

Speech: Working with civil society to promote the Women, Peace and Security agenda

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon and welcome. I'm delighted that we're working very closely with many in this room. But in hosting this event today, in particular, paying tribute to our close cooperation with both Germany and Peru and colleagues across the world on the important agenda of Women, Peace and Security both through the informal Experts Group and in the Security Council. So it's an immense pleasure to be co-hosting this Arria meeting today. And thank you, Foreign Minister, for your introductory remarks.

As we've heard from the Foreign Minister, next year will mark the 20th anniversary of when the UN Security Council resolution 1325 was passed. It was a landmark resolution. It set the course for the agenda that we all meet for today on Women, Peace and Security at the UN. If 1325 sets out the destination, then the national action plans are the means of getting there – providing country specific, tangible strategies that can drive public and political action, and drive the important priority of gender equality and most importantly lasting peace. In countries suffering the effects of unresolved conflicts, the voices of women can make a real difference. Actually let's change that. They do make a real difference. Survivors and grassroots organisations need to be allowed better connections with national politics and to be able to contribute directly to building peace. That cannot in any sense be ignored.

Five years ago, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen there was not a single National Action Plan in the MENA region. Today we can reflect and I am pleased to say there are four: in Iraq, in Jordan, in Tunisia and in the occupied Palestinian territories. And they will soon be joined by Lebanon. However the unresolved conflicts across the MENA region continue to demonstrate the chronic challenges of implementing the WPS agenda in conflict settings. As we heard from Heiko, we have a humanitarian crisis in the MENA region. We can look to Yemen's protracted conflict and Syria. Absence of political stability in Libya and yes the legacy of the awful legacy of Daesh atrocities in Iraq. I also visited Mosul. I visited Iraq together with Special Representative of the Secretary-General Pramila Patten and went to Mosul and heard first-hand about the suffering of minority communities – particularly Christians and the Yazidis. And I had the honour last week to host Nadia Murad in London, where I heard directly about the sterling work she was doing. And not only having endured the atrocities of this despicable organization -that hijacks a noble faith- Daesh, not just surviving it but then having the courage to become an advocate. And I am sure we all recognise and pay tribute to her efforts which were rightly recognised through the award of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Your Excellencies, when we look at what's happening across the MENA region –

directly or indirectly increase sexual and gender based violence. We've seen that it disproportionately affects women and girls and it creates barriers to their full participation. Therefore National Action Plans need to address the diversity of the countries and the regions they serve. Understanding the immense complexities and most importantly addressing these challenges. Under our own National Action Plan, the United Kingdom has prioritised support to key countries including Iraq, Syria and Libya. And implementing these National Action Plans requires a threefold approach. The first: is state level support and we are pleased to be funding UN Women to support the implementation of the Jordanian National Action Plan through our Conflict, Stability and Security fund. The government endorsed plan will integrate a gender based approach towards women's participation in prevention and protection processes as well as importantly in peace building. The second aspect, again as the Foreign Minister mentioned, is civil society. Women-led groups are at the forefront of efforts to build peace across the MENA region, and they must be rightly recognised but also importantly they must be protected. That is why we are helping to build the capacity of civil society organisations in Iraq through the Women's Peace and humanitarian fund and have also supported women's organizations in Libya and indeed in Yemen.

The final crucial aspect relates to the international community – that is all of us. Our collective, collaborative shared responsibility to provide technical, financial and logistical support to governments and civil society organisations, in order to achieve our shared vision and goals on inclusivity on the agenda that is women peace and security. For our part, the United Kingdom pledges to continue to support this agenda in every which way we can, including through our own National Action Plan. In the Security Council, we must do more to ensure the existing Women, Peace and Security framework is further implemented more meaningfully. The informal Experts Group is an important forum to monitor and indeed encourage implementation but we must also continue to hear directly from civil society briefers, from the United Nations who can illustrate progress and most importantly highlight areas where we must continue to apply our collective efforts and support.

