

Speech: “What I couldn’t have done was tell you their stories, the lives behind those numbers; the human cost of the fragile security situation.”

As co-lead for the Council’s visit to the Lake Chad Basin, I’d like to focus my remarks this morning on the security situation, and my colleagues, the other co-leads, will tackle the other two big themes of our visit, which is the humanitarian and the longer term and development root causes. But before I do so, I would like to thank, on behalf of all of us, the Governments of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, as well as the United Nations, for making this visit possible. And thank you to all Council members for making the most of the visit, and an ambitious programme, and for keeping up with it.

If I was talking to you about security in the Lake Chad Basin a week ago, I’d have spoken about statistics, the numbers, 20,000 people killed, 2.3 million currently displaced. What I couldn’t have done was tell you their stories, the lives behind those numbers; the human cost of the fragile security situation.

Last Friday, in Maroua, in northern Cameroon, with my colleagues I saw that cost in the eyes of a 15 year old boy whose village had been attacked by Boko Haram. He hid for days, before being interrogated and imprisoned by the authorities for two years on suspicion of being a member of Boko Haram. Most of his friends had already been killed.

I saw that cost in the eyes of a woman crying with her baby in her arms. I saw it in others who spoke of the murder of their husbands or sons, the kidnapping of their daughters, the burning of their homes. We heard from civil society how women were selling their bodies for sex just to eat.

All these people brought home the horrifying consequences of the chaos and insecurity wrought by Boko Haram. And I hope that together we brought some much needed focus to the suffering that has been neglected for too long.

And amid the horror, we also heard of the bravery and commitment of the people of the region as they try to bring stability and security back to the Lake Chad Basin.

We heard chapters from a success story on its way to completion. Stories from the Multi-National Joint Task Force of liberating twenty thousand hostages, successfully winning back territory that will act as future homes for the people of the region. But the story is not over. Security is not yet entrenched. It is fragile in too many places. Force commanders and generals outlined continued attacks; suicide bombings, IEDs are still far too common.

And Boko Haram’s tactics are getting more barbaric – mothers turned into

suicide bombers with infants strapped to them in addition to their bombs. Boko Haram are down, but they're not out. And make no mistake, their cruelty knows no bounds.

It was clear that international support remains vital for this fight. We visited Operation Barkhane Headquarters in N'djamena where we met French troops, and were joined by members of the British and American military. Together they are supporting the Multi-National Joint Task Force, as well the Nigerian military, through capacity building, training and intelligence sharing. We heard how further support was needed to enable better mobility and logistics in the fight.

Women's participation and protection was a constant theme throughout the visit, and it was clear that women must be more involved in efforts to tackle Boko Haram, and counter violent extremism, and build peace.

We also heard of the hundreds of Boko Haram defectors, including women and children. We made clear the need for compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law by all actors in tackling the scourge of Boko Haram. This is essential to prevent mistreatment, including of detainees; as well as to build confidence among communities and counter radicalisation.

Let me close with this final reflection. Only yesterday, here in New York, I met three inspirational young women from Chibok who were attending an International Women's Day event at the United Nations.

Far from being victims, far from being survivors, these women are now campaigners for education for women and girls in poverty. Despite everything that they had endured, despite being caught up in the hell unleashed by Boko Haram, they are determined to look to the future.

They showed what lies ahead. They showed a future possible when the fighting ends.

To achieve this reality, it's clear that there can be no military solution: only a comprehensive approach will bring stability and peace. And so let me reiterate that the United Kingdom will proudly stand side by side with the region, with the four governments that we visited, and with the affected people in this effort.

With that, let me now hand over to Fodé to focus on the root causes and longer term development.

[Speech: £625,000 for England's](#)

Economic Heartland to help shape its future transport priorities

It's a pleasure to join you this afternoon, at the end of a packed day of discussion on the future for England's Economic Heartland.

And how apt it is that we are meeting in Silverstone.

It reminds me of something I've been repeatedly telling my friends and family ever since I became a transport minister.

That transport can be fun.

In seriousness, it's great to see so many people here from a broad range of organisations.

Local Authorities, Highways England, Network Rail, National Infrastructure Commission and so many businesses from the supply chain that supports it all.

All here, and all demonstrating a commitment to improving this region's transport.

Significance of England's Economic Heartland

It's entirely right that this region is getting the attention it deserves.

It contains some of the fastest growing cities in the UK; Oxford, Milton Keynes, Cambridge.

Over 175,000 businesses.

1.6 million jobs.

And three and a half million people.

It's a region of world-leading universities.

And I am delighted that this region is gaining a reputation as a centre of excellence for the science, technology and innovation of transport.

As part of the government's Intelligent Mobility Fund, Milton Keynes is trialling autonomous vehicles that will revolutionise travel.

Yet none of this success can be taken for granted.

Many of you will have seen the National Infrastructure Commission's interim report which came out in the autumn.

The report highlighted the housing and connectivity challenges your area faces.

This region has some of the most expensive housing of anywhere in the UK outside London – driven up by the university towns of Cambridge and Oxford.

Yet thanks to a legacy of underinvestment by successive governments, its transport connectivity leaves something to be desired.

Getting across the region is time consuming; it's often quicker to travel in and out of London than to travel between east and west.

For example, the distance from Aylesbury to Milton Keynes is 21 miles, but can take up to 2 and a half hours by train.

Cambridge to Luton are 41 miles apart but a train journey takes almost 2 hours.

Transport for growth

When transport isn't all it should be, there's an economic and social toll to pay.

Yes, effective transport is essential for prosperity

But transport isn't just about getting people from A to B.

Transport helps people get on.

It provides access to education and to jobs; it connects businesses with customers, patients to healthcare, friends to friends and family to family.

