

United Nations Secretary General's report on the implementation of Resolution 73/295: UK statement

Press release

UK government statement following the publication of the UN Secretary General's report on implementing Resolution 73/295 relating to the Chagos Archipelago.



UK government statement:

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland acknowledges the considerable work of the Secretary-General and his office, during a very challenging period, in producing the report on the 'Advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965' published on 12 June 2020.

The United Kingdom voted against [General Assembly resolution 73/295](#) and remains firmly of the view that the International Court of Justice and General Assembly are not the appropriate fora for resolving what is fundamentally a bilateral matter of disputed sovereignty between 2 UN member states. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom was grateful for the opportunity to provide input to this report.

The United Kingdom has no doubt about its sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, which has been under continuous British sovereignty since 1814. Mauritius has never held sovereignty over the Archipelago and we do not recognise its claim. However, we have a long-standing commitment, first made in 1965, to cede sovereignty of the territory to Mauritius when it is no longer required for defence purposes. We stand by that commitment. The United Kingdom is also committed to doing more (on a voluntary basis) to address

the aspirations of Chagossians including the desire for better lives and to maintain a connection to the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). Despite our disagreement over the British Indian Ocean Territory, the United Kingdom and Mauritius remain close friends and Commonwealth partners. We remain open to dialogue on all shared issues of mutual interest, as highlighted by the friendly and constructive discussion that took place between the UK's Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister of Mauritius on 27 April.

Published 13 June 2020

[Latest rod licence figures show increase as restrictions lifted](#)

Environment Agency figures released today show a huge surge in [fishing licence](#) sales after the government lifted restrictions on outdoor activities.

Between 13 May 2020, when the restrictions were lifted, and 9 June 2020 over 335,000 licences were sold compared to 142,000 licences sold from the start of the year to end of March 2020, a rise of over 230% in less than two months. This also represents a rise of over 200,000 more than the same period last year.

The Environment Agency and the sport's governing body, the Angling Trust, believe the rise is due to existing anglers embracing the opportunity to start fishing again, together with those taking up the sport for the first time or returning to the sport after a long absence – prompted by the pursuit of new hobbies during lockdown.

Fishing licence income is vital to the work of the Environment Agency to maintain, improve and develop fisheries. Revenue generated from fishing licence sales is reinvested to benefit angling, with work including tackling illegal fishing, protecting habitats for fish and improving facilities for anglers.

Last year alone, the revenue generated by over 800,000 anglers contributed to the cost of building more than 100 fish passes, allowing the free movement of fish through rivers. Other work covered by the licence fee included nearly 2,000 fish surveys and improvements to over 1,000 kilometres of river and 87 hectares of stillwater fisheries.

The rise in interest in fishing comes at a prime time for anglers with the end of the close season for coarse fishing on rivers just around the corner.

The annual close season, which runs from the 15 March until 15 June helps to protect coarse fish stocks across England during spawning.

Dr Graeme Storey, Environment Agency Acting Deputy Director for Fisheries and the Natural Environment, said:

Since the lifting of restrictions on recreational angling it has been encouraging to see not only anglers returning to the sport, but also people trying fishing for the first time. Responsible fishing is an excellent way to engage with nature and enjoy being outdoors, which in turn can provide positive health and welfare benefits. As a consequence of the revenue generated through the sale of rod licences, anglers are at the heart of protecting and improving the very things they care about.

Fishing really is an activity that most people, of any age, can participate in and enjoy. Whether looking for a moment of solitude or a family day out, I would encourage anyone thinking about it to give it a go. It is important to remember that if you decide to return to fishing or take it up for the first time, you must have a valid fishing licence and adhere to current government guidelines on social distancing.

Jamie Cook, Angling Trust CEO, said

The Angling Trust is delighted that ministers embraced the recommendations in our When We Fish Again report and authorised an early resumption of angling in England to COVID compliant guidelines. We are also delighted to be witnessing something of a renaissance in angling with former anglers returning to the sport and newcomers trying fishing for the first time. In these difficult times we believe that our sport has much to offer in terms social, health and economic wellbeing.

In England and Wales you need a [fishing licence](#) to fish for salmon, trout, freshwater fish, smelt or eel with a rod and line. Anglers found fishing without a licence can face fines of up to £2,500.

It is imperative to anglers follow the Government guidance in place, limiting contact with other people and maintain a distance of 2m from other anglers whilst fishing. If you are in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, you must adhere to the guidance and regulations set by the Scottish and Welsh governments or Northern Ireland Executive at all times.

Group to measure for coronavirus prevalence in waste water

News story

New working group includes a range of water companies and experts across the UK



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Sewage monitoring is being established across the UK as part of an advance warning system to detect new outbreaks of coronavirus.

The new approach is based on recent research findings that fragments of genetic material (RNA) from the virus can be detected in waste water. This could be used to detect the presence of the virus in the population, including those who are asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic.

The World Health Organization is clear there is currently no evidence that coronavirus has been transmitted via sewerage systems.

