

News story: Review of Blue Badge fraud as scheme is extended to those with 'hidden disabilities'

- Blue Badge scheme to be extended to people who have less visible disabilities, making journeys more accessible
- this change to the scheme is the biggest in nearly 50 years with the extended criteria coming into force on 30 August 2019
- review also launched into Blue Badge fraud and ways of reducing misuse

People with hidden disabilities will soon be able to access Blue Badge parking permits, thanks to the rollout of [new guidance](#) today (June 15 2019).

For drivers or passengers with dementia, anxiety disorders or reduced mobility, the anticipation of travel difficulties such as finding a parking space can build on top of the stress of the journey itself.

The new guidance, which represents the biggest change to the scheme since the 1970s, will offer a lifeline to people who often find road travel difficult by providing better access to work and other amenities. It will also help combat loneliness by enabling them to stay connected to family and friends.

The expanded scheme coincides with the launch of a new task force to toughen up enforcement and help councils tackle fraudulent use of the badges.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

As a society we don't do enough for people with hidden disabilities.

I hope this change to Blue Badge guidance will make a real difference to people's lives.

At the end of 2018, the Local Government Association estimated that the theft of Blue Badges had risen by 45 percent in 12 months and increased six-fold since 2013.

The review will look at ensuring Blue Badges are used correctly and improving public understanding so that those with hidden disabilities can use the badges with confidence.

Minister for Disabled People Justin Tomlinson said:

It's unacceptable that people with hidden disabilities still face discrimination when using disabled facilities like parking spaces.

Extending the Blue Badge scheme is a watershed moment in ensuring those with hidden disabilities are able to travel with greater ease and live more independent lives.

To help councils with the expected increase in applications, the department has agreed with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to provide £1.7 million in the first year of the programme.

The Department for Transport has been working with specialists to expand the eligibility criteria for the badges, which will now include people who cannot walk as part of a journey without considerable psychological distress or the risk of serious harm.

The Blue Badge scheme already means people with physical disabilities can park closer to their destination than other drivers, as they are less able to take public transport or walk longer distances.

The extension of these badges to those with less visible conditions was announced last summer following an 8 week consultation on widening the eligibility criteria. It is an important part of the government's drive for greater parity between physical and mental health.

Jane Harris, Director of External Affairs at the National Autistic Society, said:

The changes will make a huge difference to thousands of autistic people and their families across England – helping them to go out in the way many others take for granted.

Just leaving the house is incredibly difficult for many autistic people – and involves detailed preparation. Some autistic people have no concept of the dangers of the road while others are so anxious about plans going wrong, like not being able to find a parking space, that they don't go out at all. Having a Blue Badge will be life-changing and help many to reduce loneliness and isolation.

A task group will be set up with key organisations to gather ideas and evidence on how to improve the consistency of council enforcement to tackle fraud and misuse.

The review will also look at ensuring that there is greater public awareness of which groups are eligible for a badge, when it can and cannot be used, and how to surrender the badge when it is no longer needed, for example if the badge holder dies.

While the new criteria will give clear and consistent guidelines on Blue Badge eligibility for the whole of England, not everyone with non-physical disabilities will qualify for a badge. It will be up to the relevant local authority to decide if an applicant meets the eligibility criteria, as is

currently the case.

Last year, the government set out its plans to improve accessibility across all modes of transport in the [Inclusive Transport Strategy](#) which launched on 25 July 2018. The strategy aims to make the UK's transport network fully inclusive by 2030.

Speech: Efforts to build stability in Burundi

Thank you Mr President. And I'd like to begin by thanking all of our briefers this afternoon.

Mr. President, the United Kingdom shares the ambition expressed by other speakers today for inclusive, peaceful and fair elections next year and an end to the humanitarian, human rights and political crisis.

However, since our last meeting there has been no progress to securing a solution to the political crisis which can enjoy the support of all Burundian parties ahead of the elections. We regret in particular the lack of progress in the inter-Burundian dialogue set out by Commissioner Chergui today. If the political situation is not resolved, there remains a real risk of violence, human rights violations and an escalating humanitarian crisis, which threatens peace and stability within Burundi and the region.

We have seen before, through the Arusha Accords, that it is possible to find a solution through unified and effective leadership from both the region and Burundi. We therefore call on the region especially the East African Community and the African Union and Burundi to demonstrate leadership again with the support of Burundi Special Envoy. We underline the UK support for the efforts of Special Envoy Kafando and emphasise that any solution must be in line with the spirit of the Arusha Accords.

