

Statement to Parliament: Foreign Secretary Commons statement on North Korea

Mr Speaker,

With your permission, I should like to make a statement about the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

At noon on Sunday, local time, North Korea tested the most powerful nuclear device ever detonated in the history of the regime's quest for an illegal arsenal.

The underground explosion in a testing site only 60 miles from the Chinese border triggered an earthquake measuring up to 6.3 on the Richter scale – ten times more powerful than the tremor created by the last detonation.

The regime claimed to have exploded a hydrogen bomb capable of being delivered on an intercontinental ballistic missile.

We should treat that claim with scepticism, but the House must be under no illusion that this latest test marks another perilous advance in North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

In a country blighted by decades of communist economic failure – where, in the 1990s, hundreds of thousands of people died of starvation or were reduced to eating grass and leaves to survive – the regime has squandered its resources on building an illegal armoury of nuclear bombs.

The House will wish to join me in condemning a nuclear test that poses a grave threat to the security of every country in East Asia and the wider world.

Earlier today, the North Korean ambassador was summoned to the Foreign Office to receive a formal protest. Honourable Members will recall the steady drumbeat of provocative and dangerous actions by Kim Jong-un's regime.

Last year North Korea tested two nuclear weapons and launched 24 missiles; so far this year, the regime has fired 18 missiles – including two of intercontinental range; indeed three tests have taken place since the House rose in July, and on Monday last week, a missile flew over Japan, causing sirens to sound on Hokkaido and forcing thousands of people to take cover.

The regime has threatened to launch more missiles towards the US Pacific territory of Guam, which is home to 180,000 people and two military bases.

I will commend the dignity and restraint shown by South Korea and Japan, the countries that find themselves in the firing line of Pyongyang's reckless ambitions.

North Korea's brazen defiance has brought universal condemnation.

When the UN Security Council met in emergency session yesterday, every member – including China and Russia – denounced the latest nuclear test.

Britain has been at the heart of mobilising world opinion with the aim of achieving a diplomatic solution.

Last week, I spoke to my Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, and the Japanese foreign minister, Taro Kono.

A few hours after the nuclear test on Sunday, I spoke to the South Korean foreign minister, Kang Kyung-wha, and I have of course been in regular contact with Secretary Tillerson of the United States.

During her highly successful visit to Tokyo last week, my Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister made clear our solidarity with Japan as it faces this grave threat.

Just as North Korea has pursued nuclear weapons with single-minded determination, so the international community must show the same resolve in our pursuit of a diplomatic solution.

And we should not be diverted by arguments that equate the illegal and aggressive actions of Pyongyang with the legitimate and defensive military exercises of South Korea and the United States.

North Korea has caused this crisis and the onus rests squarely on Kim Jong-un's regime to obey international law and meet their obligations to disarm.

All hopes for progress rest on international cooperation – and there are some encouraging signs.

On 5 August, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2371, including the toughest sanctions ever imposed on North Korea, banning exports of coal, seafood, iron ore and lead.

If fully enforced, these new measures will cost Pyongyang about \$1 billion – one third of the country's total export earnings – reducing the resources available for nuclear weapons.

We are now pressing the Security Council to pass a new Resolution as swiftly as possible, imposing further sanctions and showing the unity and determination of the international community.

China, which accounts for 90 per cent of North Korea's overseas trade, has a unique ability to influence the regime – and the House can take heart from the fact that Beijing voted in favour of the latest sanctions resolution and condemned Pyongyang's actions in the most unsparing terms.

North Korea's nuclear device was not only tested near China's border, it was also detonated on the day that President Xi Jinping opened a summit in Xiamen with the leaders of Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa.

I call on China to use all of its leverage to ensure a peaceful settlement of this grave crisis.

Kim Jong-un claims to want security and prosperity for North Korea's people.

The only way to achieve this goal would be for North Korea to obey the UN and halt its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes, disarming in a complete and verifiable manner.

Britain stands alongside our allies in striving to achieve this goal.

I commend this statement to the House.

Press release: PM call with President Trump: 5 September 2017

Theresa May today spoke with President Trump to discuss North Korea's most recent missile tests, which have been conducted against all standards of international behaviour.

The Prime Minister stressed that the regime poses a threat not simply to its region but to global peace and security, and it was important for the international community to send out a clear message that such irresponsible and provocative actions must end.

Mrs May said Britain would work with the US and international partners to continue to exert economic pressure on North Korea through further measures including sanctions.

The Prime Minister noted the importance of the UN Security Council continuing to present a strong and unified international voice by reaching swift agreement on new measures.