In conclusion and mindful once again of next year's anniversary, I urge all of us together today to join in implementing and developing further National Action Plans in full consultation with our civil society partners. So that together we support others to implement theirs. And together we can strengthen our resolve in promoting the Women, Peace and Security agenda in all our work – in both conflict and stability and in building peace. Thank you.

[Press release: Foreign Secretary](#)

congratulates Greece for voting to resolve long-standing 'Macedonia' dispute



The dispute had created tensions for nearly three decades, and had been an obstacle to Macedonian membership of NATO and the EU. We look forward to full implementation of the deal.

Foreign Secretary said:

The UK congratulates Greece's Parliament for successfully ratifying the Prespes Agreement. This is an historic moment bringing a decades-old dispute close to an end. Today's vote paves the way to the full implementation of the Agreement, which has the full support of the UK.

Both countries have demonstrated great courage and the will to work together to affect real change. The deal brings the prospect of increased stability and prosperity to the wider region. We look forward to continued working with two trusted allies in the interests of European security.

Further information

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[News story: Funding for councils to](#)

develop local solutions to childhood obesity

The local authorities will receive £10,000 in funding as well as targeted support to develop practical plans.

In spring next year, 5 successful authorities will be selected to take their plans forward over 3 years. During that time they will be given expert advice to help realise their plans and £100,000 a year in funding to support this.

The 13 local authorities are:

- Bath and North East Somerset Council
- Birmingham City Council
- Blackburn with Darwen Council
- City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council
- London Borough of Havering
- London Borough of Lewisham
- Middlesbrough Council
- North Tyneside Council
- North Yorkshire County Council
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Peterborough City Council
- Rochdale Borough Council
- Walsall Council

The work is part of the government's [Trailblazer](#) programme, in partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA) supported by Public Health England. The programme will focus on inequalities and work closely with local authorities to:

- test the limits of existing powers through innovative and determined action to tackle childhood obesity
- share learning and best practice to encourage wider local action
- develop solutions to local obstacles
- consider further actions that government can take to support local action and achieve large-scale changes

The 3-year programme forms part of the [second chapter of the government's childhood obesity plan](#), launched in the summer.

This included the aim to halve childhood obesity and significantly reduce the gap in obesity between children from the most and least deprived areas by 2030. One in 3 children leaves primary school overweight or obese and children from the most deprived areas are more than twice as likely to be obese.

Steve Brine, Public Health Minister, said:

We know that when it comes to improving the health of local communities, local leaders are the real experts. We need innovation, ambition and passion to tackle childhood obesity, particularly in deprived areas, where children are more than twice as likely to be an unhealthy weight.

Our Trailblazer programme will support the 13 councils to bring their ideas to life with the help of dedicated support and guidance. They have the potential to not only improve the health of children in their own communities but across the country by helping us to shape future policy on childhood obesity.

Brilliant, innovative projects are already taking place across the country, but now is the time for us to tackle this issue together.

Councillor Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said:

This 3-year trailblazer programme, managed by the LGA and funded by the Department of Health and Social Care, will see councils take the lead in developing new and innovative projects to tackle this epidemic at a local level, making a real difference in their communities.

No child should be at a disadvantage in life because of where they are from and this programme aims to support councils to reduce this gap, with a view to preventing children from becoming obese in the first place and able to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

A priority of the Trailblazer programme is to share learning with other local authorities. Local authorities will be able to join the Trailblazer Learning Network to access the latest learning and support materials and be notified of opportunities to engage.

More information about the [Child Obesity Trailblazer Programme](#) is on the LGA website.

[Speech: Council for Licensed Conveyancers conference 2019](#)

Introduction

First, I want to thank Dame Janet Paraskeeva for inviting me to join you today – my first time as a government minister here with you.

One of the things I've loved about my role so far is the chance to work with people on some of the most important challenges that we face. Issues like housing and homelessness – issues that cut to the heart of who we are as a society.

When you become a minister, they give you a box. It's literally like the red box the Chancellor holds up on Budget day! And each day it's filled with statements, advice from policy officials and lots and lots of letters!

