

Joint statement on elections in Libya – December 2021

France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and the United States of America welcome the statement of the Secretary-General's Special Adviser (SASG) on Libya, Stephanie Williams on 23 December and commend the work of the SASG to engage in broad consultations across Libya over the past ten days. We express our strong support for the ongoing efforts of the United Nations Support mission in Libya (UNSMIL) to further a Libyan-led and Libyan-owned process towards the holding of free, fair and inclusive elections.

We take note of the High National Electoral Commission's (HNEC) statement of 22 December on the postponement of the ballot scheduled on 24 December and its proposal for a new, early date on which to hold those elections. We call on the relevant Libyan authorities to respect the aspirations of the Libyan people for prompt elections by swiftly determining a final date for the polling and issuing the final list of presidential candidates without delay.

We commend the technical and logistical preparation already undertaken by HNEC for the holding of elections as stipulated in the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum roadmap and endorsed in UNSC resolution 2570 (2021), as well as the conclusions of the second Berlin conference of 23 June 2021 and during the Paris International Conference for Libya of 12 November 2021. We recall that free, fair and credible elections will allow the Libyan people to elect a representative and unified government, and reinforce the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of Libya. It is important that momentum towards these goals is maintained.

In line with the Paris declaration, France, Germany, Italy, the UK and the United States of America recall their understanding that the transfer of power from the current interim executive authority to the new executive authority shall take place following the announcement of the results of such early and prompt parliamentary and presidential elections. To avoid conflicts of interests and to promote a level playing field, candidates holding roles in public institutions should also continue vacating them until the announcement of the electoral results.

We reiterate UNSMIL's call for disagreements on emerging political or military matters to be resolved without resorting to violence. We stand ready to hold to account those who threaten the stability or undermine the political and electoral process in Libya, through violence, or the incitement of violence. We affirm that individuals or entities, inside or outside Libya, who obstruct, undermine, manipulate or falsify the electoral process and the political transition will be held accountable and may be designated by the United Nations sanctions committee in accordance with UNSC resolution 2571. We commit to respecting the UN-facilitated, Libyan-led and owned political process and urge all other international actors to do the same.

[UK condemns Iran's use of ballistic missiles: FCDO statement](#)

News story

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has condemned Iran's use of ballistic missiles in a test launch conducted today.



An FCDO spokesperson said:

We condemn Iran's use of ballistic missiles in a test launch confirmed to have been conducted today. The launch is a clear breach of UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which requires that Iran not undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons – including launches using ballistic missile technology.

These actions are a threat to regional and international security and we call on Iran to immediately cease its activities.

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[Non-specialist HGV operators](#)

Press release

In quick succession, the Traffic Commissioner for the West Midlands, Nick

Denton, has taken regulatory action against two builders' merchant companies.



In quick succession, the Traffic Commissioner for the West Midlands, Nick Denton, has taken regulatory action against two builders' merchant companies that had fallen foul of the rules.

The first case involved M K Builders Merchants, which held a restricted operator's licence, meaning that HGV operation was not its core business. It was found to have a very poor maintenance record and almost no understanding of the rules. The company had given assurances that it would improve compliance after a DVSA investigation had reported problems in 2019. The traffic commissioner found that these assurances had not been followed up by any effective action, He revoked the company's licence, and disqualified the company and its director from holding a licence for 12 months.

The second case was HRA Builders Merchant, a company which the traffic commissioner subsequently found had already started to operate goods vehicles before its application for a standard national licence had been granted in September 2021. The company failed to respond to requests for an explanation and failed to appear at the public inquiry. Mr Denton therefore revoke its licence and disqualified the company and its directors indefinitely from holding one in the future. If the company continues to operate goods vehicles, it risks having them impounded.

Of M K Builders Merchant, Nick Denton said "The business might be able to survive using third party haulage or smaller vehicles. But if it cannot, then this will be a merited outcome for non-compliance on this scale and over such a period of time."

Regarding HRA Builders Merchants he said "The operator is not of good repute. It has operated vehicles without authority to do so. Its failure to respond to my clerk's request for simple tachograph information and its failure to appear at inquiry show that it is not interested in engaging with the regulatory process."

Further details can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

For any further details or enquiries, please contact: Email: pressoffice@otc.gov.uk

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It's not true COVID-19 modellers look only at worst outcomes

We are in an uncertain and potentially dangerous phase of the pandemic. A new variant, Omicron, has emerged and it has mutations that make it appear different to the immune system. It is spreading fast and has the capacity to escape at least part of the protection offered by vaccines. Across the world scientists are trying to work out what all this means, the impact of lower severity and what the effects of different interventions might be.

Vaccinology tells us that vaccine boosters are important to restore protection. Virology is picking up differences in the speed the virus replicates in the airways and lung tissues. Epidemiology is giving insight into rates, speed and extent of spread across different parts of the population. At the same time, monitoring of clinical data is trying to get a good fix on the severity of disease caused by Omicron. Our behaviours and mixing patterns have changed and will affect in complex ways how the virus moves through the population.