The Prime Minister said she would also work with EU leaders on further measures the EU could take to pressure the North Korean regime.

The Prime Minister and the President agreed on the key role which China has to play, and that it was important they used all the leverage they had to ensure North Korea stopped conducting these illegal acts so that we could ensure the security and safety of nations in the region.

During the call, the Prime Minister also extended her condolences to the President and the US public for the loss of life and damage caused by Hurricane Harvey and expressed the UK's solidarity with the US people at this time.

Statement to Parliament: Statement on Grenfell Tower: September 2017

With permission Mr Speaker I would like to make a statement on the latest progress following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower 12 weeks ago.

Over the summer the Prime Minister, the Housing Minister, the Minister for Policing and Fire and myself have been meeting with the people of north Kensington to make sure that their concerns are being listened to and, more importantly, acted upon.

As a result, the Grenfell Recovery Taskforce has been appointed and started work.

The process of removing control of properties from the tenant management organisation has begun.

The remit of the public inquiry has been set.

A temporary school has been built.

Work is underway on the scaffolding that will surround the tower.

And I would like to pay particular tribute to the incredible team recovering and identifying the remains of those who died.

They are doing an exceptionally difficult job in the most trying of circumstances.

So far they have identified 57 victims, hopefully bringing some measure of comfort to their loved ones.

Obviously we would all like to see this process completed as quickly as possible.

But I'm sure all Hon Members appreciate the need for both accuracy and dignity as well as speed.

My statement today is going to focus on two areas the House has previously shown particular interest in: the rehousing of residents, and our building safety programme.

However, I will be happy to answer questions on any area that Honourable Members wish to cover.

And my door is always open to anyone who wants to discuss the issues in greater detail.

First, rehousing.

151 homes were lost to the fire.

A number of households have said they would like to be re-housed separately, leading to 196 households from Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk needing a new home.

Everyone who was ready to engage with the process was offered a temporary home within three weeks of the disaster.

61 households have accepted an offer and 29 have moved in.

153 households, including all but two of those who suffered a bereavement, have had face-to-face meetings with the team responsible for offering a choice of permanent homes.

164 households have used the online allocation system to look at what permanent accommodation is available.

127 have expressed an interest in one or more properties.

Viewings are continuing this week.

So far 10 households have accepted offers and two have moved in.

21 households that accepted offers on temporary accommodation with housing associations have asked for their tenancies to be made permanent.

This is entirely fair, and the council is working to make it happen.

The number of people who have moved into temporary or permanent homes continues to rise, but I know that the overall total is still low.

One reason for the low take up of temporary home offers is that some residents simply don't want to move twice and they have said it is their preference to stay where they are until a permanent home becomes available.

Meanwhile, residents who have accepted an offer of a permanent home have been given the opportunity to make choices about furniture and so on before they move in.

That obviously takes a little time too.

But we're talking here about peoples' homes and their lives.

What matters to us isn't ticking boxes but working at a pace that suits the needs and circumstances of individual residents.

We don't want to rush anyone.

That's why, at the request of residents, the council extended the "expressions of interest" period for permanent homes.

I don't want to see anyone living in emergency accommodation for any longer than necessary.

But nor do I want to see families forced to move or to make snap decisions simply so I have better numbers to report at the despatch box.

Turning now to testing and building safety.

Of course, the issues raised by Grenfell extend well beyond Kensington.

Across England there are 173 social housing buildings that are over 18 metres tall and clad with some form of aluminium composite material, or ACM.

In July, the Building Research Establishment began a series of large-scale fire safety tests on ACM cladding systems, comprising both the visible cladding and the internal insulation.

The aim was to establish whether each system, when properly fitted, complied with the relevant Building Regulations guidance, BR135.

Three of the seven cladding systems that were tested were found to meet the criteria set out in BR135.

The other four fell short of what was required.

The cladding systems that passed the test are in use on eight social housing towers.

Systems that failed are in use on 165.

The owners of affected buildings have been given detailed advice drawn up by our independent expert advisory panel.

This covers steps to ensure the safety of residents including, where necessary, removal of cladding.

We have also been holding weekly update calls with local authorities, housing associations and other building owner groups.

We have today published further advice that brings together all the results and the views of the expert panel on the implications for building owners.

We will shortly be meeting with local authorities and housing associations to discuss further steps.

This will include the process by which we will ensure that remedial work is carried out.

We have made the BRE tests available to all private residential building owners too.

While 89 private buildings in England have tested their cladding through those facilities, I continue to urge all private owners of similar blocks to submit samples for testing.

I have also asked housing authorities to ensure the same steps are taken for all private sector residential tower blocks in their areas and to collect the data so that we understand the scale of the issue and we can track the remedial action.