Sampling from sewage treatment works around the country will begin shortly. Data gathered will be used to refine the approach and feed into the Covid-19 Alert System created by the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC).

Techniques are still in their infancy, so the government and Devolved Administration partners are working closely with academics, UK Research and Innovation and the Natural Environment Research Council and water companies in developing and testing this cutting-edge approach.

This UK work is being coordinated by Defra, the Environment Agency and the JBC, working closely with water companies and the Universities of Bangor, Edinburgh, Bath and Newcastle.

In Scotland, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency has begun analysis of the first samples of waste water provided by Scottish Water, coordinating the work with the Scottish Government's Centre of Expertise for Waters, the University of Edinburgh's Roslin Institute and Health Protection Scotland.

In Wales, a number of options to support specific wastewater monitoring

projects are being assessed, which would complement the UK programme to aid Covid-19 surveillance.

Further details will be released as the work develops.

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[Promoting peace, stability and security in the Central African region](#)

Thank you, Mr President.

We first want to express our condolences to the Government and the people of Burundi for the recent death of President Nkurunziza.

We'd like to express our appreciation for the work the Mission is undertaking across Central Africa to support and promote peace, stability and security in the region.

Although there has been progress in a number of areas, countries across Central Africa continue to face serious political and security challenges that could be exacerbated by COVID-19, as the SRSB has set out for us this morning. It remains vital that all countries continue to work together to mitigate the spread of the virus in ways that will strengthen rather than undermine peace and security and to ensure the protection of civilians. We should ensure that our response is built on the protection and promotion of human rights, inclusive and resilient economic recovery, as well as the maintenance of international peace and security.

The United Kingdom particularly welcomes the ongoing efforts of UNOCA in conflict prevention and mediation efforts across the subregion. We encourage UNOCA to continue to enhance its work on early warning analysis and greater coordination with UN country teams in the subregion.

The United Kingdom shares UNOCA's continuing concerns over the situation in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon. High levels of violence are having tragic yet preventable consequences for civilians. We welcome the Secretary-General's call on armed actors to refrain from attacks against civilians in Cameroon and SRSB Fall's visit to Cameroon, which focused on the North-West and South-West crisis and elections.

The UK continues to call for restraint, an end to the violence and unhindered humanitarian access to affected populations. We urge UN agencies to scale up their rapid response mechanisms with increasing focus on the issue of gender-based violence.

Mr President, we welcome steps taken by the Government of Cameroon to implement recommendations of the national dialogue in October 2019, including passing legislation granting special status to the North-West and South-West regions. Further inclusive dialogue remains vital to progress towards a just, peaceful and durable resolution to the crisis, which meets the reasonable demands of the moderate majority. The United Kingdom continues to urge all parties to remain engaged in peace building efforts. Human rights violations and abuses in the North-West and South-West regions must stop.

The Government of Cameroon's joint investigation with the UN into the appalling attacks in Ngarbuh in February and the publication of the findings which attributed responsibility to Cameroonian soldiers were welcome steps. We urge the Government of Cameroon to maintain this momentum and ensure the perpetrators are brought to justice. It is critical that human rights, including freedom of speech, association and assembly, are respected and that all reports of human rights violations and abuses are investigated and prosecuted. The right to engage in political debate and commentary must be protected as it is the cornerstone of any democracy. We encourage all of Cameroon's international partners, including UNOCA, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Peacebuilding Commission, as was the AU, ECCAS and the Commonwealth, to continue to support efforts to restore peace in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon.

Mr President, the situation in the Lake Chad basin also remains of concern. The spread COVID-19 and the drawdown of humanitarian actors will compound the worsening humanitarian situation there. The civilian population in areas controlled by non-state armed groups are at particular risk and humanitarian actors must be able to access these populations in order to prevent further deaths from malnutrition and treatable diseases.

The United Kingdom continues to recognise the importance of regional cooperation in supporting stability in the Lake Chad basin, including through the Multi-National Joint Task Force. We express our condolences for the innocent lives lost in attacks by terrorists and violent extremist groups, including the dozens of civilians reportedly killed in Nigeria's Borno state on the 9th of June. We hope that all relevant international partners will continue to support efforts to tackle terrorism and stabilise the region.

Mr President, turning to the situation in Burundi, the UK welcomes the broadly peaceful conduct of elections on the 20th of May, although we have concerns about the fairness of the electoral process. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the importance of all actors preserving a peaceful climate during this period of transition. We look forward to working with the President-Elect and hope to see Burundi forge a path towards stability, democracy and prosperity.

Finally, Mr President, we remain concerned about the security and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic and efforts by armed groups to undermine the peace agreement and progress towards stability. The United Kingdom calls on all armed groups to adhere to the peace agreement and to abide by the Secretary-General's call for an immediate global ceasefire in the fight against COVID-19 ahead of milestone elections in December.

Thank you very much, Mr President.

[Trio receive jail term for dumping mustard gas bombs in a Lincolnshire lake](#)

A trio of wartime memorabilia hunters have received jail sentences for dumping WWII mustard gas bombs in a Lincolnshire lake – making them the first in the country to be sentenced for possession of a chemical weapon.

