

Press release: PM call with HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia

The Prime Minister spoke to His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia this afternoon.

She began by congratulating him on his recent appointment as Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister. She said she looked forward to deepening our close bilateral ties – building on their productive meetings during her recent visit to Saudi Arabia.

They agreed that the UK and Saudi Arabia have a strong and historic partnership, and will continue to work together on areas such as trade, investment and security, in support of Saudi Arabia's ambitious reform agenda 'Vision 2030'.

The Prime Minister raised the issue of the ongoing isolation of Qatar in the region. She reiterated the need for all sides take urgent steps to de-escalate the situation and restore Gulf Cooperation Council unity.

She welcomed the extension of the deadline for Qatar to respond to the concerns raised by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt, and noted that this demonstrated the willingness of all parties to make progress towards a solution. She said the UK remains committed to supporting this process.

The Prime Minister was also clear that Qatar should continue to work with its Gulf allies to tackle the threat of extremism and terrorism in the region.

They ended the call by looking forward to meeting in London at the earliest opportunity.

Statement to Parliament: Update on Grenfell Tower fire and fire safety

With permission Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the government's response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and our safety inspections of cladding in other buildings.

Almost 3 weeks have passed since the catastrophe that hit Grenfell Tower.

Progress has been made to help the survivors and people in surrounding buildings who were affected.

Landlords across the country have been taking measures to make their buildings safe.

[Sir Martin Moore-Bick has been appointed](#) to lead a full, public inquiry.

And an [independent expert panel](#) is now advising my department on any immediate action on fire safety that is required.

Mr Speaker, the disaster at Grenfell Tower should never have happened.

The police investigation and public inquiry will find out why it did.

Right now, the immediate priority of the government is to provide every assistance to those who were affected and take every precaution to avoid another tragedy in buildings with similar cladding.

Victims and survivors

The Grenfell Tower Victims Unit is operating from my department and providing a point of access into government.

And staff from across government continue to offer support at the Westway Assistance Centre and a separate family bereavement centre.

Almost £2.5 million has been distributed from our £5 million [Grenfell Tower Residents' Discretionary Fund](#).

Each household affected is receiving £5,500 to provide immediate assistance, and so far payments to 112 households have been made.

Mr Speaker, there has been much speculation about who was in Grenfell Tower on the night of the fire, and it is vital that we find out.

As I [announced yesterday](#), the Director of Public Prosecutions has made it clear that there will be no prosecution of tenants at Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk who may have been illegally subletting their property.

So all tenants can be confident about coming forward with information for the authorities.

There may have been people living in flats that were illegally sublet, who had no idea about the true status of their tenancy.

Their families want to know if they perished in the fire.

These are their sons, their daughters, their brothers and sisters.

They need closure, and it is the least they deserve.

But that can't happen unless we have the information we need, so we are urging anyone with that information to come forward, and do as quickly as they can.

Next steps in Kensington and Chelsea

Mr Speaker, the immediate response to the Grenfell disaster is being coordinated by the Grenfell Response Team, led by John Barradell.

He is being supported by colleagues drawn from London Councils, the wider local government sector, the voluntary sector, police, health and fire services as well as central government.

Their expertise and hard work is making a huge difference, but this is only a temporary measure.

It is also vital that we put in place long-term support for the longer term recovery.

It was right that the Leader of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea took the decision to move on.

I look forward to working with a new Leader of the council, and I will look at every option to ensure everyone affected by this tragedy has the long-term support they need.

Update on re-housing

Mr Speaker, the Prime Minister promised that every family who lost their home because of the fire would be offered a good quality temporary home within 3 weeks – and the deadline is this Wednesday.

I have been monitoring the progress of re-housing, and we will honour that commitment.

Every home offered will be appropriate and of good quality.

What we will not do is compel anyone to accept an offer of temporary accommodation they do not want.

Some families indicated they wanted to remain as close as possible to their former home but when they received their offer, and took a look at the property, decided it would be easier to deal with their bereavement if they moved further away.

Some families decided that, for the same reasons, they would prefer to remain in hotels for the time being.

Other households indicated that they would prefer to wait until permanent accommodation becomes available.

Every household will receive an offer of temporary accommodation by this Wednesday, but every household will also be given the space to make this transition at their own pace, and in a way that helps them to recover from this tragedy.

Public inquiry

Mr Speaker, the people affected by the disaster at Grenfell Tower need our assistance, and they are receiving it.

But they also want answers.

Sir Martin Moore-Bick has been appointed to lead a full, independent inquiry.

He has visited Kensington, he has met victims and survivors, as well as members of the local community who have done so much to help.

