

Speech: Rona Fairhead promotes UK as a leading Western hub for Islamic finance

Thank you for inviting me here to speak today; I have to say, after 3 weeks of getting lost in the winding corridors of Parliament and Whitehall it's somewhat of a relief to be somewhere I know like the City.

I'm delighted to be standing here today, today is an opportunity, as I see it to speak about 3 things: the extraordinary growth we are witnessing in Islamic Finance the strength of London as a world class financial centre, and how we as government can support you as a business to prosper within the UK and overseas.

I have to say, this historic building could not be more perfect a setting.

A monument to entrepreneurialism Lloyds of London was built on the back of Edward Lloyd selling marine insurance out of a coffee shop in the late 17th Century.

Since then, and for over 300 years London has been the home of international risk.

It is here where investors, with confidence, have taken advantage of a peerless mix of expertise, talent and innovation.

The first marine insurance market in the world, it truly reflects London's status as the epicentre of global free trade.

Islamic Finance, or Takaful, has its own impressive history. Having been practised for around 1,400 years, but has only recently experienced the surge in growth which has forced us in government and you in industry to stand up and really take notice.

And this progress is now shows no sign of slowing.

Islamic finance markets projected to post double-digit growth in the coming years, presenting clear and significant opportunities for investment and further expansion.

Currently worth \$2 trillion in total assets. Sharia compliant assets currently, even at \$2 trillion, make up only 1% of global financial assets. Yet, 25% of the global population is Muslim and it does not take a genius to conclude that this sector has extreme latent potential.

Indeed, the sector is forecast to grow by almost 20% next year.

So turning to London, in my view there is pre-eminent location to build expertise in Islamic financial services and be a foundation for growth for

the global Takaful market.

That is why the launch of the Islamic Insurance Association of London in 2015, and the ongoing terrific work that Max [Taylor] and his team are doing, is so important and timely.

Having just had a few minutes with Max, it's very clear what they are focusing on is doing the practical things right to help make it happen.

Their work illustrates that this city is leading rather than following: reinforcing the UK is the Western hub of Islamic finance through innovation and industry.

So my message today is simple. Whilst London leads the way in Europe in the provision of Islamic financial services, we now have an opportunity to be at the vanguard of insurance provision too.

I would urge you to take advantage of the global opportunities in that market, knowing that government we are here wanting to working hand in hand with you in industry, ready to support you.

But I don't want rhetoric to govern your impressions of London as a centre for trade; I want to let the facts to do some of the talking.

I want to point to 3 clear reasons why the UK is perfectly placed to lead the growth in this sector.

Firstly, we are already home to strong bedrock of Islamic financial services expertise. We have over 20 international banks offering specific Islamic finance.

Just to put that in perspective, that is nearly double the number located in the US and we are far ahead of other Western countries.

These institutions themselves are supported by the largest legal services market in Europe, with over 20 law firms, with offices in the UK, supplying legal services tailored to Islamic finance for global and domestic markets.

In 2013, we hosted the World Islamic Economic Forum, the first non-Islamic city to do so.

Soon after, we became the first western nation to issue a sovereign sukuk; and now the London Stock Exchange is the global hub of these bonds, with 65 issues to date totalling in excess of over \$48 billion dollars.

And in the realm of consumer products, there are now over 100,000 Islamic finance customers in the UK, benefiting from Sharia-compliant current accounts, home finance and savings.

And this is just the beginning.

The FCA recently authorised the first Sharia compliant fin-tech company – property investment firm Yielders. And more are set to follow.

London's sky-line is awash with projects that could only have been made possible with Islamic finance.

The iconic Shard, the Olympic Village and the £400 million Malaysian investment into Battersea Power Station are just some of the examples of London's gravitational power when it comes to Islamic investment.

We're already building a reciprocal foothold in the Takaful market, assuming a role as a leading provider of Islamic insurance.

There are plenty of success stories to note here too.

Willis, for example, in conjunction with Cobalt Underwriting, launched the UK's first Sharia compliant commercial real estate insurance solution.

Cobalt Underwriting, in partnership with AIG, have also underwritten the first merger and acquisition insurance in the Middle East region.

And Lloyd's of London's first fully Sharia compliant syndicate is in the process of being launched, thanks to Cobalt Insurance and Capita Managing Agency.

The globalisation of the Takaful industry has only emerged over the past 25 years. But even with its infancy comes opportunity.

The market has already recorded double-digit growth in recent years, with premiums averaging 14% per year growth between 2012 and 2014.