The UK remains ready to review its approach to Burundi including its support for measures taken through the European Union once tangible steps have been taken to improve the current political and human rights situation. Mr President, next year's elections in Burundi represent a critical juncture for its political developments. There is an opportunity for a democratic transition of power in Burundi for the first time in 14 years. We take note of the administrative preparations that have been made as outlined by ASG Fernandez-Taranco this afternoon. But we remain concerned by wider restrictions on the political freedoms that are essential for the conduct of free and fair elections.

In particular, since the last Security Council briefing in February, the Government of Burundi has made the disappointing decision to revoke the BBC's

operating license. Concerning comments have also been made by officials within the National Independent Electoral Commission proposing restrictions on the Burundian media. We call on the Government of Burundi to engage with the BBC to reinstate their operating license and to commit to enabling an independent media environment within Burundi.

Finally Mr President, I would like to underline the UK's concern about the humanitarian situation in Burundi and stress the importance of maintaining international support for humanitarian efforts. In 2019, OCHA estimates that 1.8 million Burundians (15% of the population) will need humanitarian assistance. As of 31 March, some 125,000 Burundians remained internally displaced. I would like to particularly draw attention to the fragile situation faced by refugees and pay tribute to the work of UNHCR which is assisting 350,000 refugees through the Burundian refugee response plan.

In conclusion Mr President, with elections next year taking place amidst this fragile political and humanitarian situation, it is vital that the UN Security Council remain seized of this issue and engage to support efforts to find a solution and build stability in Burundi. Thank you.

Speech: International community should be united in demanding peace in Sudan and Darfur

Thank you, Mr President. And let me also thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Assistant-Secretary-General Gilmour for their briefings this morning.

Let me speak a little about the wider situation in Sudan and its impact on Darfur. And then secondly, on UNAMID and our approach to the upcoming mandate renewal, Mr President.

We meet again during uncertain times in Sudan. When we last met in this chamber, I said that the Transitional Military Council had a choice. They could choose to deliver the legitimate demands of the Sudanese people for a political system that is inclusive, respectful of human rights, and the rule of law. They could choose to engage with the international community, to gain the support that Sudan desperately needs as it seeks to turn around decades of economic mismanagement and to help resolve conflict. Instead, the Transitional Military Council chose brutal violence that resulted in the death of over 100 peaceful civilian protesters and the injury of hundreds more. Through our press statement this week, we in this Council strongly condemned this violence and urged the authorities to immediately end the use of violence, fully respect human rights, and ensure justice and accountability. And I am sure that will be the clear and unambiguous message

that will be sent by members of this Council today. We note that today the Transitional Military Council has acknowledged the violations committed by the security services on the 3rd of June and has said that an investigation is underway. The United Kingdom urges the military authorities to ensure that this investigation is transparent and ensures the accountability that the military authorities have as a responsibility to deliver for the Sudanese people. May I also say how much we support the position of the African Union.

The African Union has demonstrated strong regional leadership in response to the situation in Sudan and we fully support the AU's efforts to find a peaceful and swift resolution to the current crisis. We call on all international partners to show their support for those AU efforts.

Mr President, unfortunately the violence and human rights violations and abuses perpetrated in Khartoum on, and since the 3rd of June, are all too familiar to the people of Darfur. As Andrew Gilmour referenced there remain serious human rights and protection concerns in Darfur. The very forces that perpetrated the recent violence in Khartoum, the Rapids Support Forces or our RSF, have targeted – and continue to target – civilians in Darfur. This includes indiscriminate shooting, looting and burning of villages, and sexual and gender based violence amongst other crimes. And as noted by the Secretary General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict – Pramila Patten – in her statement on Sudan yesterday, the Rapid Support Forces have been consistently listed in the Secretary-General's annual report on conflict related sexual violence. Let us not forget that the Rapid Support Forces came from the militia known as the Janjaweed. This militia was responsible for a conflict which the United Nations estimates led three hundred thousand dead and two and a half million displaced. And it should be of great concern to us all that the Rapid Support Forces currently occupy most of the team sites which UNAMID has vacated to date.

The Transitional Military Council have shown no signs of abiding by previous agreements on the handover of UNAMID team sites for civilian use, and, as Jean-Pierre Lacroix stated, they have gone so far as to explicitly demand by decree that UNAMID's remaining teams sites should be given to the RSF.

Mr President, UNAMID's team sites must not be handed over to the RSF. Doing so would not only be in violation of existing agreements on the hand over these sites, as well as UN principles, financial rules, and regulations, but it would also be grossly negligent. We would risk enabling violence against civilians.