Inspections carried out since the fire have also highlighted other safety issues related to building design.

For example, structural engineers studying Southwark's Ledbury Estate said that strengthening work may be needed on blocks constructed using the concrete panel system that, in 1968, failed with devastating effect at Ronan Point.

They also raised concerns about cracks that appeared cosmetic but could compromise fire-safety compartmentation.

We have been in contact with Southwark Council and the engineers to discuss these issues, and have engaged the Standing Committee on Structural Safety to advise on their implications.

Meanwhile, all local authorities that own similar buildings have been advised to review their designs and to check whether any strengthening work was properly carried out.

Separately, the British Board of Agrément has told us that, based on their investigations following incidents in Glasgow, some cladding systems may be designed and installed in such a way that they could fail in strong winds.

We're not aware of any injuries caused by this kind of failure.

However, we are taking advice from the independent expert panel and have written to building control bodies to draw their attention to the issues that have been raised.

The wider issues of competence and certification will also feed into Dame Judith Hackitt's review of building safety, the terms of reference for which were announced last week.

Finally, I have also established an Industry Response Group, which will help the sectors required to improve building safety and to coordinate their efforts.

Mr Speaker, for all the work being done, nothing can match the strength and determination shown by people of north Kensington.

We saw it in their initial response.

We've seen it in the dignity and courage that has been shown by survivors.

We saw it in the deeply moving scenes at this year's Notting Hill Carnival.

For me, the biggest sign that the people of Kensington will not be beaten was the amazing results achieved by local children in their GCSEs and A-levels.

I'm thinking particularly of a remarkable young woman named Inês Alves.

Just 16 years old, her family lost their home in the fire but she still received a string of top grades.

That included an A in chemistry, despite Inês sitting the exam just hours after fleeing the burning tower.

Inês is due to start her A-levels this month.

I wish her all the very best.

Her achievements should be an inspiration to us all.

If a teenage schoolgirl who has suffered unimaginable trauma can do something so incredible, we in this House have no excuse for failing to do everything possible to support the victims of Grenfell and to ensure that such a tragedy never happens again.

I hope all Honourable Members will join me in doing just that.

Statement to Parliament: Secretary of State update to the House of Commons on EU negotiations.

Mr Speaker, I will now update the House on the two rounds of negotiations with the EU which took place in July and August.

While at times these negotiations have been tough, it is clear that we have made concrete progress on many important issues.

I would like thank all our officials who have been working hard both at home, as well as out in Brussels, to make this happen.

Colleagues will have received my letter following the July negotiating round dated 9 August. I set out the dynamics of that round in some detail.

These rounds were not at this stage about establishing jointly agreed legal text. They were about reaching a detailed understanding of each other's position, understanding where there might be room for compromise and beginning to drill down into technical detail on a number of issues.

During both rounds discussions took place on all four areas including the specific issues relating to the rights of citizens on both sides, Northern Ireland and Ireland, the question of a financial settlement and a number of technical separation issues.

I will speak briefly about each in turn.

Citizens' rights

Making progress on citizens' rights has been an area of focus for both negotiation rounds and we took significant steps forward in both July and August.

We have published a joint technical paper which sets out our respective positions in more detail, updated following the August round. This underlines both the significant alignment between our positions and also provides clarity on areas where we have not as yet reached agreement.

In July we achieved a high degree of convergence on:

- The scope of our proposals on residence and social security;
- The eligibility criteria for those who will benefit from residence rights under the scope of the withdrawal agreement;
- A shared commitment to make the citizens' rights application process as efficient and streamlined as possible.

In August we agreed:

- To protect the rights of frontier workers;
- To cover future social security contributions for those citizens covered by the Withdrawal Agreement;
- To maintain the right of British citizens in the EU27 to set up and manage a business within their Member State of residence, and visa versa; and
- That we should at least protect existing healthcare rights and arrangements for EU27 citizens in the UK and UK nationals in the EU. These are the European Health Insurance or 'EHIC' arrangements.

These areas of agreement are good news. They may sound technical but they matter enormously to individuals.

The agreement on health care rights, for example, will mean that British pensioners living in the EU will continue to have their health care arrangements protected, both where they live and when they travel to another Member State, where they will still be able to use an EHIC card.

On mutual recognition of qualifications, we have made progress in protecting the recognition of qualifications for British citizens resident in the EU27 and EU27 citizens resident in the UK. In fact, each one of these areas of agreement is reciprocal, they will work for Brits in the EU and the EU27 in the UK.