So I am glad that in the Autumn Statement we were able to announce that we would press ahead with plans for a new road expressway from Oxford to Cambridge via Bedford and Milton Keynes.

And we're also looking into making improvements to the A1 between the M25 and Peterborough.

We're working to include these projects and more in our next Road Investment Strategy, and you will continue to be included in that work.

We are investing in East to West Rail, and we anticipate that train services will be operational between 2022 to 2024.

Late last year, the Secretary of State asked Rob Brighouse, former chief executive of Chiltern Rail, to look at how the project could be delivered more quickly.

And in the Autumn Statement, the Chancellor provided £10m to continue the development of the central section between Bedford and Cambridge.

All this is a good start.

It means we've got 2 important ingredients for investment – long-term planning and money.

But there's a third ingredient that's just as vital.

And that's the right governance.

After all, the government can find the money and make plans but the plans need to be turned into concrete reality, and the money spent in the right way.

This is where organisations such as England's Economic Heartland can have such an important role to play.

By taking local knowledge of needs and opportunities, and thinking strategically.

About how money is best allocated, on what schemes, and in what order.

You know your economy better than anyone.

You know what's needed to drive growth.

Yet currently decision-making over strategic transport schemes, for example, is often centralised at a national level.

So over the year ahead, we want to work with you, to support you in making a real difference to the region.

We want England's Economic Heartland to shape its future.

We want to see the region speak with one voice.

To have a shared vision for trains and buses, taking into account what passengers want.

We want to see your plans for reducing road congestion, and speeding up links the region's airports.

And we want to see a vision that links this thinking on transport to thinking on housing and economic growth.

We're seeing the early evidence that when local areas come together to plan long-term infrastructure, they can deliver outputs greater than the sum of their parts.

I'm pleased too that you're giving consideration to becoming a sub-national transport body.

It might offer significant benefits to the region.

But by definition, it's not something that should be imposed, or decided on before the hard work of analysis has been done.

The region must put forward its proposal and make the case for the benefits.

The government door will be open, and to help you have asked for £625,000

match fund to get moving. I am happy to confirm that central government is willing to confirm that funding today.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, my message is this.

We know the transport infrastructure across the region isn't good enough for a region with such incredible potential.

Now we have the chance to put it right.

Not by sitting in London and telling you what to do.

But by giving you the chance to shape your own future.

So thank you for listening, and thank you, Martin Tett, the Strategic Alliance, and Highways England for organising a brilliant event.

And thank you for bringing everyone together.

[John McDonnell responds to IFS analysis that shows real wages will be no higher in 2022 than they were in 2007](#)

John

McDonnell MP, Labour's Shadow Chancellor, commenting on today's analysis from the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) that shows real wages will be no higher in 2022 than they were in 2007, said:

"This lost decade for living standards is a damning indictment of seven years of Tory economic failure.

"Philip Hammond attempted to present his failing and unfair Budget yesterday as a piece of good news for the self-employed. Today's analysis shows that the reality for low income self-employed people is that changes to the tax and benefit system will leave them worse off. In the words of the IFS, National Insurance

changes
yesterday “are very small by comparison”.

“What
we saw yesterday was more failure and more unfairness. After a decade of no
real wage growth on top of Tory changes to the tax and benefit system,
working
people are worse off and will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

“Only Labour will take the action needed
to end the Tories’ economic failure and introduce a Real Living Wage of £10
an
hour by 2020.”

News story: Venturefest East Midlands: business growth and innovation support

If you’re an entrepreneur or innovator you could benefit from a networking
event to help grow your business through smart use of technology.

[Venturefest East Midlands](#) will invite businesses and investors to come
together next month to network and share expertise. The event – supported by
Innovate UK – is being held on Wednesday 22 March 2017 at Derby Arena, Derby.
Entry is free.

The event theme is smart innovation. The aim is to help businesses unlock
opportunities to engage in innovation. There will be a focus on how
businesses can use technology to improve their processes and become more cost
efficient.

Attendees will range from those who want to get or provide finance, and win
or contract for new business.

Key speakers include:

Delegates will be able to meet other local businesses and discover how
they’ve improved their business through innovation and design.

News story: Unknown World War 1 soldiers graves rededicated

A funeral service was held for three unknown soldiers who enlisted into The Lancashire Fusiliers, the New Zealand (NZ) Infantry and of an unknown regiment on Tuesday 7 March 2017 at Perth Cemetery (China Wall) near Ypres, Belgium.

The service, organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services was conducted by Reverend Chris Kellock, Chaplain 1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers.

The service was supported by The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and by staff from the New Zealand Embassy. In attendance were delegates from both British and New Zealand Defence, regimental representatives and local dignitaries.

Three sets of remains were discovered near Zonnebeke in December 2012 and accompanying military insignia indicated the casualties were World War 1 soldiers of The Lancashire Fusiliers and NZ Infantry; no identifying insignia accompanied the third soldier. Despite extensive research, the JCCC was unable to identify the casualties and they will be buried as 'Soldiers of the Great War known unto God'.

Beverley Simon, JCCC said:

We owe a huge debt to those who fought in the Great War and we at JCCC take immense pride in ensuring all those who died in the service of their country are laid to rest with the appropriate dignity, ceremony and respect.

Reverend Chris Kellock QCVS RChD, Chaplain 1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers said:

It is always an immense privilege to be involved on such occasions as this. As the current Chaplain to the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers it is an honour to join with other Fusiliers, past and present, alongside our friends from New Zealand to ensure a fitting remembrance to those who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

The memory of these unknown soldiers, in particular the Lancashire Fusilier, is part of our history but more importantly provides the motivation for our young Fusiliers as they follow in the proud traditions of wearing the hackle.

Headstones for the unknown soldiers have been provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), who will now care for their final resting place

in perpetuity.