I don't think I'm betraying any confidences by telling you that a lot of those letters concern buying and selling houses...

... and in truth I'm yet to receive a letter congratulating me on their smooth and stress-free process!

It's hardly a surprise. A recent poll found that buying a house can be as stressful as a bankruptcy or a divorce. Or even a bereavement.

So many of the letters I receive frankly are heart-breaking.

The elderly couple who want to move closer to their children, only for the sale to fall through at the last minute, after they've sold their possessions and packed their bags.

Or the new parents who have lost precious money and time with their new-born because of a collapse in the chain.

I'm sure you've heard the stories, and no doubt a number of you have experienced it first-hand.

It has to change.

Working with Council for Licensed Conveyancers (CLC)

It's why this government has made a commitment to reform the process; to make buying and selling quicker, cheaper and less stressful.

And that's why I'm very grateful for the work of the Council for Licensed Conveyancers: protecting consumers, fostering competition and promoting innovation.

It's been a pleasure to work with you, and I'm grateful for all the support you've given me and my team, we really do work very closely together.

Because our plans, no matter how ambitious they are, can only succeed with the support of people like you.

People who understand the sector. People with first-hand experience of the challenges of the sector, day in and day out.

Challenges

And I'm under no illusion about those challenges.

Government research has shown that somewhere between a quarter and a third of all transactions fail.

This costs consumers around £270 million a year. That's hard-working families shelling out for surveys and searches on properties they won't even get to buy.

A survey carried out by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in October last year, showed it usually takes around 19 weeks from when you put your house on the market to when you actually complete on your new home.

To put that in context, if you put your home on the market today, you'll be lucky to get the keys to your new place by June.

That's a long time to put your life on hold.

Government action

No doubt a number of you are thinking: "We know, we don't need a minister to tell me the process isn't great".

You're quite right; you want to know what we're doing as a government.

We're working on a number of fronts to help bring about the change that we need.

I want to reassure you now, I don't believe driving down your fees is the solution.

Reducing the failure rate and those wasted costs remains the key, and the priority for this government.

Information: How to guides

That must begin with better information.

Buying and selling a house isn't an everyday process. In fact, last year Barclays found that, on average, people are only moving once every 19 years.

Under these circumstances, you can hardly expect buyers and sellers to be particularly savvy consumers or navigate the process with any confidence.

It's why in the spring, we'll be publishing our How to buy and How to sell guides – to help consumers navigate every stage of the process.

The guides will sit alongside our [How to rent](#) and [How to lease](#) guides, which we published last year.

Speeding up processes

But we recognise that there's more to do that we in government can be getting on with – that means putting on the pressure to speed things up where needed.

Last year, I wrote to all local authorities to set out our expectations that they will turn around property searches within 10 working days.

I'm pleased to see that, based on the latest data, more than 80% of local authorities are hitting this target. The quickest can turn searches around in under a day. Now that's what I call progress!

Because I think the chance to live in the house of your dreams shouldn't depend on which authority it happens to be in.

We still have a way to go to speed things up – especially where leaseholds are concerned.

Having a leasehold property in the chain can add at least an extra week, due to difficulties getting information from freeholders and managing agents.

As it stands, there aren't any guidelines around the provision of this information, leaving leaseholders at the mercy of freeholders, who can charge whatever they like and take as long as they like.

We're changing this, setting out a timetable and fees for providing this information.

This will also include a fee to update this information, as I know conveyancers begin to get nervous when data starts getting old.

Taken together, these changes will speed up the process.

Accountability

But it's not only about speed – we also need greater accountability.

Research from the Department for Business revealed that 70% of buyers and 66% of sellers thought their sale wouldn't go through to completion – even after the offer was accepted.

Too many people are walking on a tightrope from the moment they put in that offer.

Things can happen over 19 weeks that can genuinely scupper a move – and I wouldn't want to force anyone to move if they don't want to.

But I also don't want people pulling out without consequences, just because they've now decided they don't like the avocado bathroom suite.

When this happens, it can take a whole chain down.

