

Speech: "It's in all of our interests to forge an even closer relationship as we strive to maintain peace and security in Africa."

Thank you Mr President, and a happy new year to you. And thank you also to Special Representative Menkerios for your briefing.

At the outset let me express my thanks to you, Mr President, and to the Secretariat, for leading a successful visit to the African Union in Addis Ababa. We all saw and heard firsthand just how critical the relationship is between the UN and the AU and I look forward to, and commit to, doing whatever I can to strengthen that relationship.

I do so because our two great organisations share the same objectives, the same priorities, and the same respect for the principle of African leadership. So it's in all of our interests to forge an even closer relationship as we strive to maintain peace and security in Africa. To do so, I see three steps that we should take.

First, and as others have said, we need to do more to learn from each other. A simple first step would be having more joint briefings in this Chamber from AU and UN officials as we do on Somalia. They are a vital means of increasing the awareness and knowledge of all of us around this table. There should also be more joint analysis, joint planning and joint assessments so that we form a common understanding of a situation and together find common solutions.

The recent UN/AU visit to DRC and Nigeria on women, peace and security is an example of the sort of collaborative work we should encourage. We should cultivate our joint reporting on gender based violence in places like South Sudan so that we move beyond reporting to sharing of action plans, and further collaboration. We should agree as the United Nations that we will make available any of our Special Envoys or Special Representatives if the African Union PSC wish to hear from them. And we should invite the African Union to do the same.

We should also look at what more we can do as Member States. The United Kingdom works closely with AU member states to provide military capacity building, delivering training and sharing expertise on improving accountability, human rights compliance and preventing sexual violence in conflict. I know others are doing the same and I encourage all to do so.

Second, Mr President, we need both organisations to play to their comparative strengths so that together we are more than the sum of our parts. We need only look to Somalia to see that it works. The bravery and the heroism of AMISOM troops, to whom I pay genuine and profound tribute, supported by the United Nations, has enabled the political process and progress we see there.

During this year's Presidential elections, it was AU troops who protected the venue, infrastructure and participants, ensuring the safety and security of all those involved. And it was the UN Support Office in Somalia who helped AMISOM in the preparatory work, setting up the venue, ensuring the integrity of the site, as well as providing vital security equipment to AMISOM. Together they, we, helped make history; ensuring that the most democratic presidential elections in Somalia in decades passed off successfully and peacefully. It is a model that we should replicate elsewhere.

My third and final point, Mr President, is that our cooperation will count for little without sustainable financing. As we heard last week during our discussions with the AU PSC in Addis, this is a top objective for all of us. So we must find a solution which shares the responsibility to provide adequate, predictable and sustainable financing to AU-led missions, including the AU's own commitment to fund 25% of costs by 2020.

It was important to the UK, that on our visit in Addis, so many speakers from the two Councils, and the AU Commission, reiterated their commitment to finding and funding that 25%. This financial solution must be combined with the undertaking of agreed standards and mechanisms to ensure oversight and accountability for performance, conduct and discipline, including sexual exploitation and abuse, and financial management. In doing so, not only will the finances of AU missions be secured, but their performance and their accountability will also improve. This will only be to the benefit of peace and security and to the benefit of so many outside this chamber. This seems to me a fruitful area for concrete follow up by the UN Secretariat and the AU PSC.

In conclusion, Mr President, there is still some way to go to bring our organisations even closer together. But through these three steps I believe we can do so. And our collaborative progress to date should encourage us that we can resolve future challenges together. Thank you.

[Press release: UK welcomes release of Mehman Aliyev in Azerbaijan from pre-trial detention](#)

UK calls for the Government of Azerbaijan to end restrictions on independent media.

On 25 August 2017 the Director of the Turan news agency, Mehman Aliyev, was detained in connection with an investigation into tax evasion. The [UK expressed concern](#) at his detention and called on the Azerbaijan Government to uphold his right to a fair trial. Mehman Aliyev was released from custody and

placed under police supervision on 11 September 2017, when a court upheld his appeal against his pre-trial detention.

Speaking after the announcement, a Foreign and Commonwealth Office spokeswoman said:

The UK welcomes the decision to release the Director of the Turan news agency, Mehman Aliyev, from pre-trial detention. This is a positive step and the UK will continue to monitor developments in his case. We urge the Government of Azerbaijan to build on this momentum to end all restrictions on independent media.