With so many different factors in play, epidemiological modellers have an unenviable task in trying to make sense of all this. They are trying to model lots of different scenarios of how the wave of Omicron might grow, determine which factors are likely to have the biggest impact on spread and its consequences, and to assess how different interventions might alter the outcomes.

The modellers always have to make assumptions and do so across a wide range of possibilities, some optimistic and some pessimistic. They do not, contrary to what you might have heard, only model the worst outcomes. They will make assumptions about vaccine effectiveness, they will model different levels of viral transmission, mixing patterns and different levels of disease severity. The range of assumptions modelled can be very broad; for disease severity for Omicron one model explored a range from 10 per cent of Delta severity through to 100 per cent.

For immunity a range of assumptions on vaccine efficacy, speed of vaccine rollout and vaccine coverage in different parts of the population were explored. It is not surprising that the outcomes from the models describe a very wide range of possible effects on infection levels, hospitalisations, hospital occupancy and death. But all of the modelling showed that with the growth rates of infection being seen the outlook was not good; a conclusion reached by many other groups across the world including the World Health Organisation. Vaccine boosters are crucial.

All of the information from behavioural science through to immunology, modelling and virology, together with input from scientists from around the world comes to the SAGE committee and its job is to try to turn this into

advice for ministers.

It is not the job of SAGE to take a particular policy stance or to either spread gloom or give Panglossian optimism. Ministers and the cabinet need to hear the information whether uncomfortable or encouraging. They of course need to factor it in to all the other information that provides inputs to policy decisions. SAGE does not provide dogmatic answers or directives, it provides information, advice, scenarios and helps determine possible consequences of actions. Part of the advice may contain a “reasonable worst case scenario” – data that are often seized upon.

But they are just that – a reasonable worst case scenario and one of many possible outcomes and trajectories presented to ministers for planning purposes and decision making.

Science has served us extraordinarily well during this pandemic and has given us many insights as well as new diagnostics, vaccines and therapeutics. Science is self-correcting, and advances by overturning previous dogma and challenging accepted truths. Encouraging a range of opinions, views and interpretation of data is all part of the process. No scientist would ever claim, in this fast-changing and unpredictable pandemic, to have a monopoly of wisdom on what happens next.

Equally, those who want to engage seriously with a debate that affects us all need to consider all the data in the round, not only those parts that fit an argument while ignoring the rest. That is not science, even though it might sometimes make an entertaining read.

Often the job of scientific advice is to allow ministers to understand both a central case and the uncertainty surrounding it, what drives that uncertainty and when the uncertainty might be reduced. Speaking scientific truth to power is a difficult but necessary part of the democratic process if ministers are to be able to make an informed decision. This is what SAGE does.

Antibiotic-resistant strain of gonorrhoea detected in London

This reminder comes as a case of antibiotic-resistant *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, the bacteria which causes gonorrhoea, was confirmed in a heterosexual man living in the UK.

This strain of *N. gonorrhoeae* is resistant to the antibiotic ceftriaxone, the last remaining treatment for gonorrhoea. Fortunately the man has been treated successfully and investigations to identify and limit onward transmission are underway by UKHSA and sexual health clinical teams.

Investigations suggest the man, in his early 20s, acquired the infection in London during November. Ceftriaxone resistance is common in the Asia-Pacific region but is rarely found in the UK.

Dr Katy Sinka, STI Section Head at UKHSA, said:

Finding this strain of gonorrhoea in the UK serves as a stark reminder of the problem of antibiotic resistance in this common sexually transmitted infection (STI).

To reduce the risk of gonorrhoea and other STIs, we recommend using condoms consistently and correctly with all new or casual partners.

If you recently developed any STI-related symptoms such as an unusual discharge, avoid sexual contact and get a sexual health screen.

STI testing is free is available through online self-sampling services or by contacting local sexual health services. UKHSA actively monitors, and acts on, the spread of antibiotic resistance in gonorrhoea and potential treatment failures and, when ceftriaxone resistant strains are identified, implements prompt public health action to limit further spread.

Typical symptoms of gonorrhoea include a thick green or yellow discharge from the vagina or penis, pain when urinating, pain and discomfort in the rectum and, in women and other people with a uterus or ovaries, lower abdominal pain and bleeding between periods. However, often people infected with gonorrhoea will have no symptoms especially for infections in the throat, vagina or rectum.

Treating gonorrhoea as soon as possible is very important as it can lead to serious long-term health problems, in women and other people with a uterus or ovaries, gonorrhoea can spread to the reproductive organs and cause [pelvic inflammatory disease \(PID\)](#).

PID can lead to long-term pelvic pain, [ectopic pregnancy](#) and [infertility](#). In men and other people with testes, it can cause a painful infection in the testicles and prostate gland, which may lead to reduced fertility in some cases.

You can read more about gonorrhoea on the [NHS website](#).