That's why we're taking forward our work to develop a standard reservation agreement, working with the industry-led Home Buying and Selling Group.

We want to increase people's commitment by ensuring that they've got some skin in the game.

While an agreement can't compensate the emotional stress of a failed transaction, people should be able to recover their costs.

And there's no reason why this can't become standard practice; I believe the appetite is there.

Government research shows that 50% of buyers and 70% of sellers would have been prepared to enter into a legal agreement, if they had known it existed.

We're commissioning behavioural insight research to help us design an agreement that's supported by consumers and industry alike, and we'll be running a field trial later this year.

Consumer confidence

And with greater accountability should, I believe, come greater confidence.

Confidence that they're not going to be out on a limb, yes. But equally, confidence in their choice of professionals to help them with this important milestone.

Buyers choose the house, not the estate agent. But this shouldn't mean that they choose their conveyancer by default.

And while referral fees are an important feature of the industry and a way of reducing marketing costs and building business, I'm concerned about the current lack of transparency.

These concerns I know you share.

Consumers should always know they have a choice.

That's why we're changing the system, to ensure consumers know the amount of referral fees before they make any decision to purchase.

I've asked National Trading Standards to produce new guidance for estate agents, setting out how and when estate agents should disclose referral fees and this guidance will be published next month...

... and the ombudsman will be amending their guidance in the light of this advice.

I have provided the National Trading Standards Team with extra funding to support their efforts to ensure transparency and I have asked them to report back to me in 12 months.

I expect this to mean an end to excessive referral fees but if behaviour doesn't change, then I will look again at the case for a ban.

Competition and innovation

Because, the prize in our sights is a market that works for everyone.

A competitive, innovative and transparent market, where consumers have clear reasons to choose which firm they go with.

Technology also offers us a chance to think anew about the services on offer.

I'm old enough to remember when houses for sale were listed in the local paper.

But today, I know that there are lots of 'proptech' companies who are developing innovative ways to shake up the home buying process and speed up conveyancing.

And we want to help them, which is why we have been looking at whether we can streamline ID verification and make more use of electronic signatures in the homebuying process.

Because the days of people passively accepting what's on offer are long gone..

...and I'm looking forward to seeing how consumers feedback, interact and shape the tools we will come to use.

Conclusion

Ultimately, we not only want to protect consumers, we want to be their champion, because frankly, they deserve better than the current system allows.

And that is, I believe, an ambition we can all share.

I'm grateful for your invaluable advice and integrity, because only by working together can we build a better process...

...one worthy of (what is after all) one of life's biggest milestones: buying and selling your home.

And maybe, just maybe, some of the letters I receive in future will reflect that joy that comes from moving home: being closer to your children; more money to spend on your new baby.

But until then, we've got a lot of work to do!

[News story: Patisserie Holdings PLC in administration: information for employees](#)

If you've been dismissed

If you worked for Patisserie Holdings Plc, trading as Patisserie Valerie, Philpotts, or Druckers Vienna Patisserie, and you've been dismissed, you might be entitled to redundancy pay, holiday pay, wages owed and statutory notice pay from the Insolvency Service.

The amount the Insolvency Service can pay you will be subject to [certain legal limits](#).

Who is eligible

You can apply to the Insolvency Service for redundancy pay, wages owed, holiday pay and statutory notice pay if:

- you worked for Patisserie Holdings PLC under an [employment contract](#)
- you work in England, Scotland or Wales

If you worked in the Republic of Ireland, you will need to make your application through the [Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection](#).

If you worked in Northern Ireland you will need to make your application through the [Department for the Economy](#).

How to apply

[You can apply online](#). The case reference number you need to complete the online application is CN00063741.

There's further information about how to apply on our [factsheet](#).

Getting help

If you have questions about your situation or about any wages, salary, or overtime you're owed, you can contact the administrator by:

If you need help completing your application, you can contact the Insolvency Service's Redundancy Payments helpline:

When calling, please have your case reference number (CN00063741) and National Insurance number to hand.