[Press release: Hurricane Irma update](#)

Shelter kits provided by UK aid are being distributed in Anguilla to help those left homeless by Hurricane Irma.

The kits, transported by Britain's Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship Mounts Bay, are being delivered to people in need by the Anguillan Red Cross.

Crews from RFA Mounts Bay are also today delivering UK aid including shelter, food and water to those affected on Gorda in the British Virgin Islands.

On the Island of Tortola, British military troops are delivering food and water having already helped to make the area secure, enabling aid to be delivered.

In addition, the UK has helped to distribute water bottles to 700 of the most vulnerable households affected by Hurricane Irma on the British Virgin Islands.

There are now 1,000 UK military troops in the region helping with the relief effort.

International Development Secretary Priti Patel said:

The UK government continues to deliver UK aid to the victims of Hurricane Irma as a matter of extreme urgency.

We have over 40 tonnes of DFID aid in the region, and more aid is arriving every day.

Our military troops, police officers and aid workers are doing an amazing job on the ground, to get vital supplies to those who need it most.

To suggest the UK reacted slowly and is not doing enough is just plain wrong. We are leading the way, and other countries, are now coming to us for help.

In addition to providing support on the ground, the UK Government is working closely with affected governments to continue to understand what assistance is needed to ensure the right aid is getting to the right place.

Yesterday, International Development Secretary Priti Patel spoke to the Governor of the Virgin Islands, Augustus Jaspert, to discuss emerging needs on the island. Earlier today she briefed the Cabinet on these latest developments.

HMS Ocean, which was loaded in Gibraltar with 5,000 hygiene kits, 10,000 buckets and 500,000 water purification tablets, is due this evening to be deployed to the region.

The government has made £2.5 million available to the Pan American Health Organisation to ensure critical health services are provided in the region, and to reduce the risk of disease spreading.

This is part of the £32 million it has so far pledged to the relief effort.

DFID has deployed 18 staff in total to the region, including to Turks and Caicos, using British expertise to provide urgent relief to those in need and support efforts to restore infrastructure.

The UK Government is being supported by companies in the private sector, including:

- Thomson and Thomas cook who have delivered over 8,000 buckets on commercial flights
- Virgin, who offered free transport to dispatch relief items including 1776 shelter kits, to Antigua yesterday.

Today, we expect another 288 kits to fly the same route with them.

Notes to editors

[Press release: Return of further powers to Rotherham](#)

The move to return the functions, which include community safety and waste collection, follows the [latest report](#) by the government-appointed Commissioner team that noted steady improvement by the council.

This council has already regained 8 powers in the last 9 months.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The council is continuing to make progress under the watchful eye of our commissioners and the return of additional powers to Rotherham reflects this progress.

However, the commissioners will remain in place and continue to work with the council to help restore full democratic powers.

Steady progress by the council

The Commissioner team, led by Mary Ney, who replaced Sir Derek Myers as Lead Commissioner in April 2017, outlined continuing improvements in her progress report of 18 May 2017.

The Communities Secretary will hand back control of the following functions to the council:

- performance management in each of the council's service areas
- waste collection
- community safety which includes community cohesion and domestic violence
- human resources
- asset management including both land and property assets

To give further assurance to residents, the community safety service will be returned with enhanced oversight by the commissioner team over services supporting victims of domestic violence. This would allow the relevant commissioner to veto any Cabinet decision if they feel necessary.

Commissioners will retain executive decision making power over children's social care services, special allowances, and also the appointment and dismissal of any statutory officers. They will also continue to have oversight over all returned functions.

Mr Javid will continue to receive 3-monthly reviews from the commissioners.

Further information

Commissioners with executive responsibilities at Rotherham metropolitan borough council are:

- Lead Commissioner – Mary Ney
- Children's Social Care Commissioner – Patricia Bradwell
- Supporting Commissioner – Julie Kenny CBE

The intervention is expected to end on 31 March 2019.

[Press release: Improving work health for a healthy economy](#)

A healthy population is the engine of a healthy economy, says Public Health England's (PHE) Chief Executive.

Speaking at the opening of PHE's annual conference, Duncan Selbie said we must look further than the NHS if we are to ensure everyone has a fair chance of good health.