Martyn Tasker (40) was jailed for 5 years for possession of firearms, plus 16 months' concurrent sentence for possession of a chemical weapon. His wife Michaela Tasker (32) and friend Stuart Holmes (50) were both handed a 12-month jail sentence suspended for two years for possession of a chemical weapon.

They all pleaded guilty to breaching environmental laws by dumping hazardous material in the lake in addition to the chemical weapons charge.

Holmes also pleaded guilty to dumping a substance likely to harm human health or pollute the environment.

High Court Judge the Honourable Mr Justice Jeremy Baker in Nottingham Crown Court today passed sentence on the joint prosecution by the Environment Agency and the Crown Prosecution Service.

During sentencing, he highlighted that the trio's acts had 'huge and wide-ranging consequences', sparking the largest multi-agency response of its kind – and the situation only came to light when two of the three sought medical help for burns and trouble breathing.

The court heard that in September 2017, the Taskers came across wartime memorabilia in Roughton Woods, near Woodhall Spa – land which was historically requisitioned by the MoD for military training – and dug up a half-buried box of mustard gas bombs.

They messaged a friend who used to repair weapons in the Territorial Army to ask what they'd found, but didn't get an immediate identification.

Ten days later, the pair returned with Mr Holmes and uncovered a total of 16 canisters and three earthenware bottles.

One bottle was prised open – exposing what Mr Tasker called 'really smelly oil' inside – before his friend texted, confirmed the containers were full of mustard gas, and advised alerting the authorities.

But Holmes had already poured the three bottles of mustard gas onto the ground so he could take the empty bottles home with him, along with 10 unopened canisters. The group left the other six canisters, but didn't report their find – despite knowing what a dangerous substance they'd uncovered.

Later that day, they decided to dump the canisters in Stixwould Lake, where Holmes worked. They secretly took a dinghy, rowed out into the lake, and left the containers to sink to the bottom, before burning their clothes.

The mustard gas bombs pulled from Stixwould Lake, Lincolnshire

The next day, Martyn Tasker sought treatment for blisters on his forearms and soon after, Michaela Tasker was treated for breathing difficulties.

Only then did the pair alert the police – but they lied about the circumstances and still didn't tell officers about the bombs they dumped in the lake.

But it wasn't long until inconsistencies emerged from their stories and all three were arrested.

Authorities then launched a major operation to secure the woods, lake, and suspects' homes, and to recover the hazardous chemical.

In what has since been hailed the biggest operation of its kind, Lincolnshire Police led more than two dozen organisations including the Environment Agency, emergency services, and the Army, in an 11-day response.

It saw roads closed, drones deployed, safety cordons put in place, and at least one home evacuated while teams worked around the clock to tackle the tactical challenges of safely removing the bombs from the lake while keeping themselves, and nearby residents, safe.

Environment Agency sonar equipment usually used for fish surveys finally determined the bombs' location in the lake before Royal Navy divers were sent in to safely retrieve them.

The bombs were immediately transferred to the specialist defence science and technology lab in Porton Down. There, testing confirmed that the containers were still sealed and had not leaked.

Everyone involved risked exposure and nasty side effects including burns, blisters, respiratory damage, vomiting and diarrhoea. Multiple public meetings were held to address concerned local residents.

Following the sentencing, Ben Thornely, Incident Management Lead at the Environment Agency, said:

Mustard gas is extremely toxic, so dumping it in a lake near people's homes and in a popular woodland enjoyed by Scouts and dog-

walkers was appallingly dangerous.

Luckily the old, corroded containers didn't leak and were safely disposed of by professionals who showed bravery, ingenuity and collaboration to keep people safe.

This incident was entirely unique, so it's satisfying the judge recognised the grave threat posed and we hope this sentence sends a clear message – we won't hesitate to take action against those who so carelessly put people and our precious environment at risk.

Chief Inspector Phil Vickers, of Lincolnshire Police, said:

This operation challenged the emergency services, military and partner agencies in ways that we have never experienced in Lincolnshire before – in fact some of the issues had never been faced anywhere before.

The operation was testament to the planning and preparation that goes on behind the scenes to protect our communities in times of need, and whilst that has meant flooding and extreme weather in the past, the same principles applied when faced with this new challenge.

Bringing together 27 agencies to protect the community of Woodhall Spa and surrounding area was no mean feat – everyone pulled together and we witnessed bravery from our military, insight from our specialist advisors, ingenuity from the Environment Agency and commitment from all involved.

This was truly a successful multi-agency team effort – we achieved our aim of protecting the community from harm, and used our wide range of skills and experience to do so.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the partners who worked on 'Operation Saddleback' in the initial response and then into the recovery stage led by East Lindsey District Council – Most of all I would like to thank the local community for their patience and support throughout.

The Environment Agency takes all reports of pollution seriously – if you suspect a pollution or other environmental incident, report it to our 24-hour hotline on 0800 80 70 60.