After consulting with the community, Sir Martin will then advise on the terms of the inquiry, and we will ensure there is legal support for victims so that they can play a full part.

Cladding testing and fire safety in buildings

We must allow that inquiry and the criminal investigation to run their course. Each must have the space to follow the evidence wherever it takes them.

We must all be careful not to prejudge or prejudice either of them.

But what we can do, right now, is take sensible precautions to avoid another tragedy.

The Building Research Establishment is continuing to test the combustibility of cladding from councils and housing associations, as well as private landlords.

So far all the samples of cladding tested have failed. That's 181 out of 181.

It's obviously disturbing that there are such a large number of buildings with combustible cladding, and the priority now is to make those buildings safe.

Where appropriate mitigating measures cannot be implemented quickly landlords must provide alternative accommodation while the remedial work is carried out, and that is exactly what happened in the 4 tower blocks in Camden.

Our primary concern has been buildings over 18 metres, or 6 storeys, where people stay at night.

Hospitals and schools are also being assessed.

Mr Speaker, we ourselves have asked questions about the testing regime after discovering the 100% failure rate so far.

Last week I asked for the testing regime to be independently assessed.

This was carried out by the Research Institutes of Sweden, and they have confirmed they believe the process to be sound.

A full explanatory briefing note on the testing process is available on GOV.UK.

As the note explains, every failed test means the panels are unlikely to be compliant with the limited combustibility requirement of the building regulations guidance.

This has been confirmed by legal advice and the advice of the independent expert panel that was established last week.

For use of the panels to be safe landlords need to be confident that the whole wall system has been tested and shown to be safe.

We are not aware of any such system having passed the necessary tests, but I have asked the expert advisory panel to look into this further.

Mr Speaker, almost 3 weeks have passed since the catastrophe that hit Grenfell Tower, but I know I will speak for every member of this House when I say we are still all in shock.

It was not just the terrible scale of the suffering, it was the fact it happened in 21st century Britain, in London's richest borough.

I will continue to direct the full resources of my department to assist the Grenfell Response Team.

I will be working closely with the new Leader of Kensington and Chelsea council to make sure there are plans for the longer term recovery are in place.

And I will return to this House regularly to update Honourable Members on progress.

Statement to Parliament: Secretary of State's Oral Statement to Parliament on the political situation in Northern Ireland (3 July 2017)

With permission I would like to make a statement about the political situation in Northern Ireland.

As the House will recall following the resignation of Martin McGuinness, the then deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland in January, an election took place to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 2 March.

Despite intensive discussions in the three weeks following the election the Northern Ireland parties were unable to reach agreement on the formation of a new Executive.

In order to facilitate further discussions between the parties, Parliament passed legislation immediately prior to dissolution extending the period in which an Executive could be formed until 29 June.

Last Thursday, 29 June, I made a statement in Belfast setting out that, while differences remained between the parties, progress had been made and that it was still possible for resolution to be achieved.

I urged the parties to continue focusing their efforts on this, with the full support of the UK Government and, as appropriate, the Irish Government.

In that regard I want to recognise the contribution of the Irish Foreign Minister, Simon Coveney, and his predecessor, Charlie Flanagan.

In the past few days, since the passing of the deadline, further progress has continued to be made, including on the most challenging issues such as language, culture and identity.

Gaps remain between the parties, but these are few in number and on a defined group of issues.

The Government remains committed to working with the parties, and the Irish Government, to find a way to close these gaps quickly in order to reach an agreement which will pave the way for the restoration of devolved government.

The Prime Minister has been actively involved following on from her meetings with each of the parties ... including speaking to Arlene Foster and Michelle O'Neill on Friday night.

I continue to believe that a deal remains achievable.

And if agreement is reached, I will bring forward legislation to enable an Executive to be formed possibly as early as this week.

But time is short.

It has been six months since a full Executive was in place to represent the people of Northern Ireland.

In that time it has been civil servants, not politicians, who have made decisions on spending.

Without political direction, it has not been possible for strategic decisions to be made about priorities in areas like education and health.

This has created pressures which need to be addressed.

And it has led to understandable concern and uncertainty among businesses and those relying on public services alike.

This hiatus cannot simply continue for much longer.

There is no doubt that the best outcome is for a new Executive to make those strategic decisions in the interests of all parts of the community in Northern Ireland.

It should be for a new Executive to make swift decisions on its Budget to make use of the considerable spending power available to it.

While engagement between the parties continues, and there is a prospect of an agreement this week, it is right that those discussions remain our focus.

At the same time we will not forget our ultimate responsibility as a Government to uphold political stability and good governance in Northern Ireland.

In April, I made a Written Ministerial Statement that sought to provide clarity for those civil servants charged with allocating cash in Northern Ireland, to assist them in the discharge of their responsibilities.