PHE believes that health and wealth are 2 sides of the same coin. Having a job is the key to a long, happy and healthy life.

Illness among working age people costs the UK economy £100 billion a year. About 330,000 every year become unemployed because of health-related issues.

For every unemployed person who gets a job there is an estimated saving to society of £12,035 in a one-year period.

We take an estimated 137.3 million days of sick leave and more than a third of those (£46 million) are due to poor mental health and lower neck and back pain.

But workplace health and wellbeing programmes such as exercise, healthy eating and stop smoking support can make a real difference. Successful programmes such as these have been found to return £2 to £10 for every £1 spent, benefiting staff wellbeing and economic productivity.

Most big employers already have some plans in place that help to improve and protect their staff's health but many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) do not currently benefit from such programmes.

PHE and Healthy Working Futures, a workplace health provider, has set out advice for SMEs, which account for 60% of private sector employment.

It gives SMEs a series of questions on health and wellbeing including smoking, fitness and sleep, which staff can answer anonymously, enabling them to assess the specific needs of their workforce and create tailored steps to improve their staff's health and wellbeing, based on evidence.

Later this week, Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) will also publish new guidelines on how businesses can improve their workers' health, with advice on physical and mental health.

PHE has also created a series of guidance for employers on important issues, such as musculoskeletal (MSK) and mental health, impacting on employees with Business in the Community. Further advice is being developed covering issues including:

- physical activity
- diet and weight
- drugs
- alcohol
- tobacco

Duncan Selbie, Public Health England (PHE) Chief Executive, said:

Work is the key to a long, happy and healthy life. But sickness absence and tackling early retirement due to ill health are still major challenges for the economy.

This new package of support for small businesses will help businesses improve the health of their staff.

We can no longer see the health service as the only solution to our ills. We've got individual responsibility, and so do employers. Keeping people healthy not only benefits the individual but also benefits the economy and the local community.

We must do more to improve health outcomes, and in turn the health and economic productivity of the country. I urge employers to take advantage of this support.

Mike Cherry, Chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses, said:

Improved wellbeing benefits individual businesses. But more than that, it helps the wider economy, government and public services, as well as the local communities where small businesses play such an important role. There's never going to be a 'one size fits all' approach and not every idea will work for every business – that's why we're very pleased to be working with Public Health England in particular to help smaller businesses and the self-employed.

The FSB will soon launch its first wellbeing campaign aimed at providing some simple ideas and suggestions that smaller firms can look to adopt to support themselves and their staff. This sits alongside the medical and health advice service we already offer our members. We are delighted to receive the support of PHE for our campaign and we hope it acts as a catalyst for a positive conversation on wellbeing and mental health.

Louise Aston, Wellbeing Director, Business in the Community, said:

We are delighted to be working in partnership with Public Health England, taking an innovative co-production, whole person, whole system approach to producing a suite of interconnected toolkits that address the two leading causes of days lost at work – mental

and musculoskeletal health.

Our suite of toolkits consolidates the very best evidence with the very best employer practice, aligned with freely available resources that are useful to all employers, wherever they are on their journey.

PHE and Business in the Community have developed a series of [toolkits for employers](#).

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust introduced a physiotherapy service for staff with MSK absence from work because it was the second highest reason for sickness absence among staff, and employees had asked for support in this area in health and wellbeing surveys.

Following a successful pilot of early intervention for staff with MSK absence at Wansbeck General Hospital in 2014, the service was extended trust-wide in January 2016.

An additional whole-time equivalent physiotherapist was provided to deliver the service for staff who can either self-refer using the online referral system or be referred by their manager, ideally on the first day of absence.

Staff are then given an appointment with a physiotherapist within 3 days.

Findings show:

- 15% of staff (86) on short-term MSK absence were referred to the staff physiotherapy service
- absence length for staff on short-term absence was reduced by 31% when referred on first day of absence, compared to day 2 or more
- 25% of staff (44) on long-term MSK absence were referred to physiotherapy
- absence length for staff on long-term absence was reduced by 11% when referred on first day of absence, compared to day 2 or more

For further information on this case study, please contact Jaclyn Curry, Media and Communications Officer, Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust on 0191 203 1654 or jaclyn.curry@northumbria.nhs.uk.

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