My message here today is that we in government are here to assist.

So far, Whitehall has organised 4 global Islamic Finance and Investment Group meetings, the second of which was co-hosted by Bank Negara Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur.

These meetings work to identify the key global opportunities but also the barriers facing Islamic finance, and aiming to harness the expertise of the attending foreign ministers, CEOs and central bank governors, to help build an Islamic financial market that supports growth and prosperity.

We are also levelling the regulatory playing field.

London is one of the few jurisdictions in the world where Sharia-compliant financial firms and products are covered by a single, secular regulatory framework.

This development is crucial, because it means everyone in the market is held to one consistent standard, giving all customers the same protections and the same safeguards.

And as a minister at the Department for International Trade, I will use the full force of my department, and indeed government, to ensure the UK remains one of the most open jurisdictions for Sharia-compliant investments in the world.

Global investment continues to flow to the UK because of our strong economic fundamentals, our openness, our expertise, our innovation and our hard work.

We offer low tax, and our low regulation is business friendly. We offer political stability combined with a strong impartial rule of law which inspires commercial trust. We have world class universities and institutions; 22 of our universities have specialist modules focusing on Islamic finance and that's helping us to continue to feed our workforce to keep our economy dynamic and innovative.

For the first time in decades, we now have a dedicated department for international trade to ensure our key sectors, such as financial services, are given the support they need to thrive on the world stage.

I can assure you that DIT and government are here to support you and will place British firms at the heart of our growth.

In financial services this has the potential to create significant economic value for the City.

As you will all know, the UK had the second largest trade surplus in financial services and we will look to see that grow as we strengthen relations with other countries.

I know there will be divisions among you on the effects of Brexit. Some will see it as a new beginning and others will worry about uncertainty and division.

However, I would urge you to take confidence in from the talent that we have here, we are awash with people and institutions of extraordinary capacity and capability.

We will not be turning our backs on Europe. We want to continue to have the closest possible barrier and tariff free access to the European market, whilst offering the same access to the UK market for firms across the EU 27.

We have been clear that a strict time limited implementation period on current terms is crucial to give businesses as much certainty and time to adapt to the new global landscape.

It is in no-one's interests to create disruption to trade, with barriers erected where none now exist, therefore our ability to collaborate will be key.

We are starting from a unique position of regulatory alignment and our future relationship with the EU, I hope will reflect this.

This means we are in a strong place to achieve an agreement with Europe: igniting new relationship at a point when we have shared the same rules for so long and had huge economic integration.

And so it is important that both the UK and the EU together think creatively about how our future relationship will work and look forward with hope.

Of course with ever challenge and with every change there is opportunity. 90% of future global growth is projected to occur beyond the borders of Europe, we need to continue to look overseas beyond the EU too.

This is why I am confident that London will remain the premier financial centre of the world, with the financial services sector continuing to drive forward our economy.

There is no better place outside of the Muslim world, to access Islamic finance and insurance. The level of our support government and industry support for this burgeoning sector exceeds the comparisons elsewhere. We have in place an incredibly strong foundation, boasting expertise, experience and innovation in Islamic Finance.

London is the most dynamic financial city in the world and for those in this room who are ready to take hold of this exciting growing market, I believe the rewards will be significant.

Thank you.

[News story: New support for flexible working in schools pledged at summit](#)

Education Secretary Justine Greening today (30 October) brought together leading figures from the education sector and the world of business at the first Flexible Working in Schools Summit, which aims to boost support for flexible working in the teaching profession.

Speaking at the ARK All Saints Academy in Camberwell to representatives from the teaching unions, Teach First, and leading businesses including Microsoft and Barclays, the Education Secretary announced new pilot programmes to look at ways of supporting and employing teachers flexibly, and enhancing coaching schemes for women working in education.

Co-chaired by Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, the summit is part of the government's commitment to recruiting and retaining great teachers and tackling the gender pay gap by encouraging employers to support alternative ways of working.

The summit comes days after the Prime Minister called on businesses to improve workplace equality by advertising jobs as flexible unless there are solid business reasons not to.

Education Secretary and Minister for Women and Equalities Justine Greening said:

Teachers are at the heart of our plans to offer all children a world class education. It is important that we recognise there are many great teachers who would welcome a more flexible workplace, whether as parents themselves who want more options on how and when to return to the workplace, or for staff later in their careers who may also want to better combine staying longer in the profession with other interests. Progress on more flexible working is great for schools who can keep their valued teachers and great for teachers who can stay in the profession.

