

[Press release: Minister for the Middle East statement following an increase in violence in Eastern Ghouta, Syria](#)

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

The Asad regime's brutal siege of Eastern Ghouta, coupled with escalating bombardment and reports of chemicals weapons use, is causing unprecedented levels of suffering. The enclave has become a crucible of misery and violence, which is simply unacceptable in the 21st century.

Airstrikes, artillery and rocket attacks by pro-regime forces are at some of the most intense levels seen in the besieged area in years, leading to scores of civilian casualties. Over 700 people need medical evacuation, but the regime continues to refuse to allow this.

We call on the regime and its backers to cease this campaign of violence, to protect civilians and allow rapid and unhindered humanitarian access. As the international community has made clear to the Asad regime and its backers: the world is watching.

Further information

- Follow the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa on Twitter [@AlistairBurtUK](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter [@foreignoffice](#) and [Facebook](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

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News story: Farm inspection review announced

The review, to be led by Dame Glenys Stacey, will look at opportunities for improving regulation and enforcement pre and post EU Exit, seek out ways to reduce duplication and allow farmers to concentrate on upholding key environmental and animal welfare standards as they produce fantastic British food.

For example, the current inspection regime can result in farmers being visited by as many as five different bodies – the Rural Payments Agency, Natural England, the Animal Plant and Health Agency, the Environment Agency or their local authority – all asking for similar information.

Each visit adds to the burden on farmers, and rigidity of the Common Agriculture Policy rules require inspections of precise criteria such as field margin dimensions and the specific placement of trees in fields. Equally, inspections over lapses such as slurry management and welfare standards are often haphazard.

The review comes as the government is preparing to publish an agriculture Command Paper that consults on future policy in this country after we leave the European Union.

Speaking at the NFU Conference today, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

The rules associated with current subsidy payments are unwieldy and, very often, counter-productive. They require farmers to spend long days ensuring conformity with bureaucratic processes which secure scarcely any environmental benefits and which, in turn, require a vast and inflexible bureaucracy to police.

As does the current farming inspection regime, which, despite several recent attempts at simplification, remains as unwieldy as ever. Every year, farmers are confronted by a barrage of inspections from different agencies, often duplicating costs in both time and money.

I am delighted to announce that Dame Glenys Stacey will be conducting a thorough and comprehensive review of this regime, seeing how these inspections can be removed, reduced or improved to reduce the burden on farmers, while maintaining and enhancing our animal and plant health standards.

This review is not only long-required but also very timely as we

guide our future approach and maximise the opportunities of leaving the EU. It will provide answers to some key general questions to guide our future approach, subject to the outcome of our negotiations with the EU.

Dame Glenys Stacey said:

I am delighted to be asked to lead the much needed review of the farm inspection regime. With farming at the heart of the quality and safety of the food on our plate as well, and central to the stewardship of our wildlife, land and rivers, this is an excellent time to be working with farmers and their representatives, and all those who inspect farms, so as to get to a sensible inspection regime, post Brexit.

Dame Glenys has over twenty years' experience in driving reform within public sector organisations. As a former Chief Executive of Animal health, a precursor to the current Animal and Plant Health Agency, she is well versed in the inspection challenge facing our farmers.

The Command Paper will provide further detail on government proposals to design agricultural support fit for the future after we leave the EU.

Notes

1. Dame Glenys is an experienced regulator, chief inspector and chief executive. A solicitor by profession, she has over twenty years' CEO experience, having led the start up or turnaround of a number of public sector organisations responsible for legal and/or regulatory services. As the former CEO of Defra's Animal Health Agency she has valuable experience of farm inspection regimes, and the nature and value of farming in the UK.
 2. Dame Glenys brings regulation and inspection experience from other public services. She joined Ofqual, the exams regulator in 2011 as its CEO and Chief Regulator, leading the implementation of the government's planned reforms to qualifications in England and providing advice to government on how best to deliver government's policy aims for qualifications. In March 2016 Dame Glenys took up the post of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation. The inspectorate sets standards and drives improvement in probation services, with the joint aims of reducing reoffending and protecting the public.
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News story: Attorney General attends Overseas Territories Attorneys General Conference

The Attorney General for England and Wales, Jeremy Wright QC MP, representing the UK Government, and the Attorneys General of eight of the UK's Overseas Territories (Anguilla; Bermuda; the British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands; Montserrat; Pitcairn; the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia; and the Turks and Caicos Islands), the Senior Advisory Counsel of Gibraltar, Solicitors General of the Crown Dependencies of Guernsey and Jersey, and a representative from the US Department of Justice met in Bermuda from 13-15 February 2018 to discuss a range of topics relating to the rule of law and administration of justice in the Territories and to enhance our mutual cooperation.

The Attorney General Jeremy Wright QC MP said:

During the conference we discussed cooperation on a number of important topics, including anti-corruption, transparency in the financial services industries in the Territories, child safeguarding, human rights, hurricane recovery efforts, criminal justice issues and support for the Territories' good governance. We also had the opportunity to discuss the Territories' interests in our Exit from the EU.

We celebrated the extension to Bermuda and St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha of the UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women demonstrating our shared commitment to raising human rights standards across the Territories.

We also welcomed continued work by the Territories with financial centres to support international efforts to tackle criminal financing and to promote tax transparency, in particular the implementation of bilateral arrangements on beneficial ownership, and the example set by the Territories as early adopters of the OECD Common Reporting Standard.

We also highlighted important developments in anti-corruption, including ongoing work in Bermuda and the Turks and Caicos Islands towards extension of key conventions to their jurisdictions.

Those in attendance committed to:

1. Continue involving the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies in negotiations for leaving the EU, ensuring their interests are taken into account as we move to Phase 2. The UK Government has also committed to

supporting the Overseas Territories Governments and the Crown Dependencies in their preparedness planning for EU Exit.

2. Continue to work in partnership with Territory governments to ensure that our financial sectors are hostile to illicit finances, to implement the bilateral arrangements on beneficial ownership, and to support each jurisdiction to adopt and implement international standards, including compliance with Financial Action Task Force standards, where they have not done so.
3. Work with the Overseas Territories Criminal Justice Adviser and Law Enforcement Adviser and with in-Territory stakeholders to build the legislative framework necessary to support reform of the criminal justice system, improve efficiency in the investigation and prosecution of crime, as well as efforts to prevent crime, supported by UK programme funds where necessary.
4. Continue to support efforts by relevant Territory governments on hurricane preparedness and recovery, including continued coordination and support between Territories.
5. Support the Territories to achieve extension of core Human Rights conventions where these have not been extended, and to complete a review of outstanding reservations against core UN human rights treaties.
6. Further enhance cooperation on child safeguarding through progress under the Overseas Territories Memorandum of Understanding and finalisation of National Response Plans and work towards extension of the Lanzarote Convention.
7. Work in partnership with Territories to address gaps in legislation pertaining to maritime obligations.

Research and analysis: Computational modelling: Blakett review

Review of UK computational modelling capabilities.

Research and analysis: Computational modelling: Blackett review

This report sets out the findings of a review looking at the rapid evolution of UK computational modelling capability, and how it could be better used in both the public and private sectors.