These areas of agreement help provide certainty and clarity for EU27 citizens in the UK and UK citizens in the EU27. They will make a tangible difference to these people's lives. I hope everyone recognises the importance of that.

The outcomes of these discussions demonstrate that we have delivered on our commitment to put citizens first and to give them as much certainty as early

as possible in this process.

Of course, there remain areas of difference which we continue to work on.

For example, we will need to have further discussions on the specified cut-off date, future family reunion and the broader issue of compliance on enforcement. Progress on these areas will require flexibility and pragmatism from both sides.

During the Summer negotiating rounds a number of issues emerged in the EU offer that will need further consideration.

For example, the EU does not plan to maintain the existing voting rights for UK nationals living in the EU. We have made it clear that we will protect the rights of EU nationals living in the UK to stand and vote in municipal elections.

Similarly, the EU proposals would not allow UK citizens currently resident in the EU to retain their rights if they move within the EU.

Even in areas where there has been progress, more is needed. While the EU has agreed to recognise the qualifications of UK citizens resident in the EU, and vice versa, we believe this should go much further.

This recognition must extend to students who are currently studying for a qualification, it must apply to onward movement by UK citizens in the EU and it should extend more broadly to protect the livelihoods of thousands of people which depend on qualifications which will be gained before we exit the EU.

In these areas the EU's proposals fall short of ensuring UK citizens in the EU and EU citizens in the UK can continue to live their lives broadly as they do now.

Separation issues

On separation issues, a very technical area, we have established a number of sub-groups. They made progress in a number of specific areas, and drew on papers the UK published ahead of both rounds.

I am pleased to say that we are close to agreement on our approach to post-exit privileges and immunities – on which we have published a position paper – which will benefit both the UK and EU to maintain after we leave.

We have agreed on our mutual approach to confidentiality requirements on shared information post-exit.

With respect to nuclear materials and safeguards, we held discussions on the need to resolve issues around the ownership of special fissile material and the responsibility for radioactive waste and spent fuel held both here and there.

We reiterated a strong mutual interest in ensuring that the UK and Euratom

Community continue to work closely together in the future as part of comprehensive new partnership.

With respect to legal cases pending before the Court of Justice, the ECJ, the parties discussed and made progress on the cut-off points for cases being defined as 'pending'. There was also progress in discussions concerning the UK's role before the Court whilst these pending cases are being heard.

With respect to judicial cooperation in civil and commercial matters, and ongoing judicial cooperation in criminal matters, we made good progress on the principles of approach and the joint aim of providing legal certainty and avoiding unnecessary disruption to courts, businesses and families.

With respect to goods on the market, both parties reiterated the importance of providing legal certainty to businesses and consumers across the EU and UK at the point of departure.

In this area, in particular, we emphasised that the broader principles outlined in the UK's position paper seek to minimise the type of uncertainty and disruption for business which we are all working to avoid.

We remain committed to making as much progress as possible on those issues which are solely related to our withdrawal, but our discussions this week have exposed yet again that the UK's approach is substantially more flexible and pragmatic than that of the EU as it avoids unnecessary disruption for British business and consumers.

I have urged the EU to be more imaginative and flexible in their approach to withdrawal on this point.

Ireland/Northern Ireland

On Northern Ireland and Ireland, I'm pleased to report there has been significant, concrete progress in this vital area. The negotiation Coordinators explored a number of issues, including both the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement and the Common Travel Area. In August, the group also had detailed discussions on the basis of the UK position paper.

As both Michel Barnier and I said at last week's press conference, there is a high degree of convergence on those key issues, and we agreed to work up shared principles on the Common Travel Area.

We also agreed to carry out further technical work on cross-border co-operation under the Belfast Agreement.

Of course, as I have said all along, the key issues in relation to cross-border economic co-operation and energy will need to form an integral part of discussions on the UK's future relationship with the EU.

Financial settlement

Finally on the financial settlement.

We have been clear that the UK and the EU will have financial obligations to each other that will survive our exit from the EU.

In July the Commission set out the European Union position. We have a duty to our taxpayers to interrogate that position rigorously. That is what we did, line by line.

At the August round we set out our analysis of the EU's position. We also had in-depth discussions on the European Investment Bank and other off-budget issues.

It is clear that the two sides have very different legal stances. But as we said in the Article 50 letter, the settlement should be in accordance with law and in the spirit of the UK's continuing partnership with the EU.

Michel Barnier and I agreed that we do not anticipate making incremental progress on the final shape of a financial deal in every round.

Generally we should not underestimate the usefulness of the process so far. But it is also clear that there are still significant differences to be bridged in this sector.

Governance and dispute resolution

Initial discussions were also held on governance and dispute resolution.