This is already happening in many other sectors – it's vital we ensure it is happening in our schools too so we continue to attract the best and brightest into teaching. And, given this disproportionality affects women, it's a smart way to help close the gender pay gap.

The pledges we have made today show that we are determined to leave no stone unturned to make the best of all of the talent and dedication in the teaching profession.

The government will be working in partnership with the unions and leading organisations from across the education sector to promote flexible working across the profession. The plans announced at today's summit include:

- a pilot programme to look at how schools are already bolstering the careers of part-time teachers, so recruiting best practice can be shared;
- a pilot to strengthen the Women Leading in Education coaching offer, so women can continue to get the professional development support they need; and
- update existing guidance on flexible working, to help make it easier for schools to know what works.

The government is tackling the issue of flexible working as part of its wider plan to ensure schools can recruit and retain the teachers they need. Flexible working can particularly support female employees in the workplace and help to tackle the gender pay gap, which is 18.4 per cent nationally and stands at 4.8 per cent for secondary school staff and 1.9 per cent for primary school and nursery staff. As well as requiring all employers with 250 or more staff to report their gender pay gap and bonus gap, the government has introduced 30 hours free childcare, shared parental leave and support for returners to help tackle the gap.

Alongside these announcements, the government will publish a new myth buster to help answer any questions school leaders may have around recruiting for roles with flexible hours. The need to include more part-time or flexible vacancies will also be considered as part of the proposals for the Teacher Vacancy Service.

Hannah Essex and Claire Walker Directors of Communications at Teach First said:

Flexible working and part-time opportunities for teachers and school leaders has the ability to not only improve their work-life balance, but also has the potential to attract former teachers back into the profession – addressing significant supply problems.

The sector should always be looking for ways to make the profession more attractive by understanding the individual needs of teachers and also understanding the benefits of flexible working, particularly job sharing, to the workplace. This is why at Teach First we will help to develop ideas through our Innovation Series, supporting our community to find new ways to break down the barriers to flexible working in schools.

Dame Alison Peacock chief executive of the Chartered College of Teaching said

It's great to see the Department for Education consulting with the profession about flexible working. I would like to use this opportunity to think about how we can take a much more open and flexible view on teaching careers as a whole.

We need to be more responsive to the needs of teachers throughout their working lives. At the moment we see teaching careers in a binary way, where you make a lifelong commitment to the profession and are 'in' or 'out'.

But we must start to think about how we facilitate teachers to move into and out of the profession at different points in their lives. We must find ways to keep the door open to those who want to return to teaching, making sure there is adequate support and opportunities for those who want to take a break from teaching. It is only in this way that we can help teachers pause their career, not leave it.

Today's summit follows the Secretary of State's speech at the Teach First conference last month, where she confirmed the 25 areas that would be selected to run a pilot programme to reimburse student loan repayments for modern foreign languages and science teachers in the early years of their careers, as well as two new projects that will receive a share of the £75 million Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund.

Statement to Parliament: International

Freedom of Religion or Belief Day

2017: Mark Field's statement

I am delighted to represent the Government in this debate and, along with everyone else, to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing it on such an important occasion. I pay tribute to him and to all the members of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief for their continued strong commitment to promoting this universal human right. We welcome the views of parliamentarians and civil society groups on what more we might do, and we seek to act on those views where possible.

I was going to thank the new boy and the new girl who have made speeches today, but unfortunately the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) has now left the Chamber. Perhaps he took to heart the idea of catching a plane home—he has a slightly longer commute to his constituency than I do, of course. He and the hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) made good and heartfelt speeches, as indeed did all Members who contributed.□

To speak slightly personally, I have spent all but four months of my 16 years in this place as a Back Bencher. Although I believe firmly that I must speak today on behalf of the Government, I am also aware, as the Government need to be aware, that we do not have a full majority in the House of Commons. Therefore, the opinions of Parliament in this and many other matters have increasing importance. I take seriously this sort of debate. In my role as a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister, I will endeavour to pass it on to the high commissions and embassies within my bailiwick, in order to ensure that the concerns expressed by parliamentarians do not just die in the ether or appear on a few pages of Hansard for a particular day, but are given practical effect. I give my word to everyone here that I shall endeavour to do so and to boil down the issues debated, as well as the important report, to make a practical—if not life-changing—day-to-day difference in how our embassies and high commissions operate. I will ensure that the concerns addressed by parliamentarians, not just in this debate but in numerous others, are brought to bear.

