

Speech: The Need for Free and Fair Elections in DRC

Thank you Mr President.

Let me begin by welcoming the presence today of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Okitundu, and thank you also to SRSZ Zerrougui for updating us on the intensifying instability, and the dire humanitarian consequences, in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The United Kingdom is deeply concerned by the proliferation of violence in the DRC, particularly in North and South Kivu, Tanganyika, Ituri and the Kasai and at significant increases in human rights abuses, with 744 violations in January, 60% of which were perpetrated by state agents.

As is too often the case, and as the civilian population of the DRC know all too well, the result of this instability has been devastating. 4.5 million Congolese have now fled their homes and communities; there are more internally displaced people in the DRC than anywhere else in Africa. 40,000 people have fled from Ituri to Uganda in this year alone, bringing the refugee population up to 670,000. This has caused a devastating humanitarian crisis – over 13.1 million are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. This number has doubled since 2017.

Mr President,

There is clearly a link between the ongoing political uncertainty and the increasing insecurity. The Congolese people cannot express their legitimate concerns with the political situation without risking their lives. On 21 January and 25 February, security forces once again violently repressed demonstrations leaving at least 9 people dead, dozens wounded and hundreds arrested. This must stop.

The holding of credible and constitutional elections by 23 December this year leading to a democratic and peaceful transition of power is essential to ending the political crisis. Without this, there is a significant risk of further violence destabilising not just the DRC, but the wider region also.

We welcome the progress made towards elections so far, including the completion of voter registration, the passing of electoral laws and the announcement of an electoral budget. However, this is no time for complacency. There is much more to do.

It is essential that the election calendar is honoured and that key dates set out in the electoral timetable are met, including the completion of the Voter Register List by 5 April, the Audit for the electoral list by 25 May, convocation of the electoral process in June and registration of Presidential candidates in July.

But, Mr President, holding credible elections is about more than complying

with timelines, it is also about creating the conditions than enable free and fair elections to take place. In order to do this, we call on the Government to implement the 31 December Agreement in full, including full implementation of the confidence-building measures set out in this agreement.

The Government must also respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people of the DRC, opening political space and allowing peaceful demonstrations and freedom of expression. The UK is extremely concerned at the high numbers of violations of political rights and fundamental freedoms in January. And we were appalled by the disproportionate use of force against churchgoers and peaceful protesters on 31 December 2017, 21 January 2018, and 25 February 2018 and the subsequent loss of life.

We recognise that the onus is not only on the Government to deliver credible elections and in this context we call on the opposition to engage constructively in the process on the basis of the 31 December Agreement, which will demonstrate their credibility and potential to govern.

Mr President,

MONUSCO has a crucial role to play in this crucial year in the DRC in protecting civilians and supporting the implementation of the 31 December Agreement.

We welcome the efforts to improve MONUSCO's ability to carry out these tasks more efficiently and more effectively. In particular we welcome efforts to enhance the flexibility and mobility of MONUSCO's forces and to improve their performance. It is important that these reforms are implemented swiftly.

Mr President,

In conclusion, let me be clear: the violence and resulting dire humanitarian situation in the DRC are the result of continual disappointment of the people in the political process and the political leaders responsible for this process. The only way to avert further violence is for free and fair elections to take place in December and for the 31 December Agreement to be fully implemented. Further excuses and delays will only lead to more violence and despair. The Security Council cannot allow this to happen. The people of the Democratic Republic of Congo cannot afford to wait any longer.

[News story: Open call for innovation](#)

jHub Defence is inviting organisation's with innovative ideas which will benefit Joint Forces Command and wider defence.

We are looking for technology and processes that will help improve the capability of our joint force, in terms of effectiveness and efficiencies.

Your idea could be a product or service that is already developed or close to being developed. We are specifically interested in building military technology, where innovative digital technology can be adapted for military use.

Our 5 focus areas are:

- artificial intelligence
- autonomy
- data analytics
- simulation
- behavioural sciences

Please note we do not do scientific and technical research.

Our online submission service will be available soon.

[News story: First year celebrations for the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network](#)

The event, held during National Apprenticeship Week 2018 at the House of Commons, welcomed Helen Grant MP and Chair of the [Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network \(ADCN\)](#) along with existing and new member employers and apprentices. Addressing the audience alongside Helen Grant were Neil Bentley from WorldSkills, Jodie Williams from Yorkshire Water, Gp Capt Steve Dharamraj from the Royal Air Force and Mike Thompson from Barclays, Elaine Billington from United Utilities and Claire Paul from the BBC, alongside Sue Husband, Director of the National Apprenticeship Service.



