

Speech: Onus on Syria to allow the UN to do its work

Thank you very much Madame President. I hadn't intended to speak today in the chamber but I wanted to respond to some of the things we've just heard. So I'll take the opportunity to thank Staffan de Mistura and his team for all their work, which is not proving as fast or as productive as all of us would like, but I think we're very grateful to you Staffan for all your efforts. And I was interested to hear the Chinese account of the work of their Envoy.

Madame President, I think we all know what needs to be done. We've had very many discussions in this chamber and in the consultations room about Syria. I think what we struggle with is how to get it done and how to take the next step so I hope that when we leave this chamber and we go next door into closed consultations we can actually have a proper discussion, without polemics, about what it takes to get the Constitutional Committee up and running. What are the concrete steps that need to be taken and how we as the Council can best facilitate and support that. And what it takes to get Idlib protected. Lots of speakers today have referred to Idlib. I think we all know the importance and the scale and the significance of Idlib. I would urge those Astana progenitors to do what they can to ensure that on the ground the people in Idlib are safe and that we avert a humanitarian catastrophe there. But I'd like to have a proper discussion next door about how the Council can actually support that.

I wanted to turn to this issue of the Syrian government engaging with the UN. The Russian Representative referred to backsliding from a political settlement and entrenching Syrian unwillingness for a negotiated solution. I think those two statements are very damning but they are not damning about us, they are damning about the Syrian regime. We really need all those with influence on Syria, and that includes Russia and Iran, to encourage them to set aside a military strategy to resolve this conflict and to engage with the United Nations across the board so that we can get back to Geneva and we can get back to a political settlement. It is not us in the West who are stopping that happening, Madame President. The onus really is on Syria to follow the will of the Council and the Security Council resolutions and allow the UN to do its work to help the people of Syria.

Those were the main things I wanted to say but I'd like to touch on three more points, if I may. We support what the Special Envoy said about bringing women in, I think that's long overdue and he can count on the UK's full support for that. I also wanted to reference Iran and the strikes on Israel from Syrian territory, and we very much agree with what the American representative said on that and we have been very vocal about that in public. But I also wanted to refer to what the Russian representative said about the airstrikes. And I won't rehearse why we took the action, why France, the US and the UK, took the action we did, except to say that we did so to avert a humanitarian catastrophe, and in taking that action we helped to protect civilians on the ground, we deterred and degraded Syria's ability to use

chemical weapons, and in doing that we upheld the global WMD prohibition. And I think those things remain very important but they shouldn't be used by anyone in this Council as a reason to let the Syrian government off the hook for engaging with the UN on the political process. The political process has been necessary since 2012 when Geneva was started. It's been necessary in increasing tenor every year since that point. And it remains necessary now, Madame President.

So I hope when we go next door we can have a really detailed discussion about how we as the Council can get back to the spirit of Sweden and actually help Staffan de Mistura and his team do something concrete to achieve this and not have any more mudslinging.

Thank you.

[News story: Foreign Secretary's Ramadan message](#)

The Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson said:

As Muslims at home and across the world begin the holy month of Ramadan I want to wish you all Ramadan Kareem.

Ramadan is a time of self-reflection, but also of being part of something bigger; fasting together, prayer and the gathering of families.

Ramadan is also about the values of compassion, charity and selflessness. Values that unite us all.

I want to highlight the huge contributions that British Muslims make to all areas of British life.

At this special time of year I say to you, your friends and your relatives, Ramadan Mubarak.

Further information

- Follow the Foreign Secretary on Twitter [@BorisJohnson](#) and [Facebook](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

Media enquiries

For journalists

Email

newsdesk@fco.gov.uk

Newsdesk

020 7008 3100

[News story: Minister for Human Rights Ramadan message](#)

Minister for Human Rights, Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

As Minister for human rights and freedom of religion and belief, I want to extend my best wishes to Muslims around the world for a peaceful and blessed Ramadan.

Tomorrow Muslims embark upon a month-long journey of fasting, prayer and reflection to remember the revealing of the Quran to the holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

Ramadan is a time for spiritual renewal and physical reflection.

As we fast as individuals, we can take comfort in the fact that Muslims across the world find strength through devotion to fulfil one of the five pillars of our religion.

It is also an incredible time to recognise how we should all do more for the service of humanity. Indeed in previous years British Muslims have raised a staggering £100m in charitable donations.

This Ramadan, let us celebrate the diversity of our great country and take the opportunity to come together, remember the less fortunate and commit to playing our part towards a peaceful world.

Ramadan Mubarak.

Further information

- Follow Foreign Office Minister Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on Twitter [@tariqahmadbt](https://twitter.com/tariqahmadbt)

- Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter [@foreignoffice](#) and [Facebook](#)
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[Press release: Boris Johnson pursues global figures to ensure girls' education around the world](#)

Political heavyweights Boris Johnson and Gordon Brown today (Wed 16th) joined forces to discuss improving education for the world's most marginalised girls.

The Foreign Secretary met the former Prime Minister as part of his campaign to deliver 12 years of quality education for women and girls around the world.

The meeting with Mr Brown – now the UN's Global Education envoy – is the latest in a series of high profile engagements Mr Johnson has held as part of his #LeaveNoGirlBehind campaign.

In recent weeks, Mr Johnson has discussed his campaign with girls' education activist and Nobel Prize Laureate Malala Yousafzai, senior adviser to President Trump, Ivanka Trump and philanthropist Melinda Gates.

The Foreign Secretary has also spoken to HRH Prince Harry and Ms Meghan Markle about his campaign during a star-studded launch at last month's Commonwealth Summit.