To an extent, that has already been done in relation to Burma, as the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) pointed out. As my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford rightly said, more than 600,000 Rohingya have been forced to flee to Bangladesh since 25 August. Parliamentarians' active role has contributed to the UK's continuing leading international position on the matter. The issue is evolving, and I know that frustration has been expressed at various times, not least by the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton, and rightly so; it is her role in opposition to provide a practical sense of concern about the pace of reform.

I spoke about the issue yesterday at a Foreign Affairs Committee hearing. The situation continues to evolve, in diplomatic and political terms. As recently

as Monday I was at the United Nations in Geneva to pledge on behalf of UK taxpayers an additional £12 million, bringing to £47 million, or \$62 million, the UK's contribution to the heartfelt international efforts in response to this terrible humanitarian catastrophe, which at the moment is occurring predominantly in Bangladesh. The hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton is absolutely right that we are doing all we can to ensure that the displaced can return to Burma, and one hopes that some of the money will be spent to rebuild lives and villages on that side of the border.

That is an example of what is going on; no doubt in three or four months' time there will be other issues for me, as a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister, or one of my colleagues, to deal with. That is why we appreciate the work of the all-party parliamentary group and parliamentarians to raise the temperature of such important issues; it informs and complements our work overseas. I stress that I will, in my own small way as a Minister, take it seriously. If we hear such representations, we will try to ensure that we can act on them in our embassies and high commissions elsewhere.

Tomorrow our posts across the diplomatic network will mark International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day in various ways. I want to mark the occasion by reiterating the Government's commitment to promoting and protecting freedom of religion or belief, reflecting on the situation in a number of countries of particular concern and setting out what action the Government are taking on the issue.□

Article 18 of the universal declaration of human rights is the fundamental principle underpinning our work. It defines freedom of religion or belief as "the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion".

As a number of hon. Members have pointed out in this debate, the article states that everyone has the right to choose a religion or belief, or to have no religious belief at all. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke earlier this year about her

"determination to stand up for the freedom of people of all religions to practice their beliefs in peace and safety."

I set out my own personal commitment on this issue when I last spoke on it in a debate in July, and I know that Lord Ahmad, the FCO Minister with responsibility for human rights, regularly expresses sentiments similar to mine, both in the other place and in his engagements in London and overseas. I also know that he was with many Members yesterday in Speaker's House for the [launch of the APPG's report](#), which is a genuinely impressive piece of work that will further inform our efforts in this area.

We make those efforts not just because the right to freedom of religion or belief is a principle worth defending for its own sake. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), who said that we also make those efforts because we believe that societies in which people are free to practise their faith or belief are, by their very nature, more stable, more prosperous and more resilient to extremism.

Sadly, however, the situation in a number of countries around the world continues to cause grave concern, and as I have a little more time than I had anticipated I will give some specific examples. The information provided by the Pew Research Centre shows that Christians have been harassed in more countries than any other religious group. The middle east is the cradle of the religion, although obviously it is also the cradle of other religions, namely Islam and Judaism. However, Christians in the middle east are particularly suffering from harassment. In Iraq the Christian population has fallen from over 1 million in 2003 to a current estimate of 250,000. We are also concerned about the plight of Christians in Syria, Burma and a number of other countries.

However, followers of all faiths and religions suffer persecution, as at times do people of no faith, so I will set out what the UK Government are doing in some specific cases. Essentially, our approach is to tackle the issue on two fronts: first, working with and strongly lobbying countries individually; and secondly, working within organisations such as the United Nations.

A recent example of our bilateral approach is our work to defend the rights of Christians in Sudan, and we welcomed the release of several pastors earlier this year. We have also called for the release of the Eritrean Patriarch, Abune Antonios, and we are supporting the rights of many faith groups, including the Baha'i in Iran and, as has already been said, the Rohingya Muslims in Burma. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) made the important point that some Rohingya are actually Hindu and that some have no religion at all, but they too have been persecuted during these terrible times. What I am saying also applies to [Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia](#) and Shi'a Muslims in several countries, including Saudi Arabia.□

Lord Ahmad recently visited an Ahmadiyya mosque in Dhaka in Bangladesh for a multi-faith gathering, at which he made a call for universal religious tolerance. Most recently, we have expressed concern about proposed amendments to the law in Nepal, which my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford rightly said would restrict religious freedoms. Only last month I had the opportunity to speak about that issue directly with my US counterpart at the UN General Assembly.