Since the events of the 11th of April, Darfur has witnessed a spike in violence in internally displaced persons camps, inter-communal clashes, and attacks on humanitarian actors. This week UNAMID verified inter-communal clashes in central Darfur that led to the death of 17 people, the injury of 15, and more than 100 houses burned. Following this incident, UNAMID plans to intensify that confidence building measures to promote into communal dialogue. This is just one example of the important role – despite its limited footprint – which UNAMID continues to play in Darfur.

Mr President, the other obvious impact of the wider situation is on the

Darfur peace process, which is currently stalled. Now, the Transitional Military Council previously stated that resolving Sudan's internal conflicts would be their top priority and that at that time was a welcome statement. However, their recent actions severely undermined that commitment. The United Kingdom therefore calls on the military authorities to undertake confidence building measures, including agreeing to an independent and transparent investigation of the violence in Khartoum.

Mr President, the United Kingdom remains committed to the transition from peacekeeping to peace building in Darfur. And for this transition to be successful a number of conditions should be met. UNAMID's departure must be undertaken responsibly without creating security and protection vacuums. And for peace building to be sustainable, the international community requires a willing and able host state partner. Unfortunately, the current conditions do not lend themselves to this. And as a result we in this Council have a responsibility to step back. To take stock of the current situation. And to consider how that affects the assumptions that we have all expressed before and all shared about UNAMID's immediate future. I would like to say that, as we have been since UNAMID first deployed to Darfur 15 years ago, the United Kingdom remains firmly committed to supporting efforts to build peace and stability in Darfur. And that commitment guides our approach to UNAMID's mandate renewal. The United Kingdom and Germany believe that the most prudent approach would be a technical rollover of UNAMID's mandate.

A technical rollover would provide time for progress on the broader political situation. It would give time for the issue regarding the handover of UNAMID's team sites to be resolved. And it would enable the United Nations and African Union to develop a political strategy to address the outstanding challenges that remain following UNAMID's departure. I take note of the African Union communique issued yesterday, and in particular the clear rejection in that communique of any handover of assets to the Rapid Support Forces under any circumstances and their demand that the decree issued by the Transitional Military Council should be repealed. Along with Germany, we will engage with all colleagues on the council, and in particular our African Union friends, on the detail of that proposed technical rollover.

Mr President, in conclusion, we will be watching the actions of the Transitional Military Council in the coming days and weeks. They still have a choice to make. The international community should be united in demanding that they make the right choice. That would require immediate steps to establish a civilian led transitional authority which would in turn pave the way for peace in Darfur. Moreover Mr President, they have an obligation to the people of Sudan who have shown tremendous bravery and perseverance in a dignified and legitimate demands for a better tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr President.

[News story: Gulf of Oman attacks: UK statement](#)

Following our own assessment the UK concludes that:

- It is almost certain that a branch of the Iranian military – the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – attacked the two tankers on 13 June. No other state or non-state actor could plausibly have been responsible.
- There is recent precedent for attacks by Iran against oil tankers. The Emirati-led investigation of the 12 May attack on four oil tankers near the port of Fujairah concluded that it was conducted by a sophisticated state actor. We are confident that Iran bears responsibility for that attack.

The Foreign Secretary said:

I condemn yesterday's attacks on two vessels in the Gulf of Oman. Our own assessment leads us to conclude that responsibility for the attacks almost certainly lies with Iran. These latest attacks build on a pattern of destabilising Iranian behaviour and pose a serious danger to the region.

In targeting civilian shipping, international norms have been violated. It is essential that tankers and crews are able to pass through international waters safely. We call on Iran urgently to cease all forms of destabilising activity. The UK remains in close coordination with international partners to find diplomatic solutions to de-escalate tensions.

[Press release: UK and Argentina take on co-chair of Equal Rights Coalition](#)

The United Kingdom has taken on the role of co-chair of the Equal Rights Coalition (ERC), in partnership with Argentina (14 June 2019).

The Equal Rights Coalition is the first intergovernmental network formed to

promote and protect the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people around the world. The ERC's membership works with civil society and allows both governments and civil society to share their national policies and practices on this agenda. The UK is a global leader on the promotion and protection of LGBT human rights and is committed to ensuring the success of the ERC, a grouping of 42 like-minded states working together to defend and advance the human rights of LGBT people around the world.

Priorities for the UK in their period as co-chair include a refreshed ERC Strategy to guide, shape and re-energise the work of the Coalition; delivery of an international LGBT rights conference in London in 2020 that seeks to address the key issues facing global LGBT equality; and the co-ordination of the ERC's work plan with the Global Equality Caucus, a new international network of parliamentarians and elected representatives due to launch later this month, and which intends to host its first global convening at the international LGBT rights conference in London in 2020.

Further information