

UK calls for the end of cluster munitions use around the world

Actor and UN Ambassador Daniel Craig and FCO Minister Graham Stuart MP will today call for the end of cluster munition use around the world at an international conference chaired by the UK.

Cluster bombs continue to kill and maim civilians in conflicts around the world, including Syria, Libya and Ukraine, often leaving their victims with life-changing injuries. Unexploded munitions continue to threaten the lives of civilians for years afterwards, hampering post-conflict reconstruction and development.

The UK currently holds the Presidency of the Convention on Cluster Munitions of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, an international agreement ratified by 110 countries to end the use of these devastating weapons. This conference will bring together the international community and civil society organisations to work together to rid the world of these weapons, educate communities on the dangers associated with their use and support survivors and their families.

Alongside the Minister, Daniel Craig will open the conference with a video message in his capacity as the United Nations Global Advocate for the Elimination of Mines and Explosive Hazards.

Daniel Craig will say:

Civilians all too often pay the price when these brutal weapons are used. In my work with the United Nations Mine Action Service, I have seen how long after conflicts, damage caused by cluster munitions persists.

Unbelievably we are still seeing use of cluster munitions today, most recently in Ukraine.

Countries that still use and produce cluster munitions need to stop doing so, they are barbaric weapons used mainly on civilian populations to spread fear and anxiety. It is up to us to do the hard work, to do what we can to support each other and help civilians recover from the devastating impact of these weapons.

Graham Stuart, FCO Minister responsible for Counter-Proliferation, is expected to say:

Too many innocent civilians have lost their lives to these weapons of war. Under our Presidency, the UK has driven forward work to eliminate them altogether.

Every step taken under this Convention, makes the world a safer place – but too many states still refuse to give up cluster munitions. We will continue to speak out against these murderous weapons – as we did in March when we condemned their use in the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine.

We did so on behalf of the parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Since the Convention was founded 14 years ago, 110 State Parties have ratified it, 13 States have signed up to its objectives but not yet ratified, and 35 states have cleared their stockpiles of cluster munitions.

The UK is a leading supporter of mine action, and continues to invest heavily in clearance of cluster munitions, anti-personnel mines, and other explosive remnants of war around the world. In June 2022, the UK announced a budget of up to £100million for the third phase of its Global Mine Action Programme tackling the lethal legacy of these weapons.

[On top of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, the human rights situation is stark](#)

Thank you President. Let me thank USG Griffiths, DSRSG Potzel and Dr Morgan Edwards for their briefings.

Let me start by offering condolences to Pakistan following the devastating flooding in their country this week. Our thoughts are with the victims and their families. As my Minister Lord Ahmad has said, we are working with the Pakistani authorities to establish the support and assistance they need. The United Kingdom stands with the people of Pakistan at this time of need.

President, Russia has called for this meeting one year after the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan. As we reflect on that anniversary, we should also recall the Soviet Union's ten year occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 until 1989 that created the conditions for devastating civil war and the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s.

Today, it is clear that the situation in Afghanistan remains critical and the needs of the Afghan people acute.

As we have heard, over 24 million Afghans are in need of humanitarian support and nearly 20 million are facing acute food insecurity. Economic stability and the delivery of basic services are essential to end the cycle of suffering in Afghanistan. There remains a vital need to inject liquidity into

the country to avoid economic collapse.

While UK personnel have left Afghanistan, our commitment to the Afghan people remains resolute.

Between April 2022 and March 2023 the UK has committed \$676 million in aid to Afghanistan and our Foreign Secretary co-hosted the UN humanitarian pledging conference earlier this year, raising \$2.4 billion.

By contrast, Russia contributed nothing to the UN Humanitarian Response Plan, and China pledged \$2m.

On top of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, the human rights situation is stark. There are credible allegations of extra-judicial killings and detentions and disappearances, including civil society activists and former security forces and government officials.

The last few months have also seen the imposition of deplorable restrictions on the rights and freedoms of women and girls, including on access to education, jobs and services and on their freedom of movement and dress. It is clear to all but the Taliban that the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in society is a pre-requisite for a stable, prosperous Afghanistan.

The Taliban have also been repeating other mistakes from the past – not least the harbouring of the leader of Al Qaida, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, in downtown Kabul in breach of their international commitments.

We again call on the Taliban to meet its commitments:

- To ensure principled, unhindered humanitarian access across the country
- To uphold basic human rights, most pressingly for women and girls.
- And to ensure Afghanistan is never again a permissive environment for terrorist groups.

Strong and consistent UN leadership remains crucial to ensuring a well-coordinated and prioritised response and UNAMA has our full support in delivering its mandate provided by this Council.

President,

One year ago, this Council adopted resolution 2593 which set out our shared expectations of the Taliban. We hope the Council can continue to speak with one voice to press the Taliban on its commitments, and to support the Afghan people in overcoming the challenges ahead. We thank the UN for their ongoing and tireless efforts.

Our commitment to championing civil society participation at the UN

Thank you Madam Vice Chair,

Let me begin by echoing the concerns raised by the representative of Estonia on the impact of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine on civil society and NGOs.