As an example of our multilateral work to defend and protect religious freedoms, I draw the House's attention to the UK's leading role in the global efforts to bring ISIS or Daesh to justice. All of us here are only too aware of the absolutely appalling treatment that that paramilitary group has meted out to anyone who does not subscribe to its extremist ideology. That has included religious minorities in Iraq and Syria—Christians and Yazidis—and of course the majority Muslim populations in those countries.

The UK is determined that Daesh will not get away with it. That is important not only in countering extremism, but in defending the right to freedom of religion or belief. We have led the multilateral response to Daesh. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, together with his Belgian and Iraqi counterparts, got the ball rolling last year with a UK-led initiative to bring Daesh to justice. Just last month a new UK-drafted UN resolution, co-

sponsored by 46 member states, including Iraq, was [adopted unanimously by the Security Council](#), as Daesh Accountability Resolution 2379. The resolution calls on the UN Secretary General to establish an investigative team to collect, preserve and store evidence of crimes by so-called Islamic State, beginning in Iraq. I know that we will be supported by members of the APPG, who focused on the issue when their report was launched yesterday.

That UN investigative team will be led by a special adviser with a mandate to promote the need to bring ISIS to justice around the globe. We have contributed, as a down-payment, £1 million to support the establishment of the team, to ensure that it is adequately resourced at the outset and that the evidence collected is used to bring the perpetrators to book.

However, our work on promoting freedom of religion or belief goes beyond bilateral or multilateral efforts overseas. We are also now committed to stepping up our engagement with faith leaders here in the UK. That is why Lord Ahmad has established a regular roundtable with a variety of faith leaders and representatives, the first of which he hosted as recently as Monday. The aim of the roundtable is to discuss how the Government and faith leaders can work together to address issues of religious freedom. We want faith groups to play a bigger role in seeking solutions to international crises and to broader international challenges. That international network will be of critical importance. Also, when the Foreign and Commonwealth Office marks International Human Rights Day in December, we will focus particularly on promoting freedom of religion or belief, and on the important role that faith leaders can play in driving that agenda.

We shall continue to support religious freedom and tolerance through our project work under the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Magna Carta fund for human rights and democracy. I must confess that I am particularly proud of a project that is helping secondary school teachers in the middle east and north Africa to create lesson plans that promote tolerance and freedom of religion or belief among all their pupils. The project is being implemented by an organisation called Hardwired Inc, which, along with other civil society organisations, is a vital partner in our efforts to make article 18 a reality. I pay tribute to its dedicated work.

We continue to strive to be as effective as possible in promoting freedom of religion or belief. Ensuring that our embassy and high commission staff are properly trained is an essential part of that programme, and I know that the APPG's report rightly highlighted such training. I will continue to look for ways to improve religious literacy among our staff. We already provide a set of resources to support their work, which we will promote more widely to our posts overseas. Earlier this month the FCO launched a new religion and diplomacy course. We will continue to review actively both that course and the feedback it receives from our staff, to ensure that it meets our needs in a fast-changing world.

In addition, my noble Friend Lord Ahmad will write to all our ambassadors and high commissioners tomorrow, reissuing our freedom of religion or belief toolkit and instructing them to give serious consideration to freedom of religious belief in their diplomatic engagement with host Governments. Where

there are violations of religious belief, Members can be assured that the FCO and its Ministers are clear that they will be addressed through our diplomacy with international partners.

In partnership with Lord Ahmad, I will also write to the embassies and high commissions in key countries for which I have responsibility, asking them to report on precisely what they are doing to promote freedom of religion or belief. I will ensure that our embassies are aware of the strength of both parliamentary feeling and my own personal feelings on this issue.

As recently as 2011 there were 150,000 Christians in the city of Aleppo in Syria, which is a country I visited in my first term as a Member of Parliament. Now, as far as we can understand, there are fewer than 35,000. Religious persecution has increased in other Muslim countries, such as Pakistan, Sudan and Iran. In Nigeria, 1.8 million people have been displaced by Boko Haram. In India, it has been suggested that the harassment of Christians has increased with the current rise of Hindu nationalism. However, I also take on board what my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East said on that issue, namely that Hindus and Sikhs themselves are under day-to-day threat in parts of the subcontinent. In China there are now no fewer than 127 million Christians, which I fear has upset the authorities there, who see Christianity as some form of foreign infiltration and seek to Sinicise it in some way.