These provided an opportunity to build a better, shared understanding of the need for a reliable means of enforcing the Withdrawal Agreement and resolving any disputes that might arise under it.

The future partnership

Alongside the negotiations, we have also published a number of papers which set out our thinking regarding our future special partnership with the EU.

These future partnership papers are different from our papers that set out our position for the negotiations under our withdrawal agreement.

Our future partnership papers are part of a concerted effort to pragmatically drive the progress we all want to see.

All along, we have argued that talks around our withdrawal cannot be treated in isolation from the future partnership that we want.

We can only resolve some of these issues with an eye on how the new partnership will work in the future.

For example, on Northern Ireland it would be helpful to our shared objectives on avoiding a hard border to be able to begin discussions on how future customs arrangements will work.

Furthermore, if we agree the comprehensive free trade agreement we are seeking as part of our future partnership, solutions in Northern Ireland are

of course then easier to deliver.

A second example is on financial matters.

As I have said, the days of making vast yearly contributions to the EU budget will end when we leave.

But there may be programmes that the UK wants to consider participating in as part of the new partnership that we seek.

Naturally we need to work out which of those we want to pursue. We need to discuss them as part of talks both on our withdrawal from the EU and our future as their long-standing friend and closest neighbour.

A third example is on wider separation issues.

While we are happy to negotiate and make progress on the separation issues, it is our long-term aim that ultimately many of these arrangements will not be necessary.

With the clock ticking Mr Barnier, it would not be in either of our interests to run aspects of the negotiations twice.

Last week, as we turned our heads to the next round of talks, my message to the Commission was: Let us continue to work together constructively to put people above process.

To that end my team will publish further papers in the coming weeks – continuing to set out our ambition for these negotiations, and a new deep and special partnership the UK wants to build with the EU.

Ultimately, businesses and citizens on both sides want us to move swiftly on to discussing the future partnership, and we want that to happen after the European Council in October if possible.

As colleagues know, at the start of these negotiations, both sides agreed that the aim was to make progress on four key areas: citizens' rights, the financial settlement, Northern Ireland and Ireland, and broader separation issues.

We have been doing just that.

No one has ever pretended this will be simple or easy. I have always said this negotiation will be tough, complex and, at times, confrontational.

So it has proved.

But we must not lose sight of our overarching aim – to build a deep and special new partnership with our closest neighbours and allies, whilst also building a truly global Britain that can forge new relationships with the fastest growing economies around the world.

Speech: Minister calls for evidence to improve the accessibility of elections

Thank you, Mark, for inviting me to today's meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Learning Disability. As the Minister responsible for elections, it is very important to me that everyone who is eligible to vote is able to do so.

To play their part in choosing the person whom they believe will best represent their interests, whether as their Member of Parliament or local mayor or councillor or head of their police force. A thriving democracy depends upon the participation of all eligible electors.

To meet this important aim I have visited every region and nation of Great Britain to learn about the barriers that prevent certain groups in society including people who have a disability from participating in the democratic process. I want to find out how these identified barriers can be best overcome.

I have been very impressed by the enthusiasm for voting and level of understanding of its importance that has been told to me, including when I met with organisations who represent the interests of people who have a learning disability. These have included Mencap and, last month when I visited Brighton, Speak Out.

As a direct result of this wide engagement I have been able to push changes to improve the accessibility of elections.

At my request the Department of Health has recently made changes to the Certificate of Visual Impairment so it can now be used by local authorities to support blind and partially sighted people to vote at elections, once their consent has been provided.

The government is also making the process easier for disabled people to register to vote by undertaking an accessibility audit of the website, so the process for online registration is as user friendly as possible. This will include considering providing a facility to request that election materials are available in alternative formats from local authority electoral service teams.

I want to go further to strengthen our democracy and to ensure future elections are even more accessible to disabled people, and this is why today I have launched a Call for Evidence.

The Call for Evidence is asking for people to provide information that will:

- enhance the government's understanding of the experiences of disabled

people in registering to vote and casting their vote.

- help identify if current mechanisms to support disabled people to participate in the democratic process are sufficient; and
- identify examples of good practice provided by Electoral Service Teams to disabled people at elections.

In partnership with the members of the Cabinet Office Accessibility Working Group which includes Mencap, the Association of Electoral Administrators and the Electoral Commission the Government will review the evidence we receive and produce a report of key findings and recommendations.

I would warmly welcome responses from all here today to this Call to Evidence – which is available in alternative formats including Easy Read – as part of the process to help ensure that every disabled person is able to have that equal chance, that equal right, to participate in our democracy, and to have their say.