But there remains resource available, including £42m from the Spring Budget and any further budget transfers as may be agreed, which are as yet unallocated.

If we do not see resolution in the coming days, we would need to reflect carefully upon whether further clarity would be required for NI Permanent Secretaries around those resources.

In that situation, we would also need to reflect carefully on how we might allocate the funding made available to address immediate health and education pressures as set out in Monday's statement on UK Government financial support for Northern Ireland, recognising Northern Ireland's particular circumstances.

And, if no agreement is reached, legislation in Westminster may then be required to give authority for the expenditure of Northern Ireland departments through an Appropriations Bill.

From my conversations with the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, we have not quite reached that critical point yet.

But that point is coming and the lack of a formal Budget is not something that can be sustained indefinitely.

Similarly, decisions on capital expenditure and infrastructure and public service reforms in key sectors such as the health service cannot be deferred for much longer.

One area on which there is much consensus, however, is on the need for greater transparency around political donations.

In line with the commitment set out in the Conservative Party's Northern Ireland manifesto at the General Election I can confirm that I intend to

bring forward legislation that will provide for the publication of all donations and loans received by Northern Ireland parties on or after 1 July 2017.

Mr Speaker,

All of this reinforces further the importance of the parties coming together and reaching an agreement.

And it sets out, too, some of the hard choices that we face if uncertainty persists.

I am also conscious that, with the deadline now passed, I am under a duty to set a date for a new election. I will continue to keep that duty under review.

But it seems unlikely that would that of itself resolve the current political impasse or the ultimate need for political decision-making, however we proceed.

As the Government for the whole United Kingdom, we will always govern in the interests of all those within the United Kingdom.

And so if resolution were to prove intractable, and an Executive could not be restored, then we would of course be ready to do what is needed to provide that political decision-making in the best interests of Northern Ireland.

But I am clear that the return of inclusive, devolved government by a power-sharing Executive is what would be best for Northern Ireland.

And that will remain our overriding focus in the crucial days ahead.

The UK Government will continue govern in the interests of everyone in Northern Ireland by providing political stability and keeping an open and sustained dialogue with the parties and with the Irish Government, in accordance with the well-established three-stranded approach.

I stand ready to do what is necessary to facilitate the quick formation of an Executive once an agreement is reached.

And I commend this statement to the House.

Speech: Greg Hands speech at the Iraq Trade and Investment Conference

Thank you for inviting me here today, and let me extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Dr Al Jaafari and His Excellency Salih Hussein Ali.

Thank you also to the sponsors of today's event the Arab British Chamber of Commerce who have the wonderful slogan 'friendship through trade'.

Today, my message is simple.

Everyone here has a role to play in ensuring trade will always remain central to both the UK's and Iraq's futures.

For while we both face a huge set of global challenges together, it will be our shared commitment to free trade that ultimately brings long lasting stability and prosperity to our 2 countries.

There exists both the opportunity and the will to do business together.

Let's seize that opportunity.

I will outline some of the areas we can focus on.

But first I would like to acknowledge Iraq's rich heritage, and how its legacy, particularly around trade, continues to teach us much today.

The area now known as Iraq is widely seen as the cradle of civilisation.

Five thousand years ago, it gave us the original writing system, which produced the first ever records of history, mathematics, astronomy and medicine.

Fast forward to the Middle Ages, and Baghdad was the at the centre of the Islamic Golden Age, attracting the world's finest scholars.

It oversaw pioneering advances in the fields of science, economic development and the arts.

The city was an important junction on the Silk Road, serving as a crossroads for trade to Europe, South East Asia and even East Africa. Everything from silk to Qashani tiles passed through its lively markets.

While Europe lost-importance in the Dark Ages, it was the sharing of books, knowledge and language along these trading routes that turned Baghdad into a truly cosmopolitan city, and the learning centre of the world.

So what does this teach us?

It shows that trade fosters not just economic growth, but creates the conditions for culture, academia and societies to flourish.

I understand, for example, that 2017 has been declared a 'year of excellence' for Iraqi football, with the construction of several new stadiums.

Iraq and the UK may be separated by geography and culture, but we are united by a love of the beautiful game.

I am proud to be able to say that, as the Member of Parliament for Chelsea and Fulham, I am the only Conservative MP to have continuously represented a

member of the English Premier League in the Commons.

Often, I've represented 2!

In seriousness, I believe that our mutual love of football perfectly illustrates why the theme of this conference is significant: the effects of trade are multifaceted, allowing us all to develop in the most holistic way possible.