I will now take the opportunity to address one or two issues that were specifically raised by a number of Members. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford that there are concerns that some provisions of the new penal code in Nepal may be constructed to limit the freedom to adapt, change or practise a religion. I have already raised those concerns with the Government of Nepal and will continue to do so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) mentioned Egypt, which is a human rights priority country. Her Majesty's Government have been clear that freedom of religion or belief needs to be actively protected. The Government of Egypt have stated their commitment to protecting the rights of minorities and the need for religious tolerance. We regularly raise concerns with the Egyptian Government about the deteriorating human rights situation, including issues that affect Christians. The Coptic Christian community is made up of 8 million to 9 million people and has been around as long as any other Christian group, but there are great fears for its future, and certainly for its future stability.

May I take this opportunity to apologise to the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day), who has not yet received a response to his letter on behalf of his constituent from 25 August? I will endeavour to find out where the letter has gone in the system. He made some interesting comments about the apostasy issue. I will contact the Home Office to request that it finds a way to include such cases within the hate crime statistics, if that is at all possible. I will get back to him when I have a reply.

There was a slightly discordant shot from the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) on genocide. Genocide is strictly a legal term. Whether a

parliamentary motion or Ministers refer to it as genocide is neither here nor there; it is strictly a legal term. With what has been happening in Burma and various other parts of the world, it is clear that a process has to be gone through in the UN and finally in the International Criminal Court before a genocide can be proven.

I want to reassure those Members who raised the issue of funding. All DFID's support to Governments involves discussions on human rights, and we will continue to give serious consideration to adopting recommendations 1 and 2 from the report to take account of DFID and FCO funding streams. I do not want to commit my Department on the Floor of the House without it having had a proper look through all the recommendations. To be brutally honest, many of them relate to issues that we already address on a day-to-day basis, but we will give the report serious consideration. Once we have had a chance to look through all the recommendations, I will get back to the shadow Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford to say which ones we are in a position fully to adopt and what action we would look to take elsewhere.

In conclusion, the Government believe strongly that whole societies benefit when the fundamental rights of all their citizens are respected and protected. That includes the right to religious freedom or belief, or to have no religion at all. That is why we will continue to work with individual countries, with the international community and with faith leaders and civil society organisations to promote and defend this fundamental right. The UK Government's position is to remain absolutely committed to promoting freedom of religion or belief as enshrined in article 18 of the international covenant on civil and political rights, supported by article 2 on non-discrimination and article 26 on access to justice. I think I speak for everyone who has contributed to this important debate when I say this: only when these universal rights are universally respected can there be religious freedom for everyone, everywhere.

[News story: Funding available in England towards replacing fishing vessel engines](#)

The MMO has made a number of changes to the EMFF scheme to make sure it continues to provide maximum possible benefit to the fishing sector and associated communities. This includes gathering feedback from the fishing industry and representative bodies as to where financial assistance would be of most use.

A significant development is that funding is now available towards the replacement of engines on fishing vessels. Other changes include to some

funding thresholds. Full details are available on the [MMO website](#).

Michelle Willis, MMO Chief Finance Officer, said:

“We are committed to ensuring that the EMFF scheme meets the needs of the people it is designed to serve and we regularly use stakeholder feedback to refine and improve the scheme. These changes are further evidence of that commitment.

“The changes we have made will allow fishermen to apply for funding to upgrade their engines, which will improve reliability, reduce running costs, provide safety benefits and also reduce the impact on the environment. The amendments to increase funding thresholds in a number of areas should also help strengthen the fisheries sector and be of significant benefit to the industry as a whole.

“I would urge people to visit the MMO website to learn about the changes, see if they can now benefit from EMFF funding and submit an application or expression of interest to us.”

[Speech: Sustainable growth at heart of future strategy for UK aviation](#)

Good morning everyone.

It's a real pleasure to join you again for your annual conference.

And to kick off what promises to be a very interesting day and a half of debate.

The theme today (30 October 2017) – how we plan for sustainable growth – is a familiar one in transport.

'Sustainable' has become one of those words that means different things to different people.

Often it's used to describe the environmental viability of transport.

Whether we can meet rising demand for mobility while reducing pollution, carbon and noise.

Others use it in an economic sense.

For them, a sustainable business is one that is profitable and growing.

But the true meaning of the word is less specific.

The Oxford Dictionary defines 'sustainable' merely as something that can be maintained at a certain rate.

Or kept going at a constant level.

Which strikes me as an unsuitable description for the challenges facing aviation.

What we've done for far too long in this country is 'sustain' transport.

Or done just enough to keep things running.

Decade after decade.

While failing to consider the long-term implications of inaction.