As we begin our work this session, we recall the importance of this Committee. This Committee exists because we recognise that civil society is essential to our work at the UN. Their engagement enriches the evidence base at our disposal, making our meetings more effective and more substantial. In turn, this helps ensure that what we do here has an impact on the ground.

For these reasons, the UK is committed to championing civil society participation at the UN. Regrettably, we do this in the face of opposition, with a small group of Member States opposing civil society engagement with the UN, seeking to stifle their voices, afraid of the scrutiny that civil society provides.

Those states deliberately bring inertia to this Committee. Dozens of NGOs have been deferred for eight or more Committee sessions. The politicisation of this Committee is another example of the worrying increase in reprisals against organisations who seek to engage with the UN.

We were therefore pleased to see that, during this year's regular session, some Member States brought the arbitrary deferral of NGOs to a vote in the Committee, as has happened on several previous occasions. Those NGOs put forward to the vote, were ones that had been consistently deferred for years despite responding satisfactorily to Committee questions. We were disappointed that the vote was blocked in the committee by a no-action motion, but we were happy to co-sponsor the decision at ECOSOC, the Committee's parent body, where it was adopted by a wide margin.

We look forward to joining the Committee in January. As we have set out previously, we plan to use our membership to work with others to improve the working methods, promoting transparency to reduce arbitrary deferrals.

This Committee's role is to facilitate NGO access, not impede it. During this resumed session, in order to fulfil our collective commitment to inclusive multilateralism, we urge Committee Members to address the backlog of deferred applications fairly and transparently, and to promote a safe and welcoming space for civil society participation at the UN.

Thank you.

A renewed agreement this January will be critical to meet the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people

Thank you President.

Thank you to Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and ASG Joyce Msuya for their sobering briefings.

Let me join others in welcoming our new Irish colleague, Ambassador Fergal Mythen to the Council.

The UK continues to stand with the Syrian people in their desire for a sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict. As we have said many times, the only way to achieve this is through the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 2254. This includes: a nationwide ceasefire; unhindered aid access; release of the arbitrarily detained; conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified refugee return; and free and fair elections pursuant to a new constitution.

Special Envoy Pederson's ongoing efforts to deliver 2254 have our full support.

We are disappointed that the regime continues to stall discussions on political and constitutional reform. We are further disappointed that Russia has used the fallout of its own aggression in Ukraine as a pretext for undermining political progress in Syria, by asserting that Geneva should no longer be the venue for what should be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned Constitutional Committee talks.

While the Syrian regime continues to fail in its responsibility to respect the basic rights of Syrians, provide for their needs, or engage in the political process, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate.

Currently, around 14.6 million Syrians require humanitarian assistance – more than 67% of the population and 12 million people are facing acute food insecurity this year.

The UK recognises that early recovery is necessary to address humanitarian needs. This is reflected in our support. Our funding has helped with the rehabilitation of water networks, provided agricultural training and inputs for livestock and vegetable production, and provided apprenticeships and small business grants to help create jobs.

But humanitarian assistance, and particularly cross-border assistance, remains a lifeline for millions. By reducing the UN cross border mandate from

twelve to six months, resolution 2642 has caused uncertainty for the UN and its partners, impacting humanitarian operations and early recovery programming, a priority avowedly shared by Russia as well as other Council members.

We therefore call on all Security Council members to work together to ensure a renewed agreement this January to meet the critical needs of the Syrian people. Further uncertainty, or a closing of this lifeline at the height of winter, would be catastrophic for millions of people.

[Government re-affirms city status of Gibraltar](#)

Press release

A full, up-to-date list of cities in the United Kingdom, its Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories has been published.



The UK Government will today (Monday 29 August) re-affirm the city status of Gibraltar, as granted by Queen Victoria, confirming its special status in the Realms of Her Majesty the Queen and the family of the United Kingdom, the Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories.

The Government has undertaken detailed research in the National Archives and established that the City of Gibraltar was granted city status by Queen Victoria in 1842 but was omitted from the list of recognised cities. A newly-published record of 81 recognised cities confirms its place among the official list.

This status is testament to the close relationship between Gibraltar and the United Kingdom, 99% of Gibraltarians reaffirmed their commitment to British sovereignty in a referendum of 2002.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

It is excellent to see official recognition given to the City of Gibraltar, a huge accolade to its rich history and dynamism.

This official recognition re-affirms Gibraltar's special status in the Realms of Her Majesty, and rightly signifies the pride that Gibraltarians feel for their community and their distinctive heritage.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Kit Malthouse said:

The cities in this list are incredibly rich with history and culture, and the local people of those areas are rightly very proud to see their city's significance put to paper.

I'm hopeful people based in these places, particularly the new cities, can reap the benefits of their home's increased global standing and that it will attract more inward investment for local businesses.

In the year of the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, the updated list is being published following the award of eight new grants of city status earlier this year and the award to Southend-on-Sea in honour of Sir David Amess MP.

The full list of recognised cities from the Overseas Territories include Hamilton (Bermuda), Jamestown (Saint Helena) and Stanley (Falkland Islands) which was awarded the status as part of the Platinum Jubilee competition.

The publication will also highlight those cities which have received the honour of Lord Mayoralty or Lord Provostship.

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