Mr Johnson hopes that his drive will build a coalition of political heavyweights and cultural icons that will lobby the world's leaders to prioritise girls' education.

Speaking after the meeting the Foreign Secretary said:

Girls' education is manifestly in the global interest. It is the Swiss Army knife, the Rosetta Stone, the Black and Decker toolkit that solves a multitude of the world's problems.

If we fail to educate girls, we store up huge problems for the future and wilfully miss out on boosting economic growth, managing population pressures and creating stable, prosperous societies – and most importantly, it is the right thing to do.

Gordon understands this, which is why he is a passionate advocate of improving education for women and girls around the world.

It was a pleasure to listen to his ideas and exchange views on the ways which the UK can become the global leader in ending the gross sexism behind attitudes which shut 130 million girls out of the classroom.

Appallingly 90 per cent of world's poorest children leave school unable to read and write. Mr Johnson believes that one of the root causes of girls' illiteracy and poor schooling is sexism masquerading as 'tradition', which is holding millions of the world's poorest girls back. Britain is leading by example by providing £212 million through the Department for International Development to ensure one million vulnerable girls across the Commonwealth get 12 years of quality education by 2030.

The Foreign Secretary believes that the single biggest thing that can be done to improve stability and reduce conflict in the world is to make sure that every girl gets 12 years of quality education.

During last month's Commonwealth Summit, Mr Johnson pushed for firm commitments from Foreign Ministers to make girls' education a priority. He will also use the UK's Presidency of the UN Security Council in August, to influence General Assembly members on the need to remove barriers to education.

Further information

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[News story: British army officer killed during WW1 is honoured as he is laid to rest](#)

2nd Lieutenant (Lt) Eric Henderson who served with the 8th (City of London) London Regiment 'Post Office Rifles', has finally been laid to rest after he was killed on the first day of the Battle of Messines during WW1. 2nd Lt Henderson was buried during a moving ceremony at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Oak Dump Cemetery, near Ypres in Belgium.



The Royal Artillery Regiment bearer party carry the coffin of 2nd Lt. Henderson (Crown Copyright), all rights reserved

The service, organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services, was held on Wednesday 16 May 2018 and was conducted by the Reverend Thomas Hiney CF, Chaplain to the 19 Royal Artillery Regiment.



The Royal Artillery Regiment bearer party take 2nd Lt. Henderson to his final resting place (Crown Copyright), all rights reserved

Nicola Nash, JCCC said:

It's a great honour to be here today to lay this brave man to rest, who fought so courageously alongside his comrades. I am particularly grateful that Eric's family were able to be here to witness him being finally laid to rest after so many years.

Although over 100 years have passed since Eric's death, we passionately believe in continuing to honour his sacrifice and the sacrifice of all members of the Armed Forces who are lost in battle.



The Royal Artillery Regiment bearer party ceremonially fold the Union Flag during the service (Crown Copyright), all rights reserved

2nd Lt Henderson initially joined the 28th Battalion London Regiment in July 1915 as a Private. He was soon commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant and eventually joined the 8th Battalion London Regiment, also known as the Post Office Rifles.

2nd Lt Henderson was killed in action on 7 June 1917 aged 21 years old, near the village of Messines in West Flanders, Belgium. He was found a century later during road works in the area of Eekhofstraat, near Voormezele in Belgium. He was found with several artefacts including a silver coin that was engraved with '2nd Lt. Eric Henderson, London Regiment'. Further research, conducted by the JCCC, showed that the location of the soldier was exactly where the Oak Reserve Line was during the Battle of Messines, which corresponded with the location of Eric's regiment on the day of his death.

The beginning of the Battle of Messines was signalled by the explosion of 19 mines that had been laid under German lines. The shock of the explosion was overwhelming and devastating to the enemy. The objectives of the Post Office Rifles on the day were to capture portions of the four lines known as Oak Trench, Oak Support, Oak Reserve and Oak Switch as well as a formidable strongpoint known as the 'Dammstrasse'. Many of the casualties of the Battalion were due to machine-gun fire from the White Chateau, one of the objectives of the 7th Battalion. Some of the 1/8th took part in the attack on this Chateau, and materially assisted in its capture.



2nd Lt. Henderson's great nieces (l to r) Judith Leyman, Sarah Foot and Lucy Cocup stand with the Royal Artillery Regiment and military representatives (Crown Copyright), all rights reserved

Family members who paid their respects to 2nd Lt Henderson included his three great nieces, Lucy Cocup, Sarah Foot and Judith Leyman, as well as members of their own families.

Mrs Judith Leyman, Eric's great niece, said on behalf of the family:

Being here in Ypres, and knowing Eric's resting place, means an awful lot to us. He wasn't a dusty memory in our family, but part of our mental landscape.

Reverend Thomas Hiney CF said:

These war cemeteries of northern France and Belgium are one of the wonders of the modern world. To add to one is of course poignant. These stories still feel very alive to our national memory.

Sub Lieutenant Harry Lewis from the British Embassy in The Hague was also in attendance. Current members of the Royal Artillery Regiment paid their own tribute by providing the bearer and firing party.

Mel Donnelly, CWGC Commemorations Manager said:

For almost a century, 2nd Lieutenant Eric Henderson was remembered with honour on the CWGC's Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial to the Missing – one of tens of thousands of young men whom the fortune of war denied a known grave. When the memorial was unveiled in 1927, the assembled mourners were told 'He is not missing. He is here'. Today, thanks to the efforts of many, that statement has new meaning for Eric and his family.



2nd Lt. Henderson's headstone bearing a poignant message (Crown Copyright), all rights reserved

A new headstone bearing 2nd Lt Henderson's name has been provided by the CWGC, who will now care for his final resting place in perpetuity.