What we are doing today is embracing a different model of sustainability.

Rolling out a huge infrastructure programme.

Making the investments.

Taking the difficult decisions.

To build capacity and resilience for the future.

So when I talk about a sustainable aviation strategy for the UK, I mean one that will help this industry compete and grow in an environmentally friendly way.

I remember last year's AOA Conference well.

It was the [first speech I'd given to an aviation audience as Transport Secretary](#).

I talked about the unprecedented growth that UK airports had experienced in 2015.

The highest passenger numbers since records began.

Airports around the country expanding.

Adding new routes to emerging markets around the world.

Investing in new passenger and freight facilities.

From Edinburgh to Bristol, Manchester to London City Airport – which is also celebrating its 30th birthday this year.

Well – in 2016, you raised the bar again.

268 million terminal passengers.

7% up on the previous year.

A new record for the industry.

And that meant – over a 5 year period – aircraft movements increased by 10%.

Even though aircraft are getting bigger.

And average loads are rising too.

This industry is incredibly successful.

And when you consider that you and your employees have absorbed this growth at a time of heightened security.

Which has put considerable extra responsibility on your shoulders.

I think you've done an outstanding job.

And it's not just your customers who benefit.

We all do.

In fact, never has aviation had more of a positive impact on our economy than it does today.

You've been instrumental in the UK's economic recovery since 2010.

And that vital contribution continues.

Creating thousands of new jobs – at a time when more Britons are in work than ever before.

Attracting new foreign businesses to this country – at a time of record UK inward investment.

And helping us forge new trade links with fast growing cities – when we already have the third largest network of air routes in the world.

When you thrive, Britain thrives.

And that's why, when I think about a sustainable aviation strategy, it's with a clear objective to meet rising passenger and freight demand.

To achieve and increase profitability.

To support your growth ambitions for the future.

While meeting our environmental commitments, and reducing the impact of flights on local communities.

A key theme for the next day and a half.

That's why – just before my speech here last year – we announced that [Heathrow Northwest Runway would be the government's preferred scheme for delivering new airport capacity in the south-east.](#)

Not just with Heathrow, but across the whole sector, we have made good progress since.

We have published a [draft Airports National Policy Statement](#), and received over 70,000 responses to the consultation exercise.

In parallel, Heathrow has been working with airlines to bring the cost of the scheme down – in line with the ambition I set out to keep landing charges as close as possible to current levels.

This is vital to its success of the scheme.

We are now [consulting on a revised draft Airports NPS](#) for a further period of 8 weeks.

Don't think this will derail progress – we are on track.

The draft has been revised in light of the consultation responses we've considered so far.

For example, it reflects changes to government policy, and fresh evidence – from the [air quality plan](#) and new passenger demand forecasts.

Of course it's perfectly normal for National Policy Statements to require more than one round of consultation.

Do not think this delays our plans.

Indeed the Planning Act 2008 requires the government to consult on material changes.

So that is what we are doing.

And we remain on track to lay a final airports NPS in Parliament during the first half of next year.

The updated passenger demand forecasts published last week show that the need for extra capacity in the south-east is even greater than previously thought.

They show that all 5 of London's main airports will be completely full by the mid-2030s.

The updated analysis also shows that the north-west runway scheme at Heathrow would deliver the greatest benefits soonest.

And that it continues to offer the greatest choice of destinations and frequency of vital long-haul routes.

The runway would deliver benefits of up to £74 billion to passengers and the wider economy over 60 years.

Of the 3 options shortlisted by the Airports Commission and assessed by the government, the north-west runway offers the greatest economic benefits for at least the next 50 years.

So let's be clear.

The case for expanding Heathrow is as strong as ever.

And the draft NPS makes clear that expansion would not be allowed to proceed without a world-class package of compensation and mitigation measures.

We will then go to Parliament for confirmation.

The airport will set out how it is being a good citizen both locally and for the country.

This includes setting legally binding noise targets, periods of predictable respite, and a ban of 6 and a half hours on scheduled night flights.

Now everyone has until 19 December (2017) to consider and respond to new evidence.

Once MPs approve a final document, it will set the policy framework for the developer to bring forward a planning application for a new north-west runway.

I describe this stage as outline planning permission – the detailed work begins afterwards.

Of course the views of airports around the country are crucial.

Because a third runway at Heathrow will provide opportunities for new and more frequent domestic connections to our largest hub.

And so help passengers to benefit from onward connections to long haul destinations.

But – although it dominates the headlines – Heathrow is just one airport.