Speaking at the event, and discussing the impact of the network since its launch during National Apprenticeship Week 2017, Helen Grant MP said:

It is wonderful to celebrate the impact of the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network over the past 12 months. We now have over 50 employers in the network who are all committed to ensuring that their workforce includes apprentices, from all backgrounds, as well as pledging to tell other employers about the powerful impact apprentices can bring.

I am delighted that the hard work we have undertaken to increase the number of apprentices from diverse backgrounds is making a difference and our impact report, launched today, highlights this success.

Having so many ADCN members in the room, alongside new members, is great for the network and for apprenticeships and it's great to celebrate our success as part of National Apprenticeship Week 2018.

National Apprenticeship Week 2018 – themed 'Apprenticeships Work' – is the 11th annual week-long celebration of apprenticeships and during the week employers and apprentices from across England will come together to showcase the success of apprenticeships whilst encouraging even more people to choose apprenticeships as a pathway to a great career.

New members of the ADCN were also announced today – including Channel 4,

Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, and ITV.



Gp Capt S J Dharamraj from Commandant Royal Air Force Central Training School said:

Diversity is of absolute paramount importance to the RAF, and indeed to our apprenticeship programme.

Greater Diversity in our workforce allows us to draw on a range of different experiences, select the best recruits, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation, and better reflect the society we seek to protect. Improving diversity and inclusion is in itself a challenge but are working hard through our outreach programmes and our own diversity champions to ensure we inform communities of what an apprenticeship provides to the RAF and the benefits that apprenticeships can bring to them – in sum, what it means to be an RAF apprentice.

We are proud to stand up as a champion, and work with other members of the network to ensure we deliver lasting and positive change.

The event concluded with news that the new parent's apprenticeship information leaflets are now being produced in Polish and Punjabi. The event also highlighted developments to show the Disability Confident logo on apprenticeship vacancies on [find an apprenticeship](#), the service for searching and applying for apprenticeships. This will help support Learners with

Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LLDD) by giving them the facility to search for appropriate apprenticeship opportunities and will be fully functional by April 2018.



Sue Husband, Director of the National Apprenticeship Service concluded:

The 11th National Apprenticeship Week is well underway and it is magnificent that we can recognise the employers committed to apprenticeships diversity as part of our week long celebration of all things apprenticeships.

It is important that workforces reflect the community they serve and these employers are working to ensure that the reach of apprenticeships is extended to diverse groups. Apprenticeships work – for individuals, employers, for local communities and for the economy – and the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network is working hard to make sure this message is being spread to secure a more diverse workforce for the future.

You can find images from the event on the [National Apprenticeships Service Flickr page](#).

[News story: Public Health England statement regarding events in Salisbury](#)

Paul Cosford, Medical Director and Director of Health Protection at Public Health England (PHE) said:

All known first responders have been contacted through their organisations and encouraged to seek further advice should they experience any symptoms. The sites recently visited by the 2 people affected have all been secured and PHE is reminding local clinicians of the symptoms to look out for.

Based on current evidence, the risk to the wider public is low and it is likely that, had any member of the public been exposed to the substance, they would have presented with symptoms by now. However, anyone who was in the area and is concerned because they feel unwell, should dial 111 or 999 depending on the severity of their symptoms.

[News story: Home Office announces new round of funding to tackle knife crime](#)

As part of a new step-change to tackle the threat of violent behaviour, the Community Fund – which supports community projects to work with young people about the dangers of carrying knives – will have its funding increased to up to £1 million.

Over 40 charities, including the Ben Kinsella Trust, have already benefited by receiving grants of up to £20,000 through the first round of the Community Fund which was launched in October 2017.

In addition, further funding has been secured for Young People's Advocates until at least the end of March 2019, to provide support for vulnerable women and girls at risk of exploitation by gangs.

Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability Victoria Atkins said:

Knife crime has devastating consequences for families and local communities and I am determined to provide necessary support for

those most at risk.

Tackling this crime needs a change in young people's attitudes so they are not tempted to carry a knife and understand that they risk inflicting serious injury or even a tragic loss of life if they do.

This new funding will allow communities to work with young people so they do not want to carry knives. This will be a commitment in the forthcoming Serious Violence Strategy which will be published later this spring, in which there will be a strong emphasis on early intervention.

The Home Office has already provided around £2.5 million of funding for 13 Young People's Advocates over 6 years (April 2012 to March 2018) in London, Manchester and Birmingham. In recognition of the important services these professionals deliver to vulnerable women and girls affected by gangs, funding will continue in order to ensure effective delivery of these services.

Early intervention and prevention will be one of the main messages in the new Serious Violence Strategy to be published later this spring. It will place a new emphasis on steering young people away from crime, while continuing to promote the strongest possible law enforcement approach.