

Holding the Assad regime accountable for its repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria – UK Statement at the UN Security Council

I'd like to start by thanking the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms Nakamitsu, for her briefing.

The entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention was an important milestone in international security, and we commend the OPCW's success in overseeing the Convention and verifying the destruction of 99% of declared stockpiles.

While almost all States Parties have met their obligations under the Convention, a few continue to develop, acquire, and deploy chemical weapons.

The Syrian regime continues to flout the terms of UNSCR 2118. It has ignored its obligations to cooperate fully with the OPCW to make progress on the outstanding issues on its chemical weapons declaration.

This month marks the anniversaries of chemical weapons attacks at Khan Shaykhun in 2017 and Douma in 2018. We are unwavering in our commitment to hold the Assad regime to account for its repeated uses of chemical weapons against its own people.

In Syria, the use of chemical weapons was both preceded and followed by disinformation. We are therefore concerned to see a similar pattern in Russian disinformation about chemical weapons in Ukraine. The use of chemical weapons in Ukraine would be a callous escalation, and we will hold any state which uses WMD to account.

There must be no impunity for any state that develops, acquires, or deploys chemical weapons anywhere under any circumstances.

With the entry into force of the Convention, the international community pledged to eliminate a class of weapons that inflicted appalling suffering in the last century. With this in mind, I welcome the Council's agreement on a press statement that reaffirms the objectives of the CWC. On its 25th Anniversary, we must collectively recommit to the Convention – it has saved countless lives.

Three month limit for three HRT products to ensure continued access

- Serious Shortage Protocols (SSPs) issued to limit dispensing to 3 months' supply of Oestrogel®, Ovestin® cream and Premique Low Dose® to ensure women across the UK will be able to more reliably access Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) products
- Women will only pay for prescriptions if they are dispensed in full meaning they will not face additional costs
- Move follows appointment of Madelaine McTernan as Head of the HRT Supply Taskforce and will enable more women to access the HRT they need

Urgent action is being taken to ensure women across the UK will be able to more reliably access HRT products, as the Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid issues Serious Shortage Protocols (SSPs) to limit the dispensing of 3 HRT products to 3 months' supply.

In response to concerns regarding longer prescribing cycles putting pressure on availability of some HRT products, the government has made the decision to issue SSPs to three products in high demand to ensure women are able to access the HRT they need.

Women who have a prescription for more than three months but are only able to access three months' supply will not have to pay an additional prescription charge. This means women will not incur any additional costs. Imposing a three month limit will mean more women are able to access the medication they want. Any woman who is worried about access to HRT or is unable to access HRT should speak to her GP.

This follows the recent appointment of Vaccine Taskforce Director General Madelaine McTernan to spearhead a new HRT Supply Taskforce, applying lessons learned from the successful procurement seen during the Covid vaccination programme to identify ways to support the HRT supply chain ensuring it can meet both short and long term demand. The move will save time for patients as well as pharmacists and prescribers who are working tirelessly to tackle the covid backlog.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

I want to reassure women I have listened to their concerns and will not hesitate to take decisive action to ensure they can access the HRT they need.

We will leave no stone unturned in our national mission to boost supply of HRT – and this next step will ensure women across the UK will be able to reliably access this vital medication and maintain this lifeline for millions who need it.

Demand for HRT has dramatically risen with a 38% increase in the number of prescription items over the last seven years as there is greater awareness around the menopause and GPs are more confident in prescribing. Supplies of the vast majority of HRT products, including alternatives to those affected, currently remain available

The SSPs, which are set to expire on Friday 29 July 2022, allow community pharmacists to supply the three specified HRT products according to the protocol rather than the written prescription, without needing to seek authorisation from the prescriber. This will even out distribution of in demand for products such as Oestrogels which have recently experienced issues due to rising demand. Pharmacists are expected to use their professional judgement when deciding to apply the SSP and patients must be consulted.

Head of the HRT Supply Taskforce Madeline McTernan said:

This is a step in the right direction of tackling the supply issues women are facing when it comes to accessing HRT and ensuring ongoing, reliable supply.

Minister for Women's Health Maria Caulfield said:

HRT can be a lifeline for women suffering from severe menopause symptoms including anxiety, difficulty sleeping, night sweats and hot flushes.

We will do everything in our power to make sure women can access the HRT they need both in the short and long term as part of our drive to improve the quality of life for menopausal women.

We are taking action to increase access and reduce the cost of HRT meaning women can pay a one-off charge equivalent to two single prescription charges, currently £18.70, for all their HRT prescriptions for a year.

This prepayment certificate will mean women can access HRT on a month by month basis if need be, easing pressure on supply, while keeping the cost of HRT low. This system will be implemented from April 2023.

This forms part of the wider government agenda to reduce the gender health gap and increase support for menopausal and peri-menopausal women. In the recent call for evidence to inform the upcoming Women's Health Strategy, menopause was the third most selected topic that respondents picked for inclusion in the plan, with 48% of respondents selecting this as a priority. This is in line with the governments commitment to tackle health disparities and support everyone to live healthier, happier lives.

As set out in our women's health vision document, the menopause will be a key priority in the first government-led Women's Health Strategy for England. The UK wide Menopause Taskforce will also consider the role of education and

training, workplace policies and peer groups for menopausal women can play in supporting women through what can be a mentally and physically challenging time.

Background

- The SSPs applies across the whole of the UK.
- The SSPs applies to the following products:
 - Oestrogel pump-pack 750mcg/actuation gel
 - Ovestin 1mg cream
 - Premique low dose 0.3mg/1.5mg modified release tablets
- The SSPs do not authorise pharmacists to dispense alternative products.