And London is just one city.

We're lucky having a network of over 40 commercial airports across the country.

Directly serving over 150 short-haul and 35 long-haul destinations.

These connections provide huge benefits for cities and our regions.

So we welcome airports and airlines working together to develop new direct routes.

Creating a competitive market that gives the customer more choice, more frequent flights, and lower fares.

That's why our new [aviation strategy](#) will reflect the need for growth across the UK.

For example, Manchester which has fantastic plans.

Aberdeen and Bristol too. They are combining investment with visionary management.

Successive governments have published many strategic aviation documents over the years.

Some more influential than others.

Well our new strategy will set a course for the future that will affect every airport in the country.

This will be more than just a statement of intent.

It will be a long-term vision for the sector to 2050 and beyond.

In particular, how we can make best use of existing capacity.

And where we might need new capacity in the future.

As well as meeting all our environmental obligations.

It's an opportunity to look at what the government can do for you and your customers.

Putting the passenger at the heart of what we do.

But also providing the connections Britain will need in the future.

Brexit is important to the transport sector.

Negotiations and detailed work are underway already to secure a fair and liberal deal.

No other transport sector will have such a key role to play as aviation when we leave the European Union.

A clear priority for me through the negotiations is to achieve the best possible access to European markets for aviation.

We've not started those discussions yet, but we are well prepared for when they do.

I remain confident that we'll get a good deal, and that UK airlines and airports will continue to flourish.

Because our aviation market is the biggest in Europe.

And it's in the interests of all European countries, and everyone who travels between them, that we seek an open, liberal arrangement following Brexit.

But just as crucial is how we capitalise on our new position in the world.

At the moment, services to some third countries, like the US and Canada, are determined by EU-negotiated arrangements.

I am pleased to say that we are making rapid progress towards securing post-Brexit arrangements with those countries.

We already enjoy excellent international connectivity, but we should constantly ask ourselves how UK airports can open up more long haul routes to markets like China, South America and India than we do today.

Routes that have an enormous impact on inward investment.

So we will continue to work with you to ensure the aviation strategy represents the interests of every airport, in every region of the country.

Another priority is the modernisation of the industry.

In particular, the way that UK airspace is managed.

To tackle delays, cut emissions and reduce the need for stacking above our busiest airports.

Our aircraft are fitted with the latest satellite navigation technology, but most of our airspace arrangements are 50 years out of date.

Without action, by 2030 total delays due to inefficient use of airspace capacity could be 70 times more than in 2015.

This wouldn't just be bad news for passengers.

It would also damage the economy and the environment, as planes are increasingly forced to circle above urban areas while waiting for a landing slot.

As you know, earlier this year we held a consultation on how we can make better use of this critical piece of national infrastructure.

Our response to that consultation confirms that we will establish a new independent commission on civil aviation noise.

This will ensure the noise impacts of airspace changes are properly considered.

Giving local communities more of a say in airspace changes.

They will help us make the most of quieter and more efficient aircraft and to provide more predictable periods of relief from noise.

We need to make the most of technology.

We are also making compensation for airspace changes fairer by bringing it into line with existing compensation policy for new airport development.

I've been pleased with the way the industry has engaged with the consultation process.

And the way in which aviation is working with communities and stakeholders.

To minimise the environmental impact of flights.

It's by being responsible and transparent that aviation will earn the right to grow.

So we can build a truly sustainable strategy for the future.

Sadly, Monarch will not be part of that future.

But I just wanted to thank everyone who helped us repatriate passengers following Monarch's recent failure.

It was a remarkable effort.

With government working alongside airlines and airports to deal with a complex and difficult logistical challenge.

A huge amount of work at short notice.

In fact the Prime Minister has personally thanked the industry for the way it responded.

And I absolutely endorse her thanks today.

Monarch reminds us that the market remains incredibly competitive.

I know it's challenging out there for airports and airlines.

And I recognise that until the Brexit negotiations are finished, there is inevitable uncertainty about what will happen.

I want you to be confident of the process and the future Brexit will provide.

But I can assure you that the interests of our aviation industry are at the forefront of our minds.

Not just because Britain needs the services and connections you provide.

But because we need the jobs and prosperity you bring to every part of this country. That's why we're expanding Heathrow.

It's why we're working on a new aviation strategy.

And it's why we believe the only sustainable model for UK airports is one that helps you flourish.

So let's continue to work together in partnership.

Let's grasp hold of the growth opportunities out there.

And let's look forward to the future with confidence.

Thank you.