not yet know their fates.

These notices do not bring an end to the issue. The regime must now clarify the situation of all those who remain missing, and release all those still arbitrarily detained, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions 2254 and 2268. Moreover, the families of the deceased deserve justice. Those responsible for torture and killings must be held to account. We fully support the UN Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism in investigating the appalling human rights abuses committed in Syria.

Further information

- Follow Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt [@AlistairBurtUK](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter [@foreignoffice](#) and [Facebook](#)
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[Press release: Defence Secretary strengthens Romania ties and thanks RAF crews](#)

Gavin Williamson reaffirmed the UK's commitment to the region during meetings with his counterpart Mihai Fifor in Bucharest. They discussed existing mutual defence activity and announced their intention to step up UK-Romania co-operation by signing a Memorandum of Understanding before the end of this year.

They also unveiled plans for the British Army to support a Romanian-led Multinational Brigade (South-East), which is taking part in Exercise Scorpions Fury and is part of NATO's Forward Presence in the Black Sea, aimed at deterring aggression in the region.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

"European security is our security and though we are leaving the EU our commitment to our allies remains steadfast. That is why we are accelerating our military collaboration with Romania, with whom we enjoy a strong relationship.

"NATO is the cornerstone of both our nations' security and this deployment demonstrates the alliance's collective resolve and readiness in a world of intensifying threats."

Mr Williamson discussed last month's NATO summit and defence post-Brexit in a meeting with Romanian Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă before flying to the Black Sea to meet RAF crews flying Typhoon patrols as part of NATO's Southern Air Policing mission.

The UK's unwavering commitment to co-operating on European security is further evidenced by this week's deployment of two RAF Typhoons from Romania to Hungary where they are taking part in bilateral exercises with the Hungarian military.

[News story: HMRC late payment interest rates to be revised after Bank of England rate rise](#)

The Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee voted unanimously to increase the Bank of England base rate to 0.75% today (2 August 2018).

HMRC interest rates are linked to the Bank of England base rate and, as a consequence of the change, HMRC interest rates for late payment will be increased.

These changes will come into effect on:

- 13 August 2018 for quarterly instalment payments
- 21 August 2018 for non-quarterly instalment payments

Repayment interest rates remain unchanged.

We will update [information on the interest rates for late payments](#) shortly.