COP President Alok Sharma visits Mexico to promote global climate action and implementation of the Glasgow Climate Pact

- COP President Alok Sharma met representatives from the federal and state Mexican government, as well as representatives of civil society, indigenous peoples and youth
- He visited the state of Quintana Roo to hear about sustainable forestry management from communities and see coastal areas blighted by the brown algae sargassum
- The visit was made to follow up on the agreements made during COP26, held in Glasgow in November 2021

COP President Alok Sharma visited Mexico from April 24-27 to drive momentum on delivering commitments made in the Glasgow Climate Pact signed last November by 196 countries.

On his first visit to the country, the COP26 President participated in several bilateral meetings in Mexico City focused on climate action issues, including a push for greater ambition and a net zero commitment.

At the start of the visit, the COP President met representatives of civil society organisations, youth groups and indigenous peoples who highlighted their climate change concerns across sectors including forests, energy, and agriculture.

The COP President also held bilateral Government meetings with Rocío Nahle, Minister of Energy and Martha Delgado, Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs. He also met the Mexico City Mobility Secretary, Andres Lajous, during a visit to the Cablebus, the city's new low carbon transport system and the Quintana Roo Secretary of Ecology and Environment, Efrain Villanueva.

Throughout these meetings, Alok Sharma underlined the importance of greater ambition in Mexico's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the potential to achieve a net zero goal as well as the importance of decarbonising Mexico's energy mix. Mexico's perspectives post COP26 and in preparation for COP27 were also heard.

Mr Sharma participated in a business round table with members of the private sector in Mexico to discuss the important role business has to play in delivering the Glasgow Climate Pact and driving ambitious climate action in the country.

While in Mexico, Mr Sharma also visited Muyil in the Yucatan peninsula to meet with indigenous representatives and hear views on nature-based solutions and community integration in projects in the region.

On his final day he witnessed coastal areas affected by the brown algae sargassum, considered by experts to be a consequence of rising ocean temperatures, fertiliser use and deforestation.

During this visit, the COP President took part in a dialogue with the leading local and federal authorities, including the Mexican Navy tasked with managing the sargassum crisis in the state.

COP26 President, Alok Sharma, said:

I came to Mexico to speak with my government counterparts, civil society groups and business who are all so important in turning climate change commitments into action.

State ministers, parliamentarians and business leaders all demonstrated their commitment to action in undertaking work to tackle climate change.

Many countries are already seeing the impact of climate change, including Mexico.

During my visit to Quintana Roo it was great to see how sustainable forest management and land restoration are being used to protect those most vulnerable to climate change.

Pledges made at COP26 in Glasgow must come to life this year. Mexico has a crucial role in helping to deliver this, both through net zero commitments and shorter-term emission reduction targets. I look forward to the UK and Mexico working closely together on this.

Local Government Pension Scheme – Northern Ireland

News story

GAD completed its report into the actuarial valuation of the Local Government Pension Scheme for Northern Ireland.



The Government Actuary's Department's (GAD) report [into the actuarial valuation](#) of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) for Northern Ireland has concluded the scheme's in a strong financial position.

The Department of Communities appointed the Government Actuary to undertake the report under Section 13 of the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. This covers the actuarial valuation of the LGPS NI as at 31 March 2019. Section 13 requires us to assess whether the scheme has achieved the following aims:

- compliance
- consistency
- solvency
- long term cost efficiency

Top level findings

GAD based its findings on the actuarial valuation of the LGPS NI, data from the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee and its actuary, Aon.

We found the funding position of the LGPS NI has improved since 31 March 2016 and the scheme appears to be in a strong financial position. Among our top-

level findings are that the:

- total assets have grown in market value from £5.8 billion to £8.0 billion
- total liabilities disclosed in the 2019 local valuation report amounted to £7.2 billion (the local valuation is required to be completed using prudent assumptions)
- aggregate funding level on the prudent local basis has improved from 96% to 112% (at 2019)
- improved funding level is due in large part to strong asset returns over the 3-year period to 31 March 2019

Funding level

Although the funding level had improved due to change in the demographic assumptions, this was offset by changes in financial assumptions. Furthermore, the funding level on GAD's best estimate basis has reduced from 122% (at 2016) to 114% (at 2019).

One of the report's authors GAD actuary John Bayliss said: "Our report into this actuarial valuation of the LGPS NI showed the fund continues in good health. The scheme has grown significantly over the 3 years since we last examined it."

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[Foreign Secretary statement on the British Virgin Islands: 29 April 2022](#)

Press release

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss issues a statement ahead of the publication of the Commission of Inquiry report into governance in the British Virgin Islands.



Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

The arrest yesterday of the Premier of the British Virgin Islands on charges related to drugs trafficking and money laundering is extremely concerning and underlines the need for urgent action.

In January 2021, we set out significant concerns about the deteriorating state of governance in the British Virgin Islands, as well as the potential vulnerability of the islands to serious organised crime. The UK Government supported the then Governor's decision to launch an independent Inquiry into governance of the Territory.

The Inquiry report published today by the Governor shows clearly that substantial legislative and constitutional change is required to restore the standards of governance that the people of the British Virgin Islands are entitled to.

I have instructed the Minister for Overseas Territories to travel to the Territory immediately to speak to the Governor and key stakeholders. We will then announce a clear path forward.

The Overseas Territories are a core part of the UK family. The UK Government is committed to the security and wellbeing of the people of the British Virgin Islands.

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