As Minister of State at the UK's Department for International Trade, my role is to work with counterparts and businesses, both in the UK and overseas, to identify opportunities for trade, and overcome barriers wherever they exist.

My department's main function is to ensure the UK becomes the most passionate advocate for free trade, enhancing relations with high potential economies such as Iraq.

UK / Iraq

Last year's UK-Iraq Joint Ministerial Committee provides a good foundation from which to build. There was widespread agreement on both sides that increased cooperation on a variety of areas, but in particular on trade and investment, was crucial.

Our bilateral trade currently stands at over £700 million; but we can improve on this.

I welcome the progress and reforms being made by the Government of Iraq, under the IMF agreement, which will make the local business environment more attractive for foreign investment.

UK companies and brands are already well established in Iraq: from BP and Standard Chartered to G4S and JLR.

But more companies must see the vast opportunity on offer, so I am glad that our Embassy team in Baghdad is working closely with the IBBC and others to encourage and help more UK companies to do business in Iraq.

We are being ably supported by the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Iraq, Baroness Nicholson, who also serves as the President of the Iraq-Britain Business Council – a key partner in helping promote greater economic ties.

But if we are to see bilateral trade increase, we must reduce the barriers to export which still exist.

UKEF

UK Export Finance, the UK government's export credit agency which now sits in my department, ensures UK companies have the financial backing to win and fulfil contracts around the world.

Where in the past deals may have been under threat due to a lack of finance

or insurance, UKEF support allows UK and Iraqi firms to do business with confidence.

The signing of Iraq-UK MOU in March signalled an increase in UKEF support for infrastructure projects – up to £1 billion of cover per year.

That means that UK firms can better share their infrastructure expertise to help Iraq refurbish its power generation facilities, upgrade its airports and roads, and help with the building of hospitals.

Oil and gas

Another area of future co-operation will be around oil and gas. Iraq has the world's fourth largest proven oil reserves, sixth largest gas reserves, and huge untapped potential across both.

The International Energy Agency estimates that 46% of global oil production could come from Iraq by 2035.

Despite relatively low oil prices, UK firms remain strategically well-placed in areas such as Rumalia and Majnoon.

The UK supply chain, built over 50 years, is ideally placed to support the Government of Iraq's ambition to increase oil production to 6million barrels per day by 2022.

But while the UK and Iraq look to strengthen economic ties in these areas, our relationship is much more diverse.

The UK stands ready to continue supporting the Government of Iraq in bringing peace, stability and prosperity to all parts of the country.

Security

As part of the Global Coalition, the UK is supporting Iraqi Security Forces in liberating Daesh-controlled areas, as well as helping provide humanitarian assistance, and re-establishing governance and services.

UK firm Optima Group is already actively engaged in affected areas, mitigating threats of explosives and working with local communities to provide a safe environment.

Recent attacks in Baghdad, Manchester, and London show that terrorism is our mutual enemy. An ever-present threat that we all share.

The UK will always stand shoulder to shoulder with Iraq to defeat international terrorism, deliver stability and promote development.

Conclusion

Today's conference shows the willingness on both sides to strengthen our bilateral relationship.

I hope it is a relationship dominated by increased trade for many years.

For history shows trade is a force for good: ushering in periods of prosperity, stability and human advancement.

Everyone here has a role to play in ensuring that is just as true now as it was 1,000 years ago.

Thank you.

[News story: Refugees of all nationalities fleeing Syria are now eligible for resettlement in the UK](#)

The Home Secretary Amber Rudd has announced today (Monday 3 July) that vulnerable refugees of any nationality, not just Syrian, who fled the conflict to neighbouring countries and are unable to safely return to their home country could now be resettled in the UK. There has been no change to the 20,000 commitment.

In 2015 the government committed to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees from the Middle East and North Africa Region (MENA) by 2020 and more than 7,000 Syrians have already arrived in the UK through the scheme.

The policy change follows advice from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) who identified that a diversified resettlement scheme was required to address the needs of the refugee population in the region.

The Home Secretary Amber Rudd said:

It is vitally important that we focus our support on the most vulnerable refugees in the region who have fled the atrocities in Syria, whatever their nationality.

I am proud that the UK is continuing to be proactive and by expanding the scheme we are making sure our doors continue to remain open to the people who most need our help.

We will continue to work with local authorities and the UNHCR, whose hard work so far has made sure that the scheme is a success.

The government partners with the UNHCR on the Syrian VPRS to identify the most vulnerable refugees, from the areas surrounding Syria, for resettlement in the UK.

The UK has been at the forefront of the response and has pledged £2.46 billion to the humanitarian crisis.

In addition, the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme will resettle up to 3,000 of the most vulnerable children and their families from the Middle East and North Africa region by 2020.