

# Climate change has a direct impact on peace and security

Thank you Mr President, the United Kingdom also regrets the vote outcome.

For more than 75 years, across thousands of resolutions, this Council has sought to address the greatest challenges to international peace and security.

It is clear that climate change is such a challenge.

In the past few years, political consensus has caught up with the scientific consensus that climate change is caused by human activity and the burning of fossil fuels, and that these changes have a direct impact on peace and security.

Member States on the forefront of climate change are acutely aware of this. Like in the Sahel, where temperatures are rising 50% faster than global averages.

They know we don't have the luxury of time.

Like the Small Island Developing States where sea levels are rising faster than global averages.

They know we don't have the luxury of time.

Like mountain states whose glaciers are melting.

They know we don't have the luxury of time.

At COP26, we saw that countries can work together to take decisive action. And today, well over 100 member states, including many developing countries, including countries outside the Security Council, co-sponsored this resolution.

We welcome steps taken by all Council members and Member States to combat climate change. But actions must follow words.

The Security Council can play its own part. More frequent reporting on the links between climate and security would be a good start.

Mr President, climate change is a threat to us all.

The consequences of inaction will be catastrophic. We must act now. We must all act now.

The United Kingdom strongly supported this resolution and will continue to support further action across the UN including in the Security Council to combat climate change.

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## Address given by His Excellency Governor Nigel Dakin CMG on border security and the OPBAT alliance

1. It was against this highly relevant backdrop that the long planned strategic conference, the first of its kind, took place in TCI. The delegations were led by the Miami based Commander of the US Coast Guard that operates across the Caribbean, Admiral McPherson and by the Bahamas Minister for Immigration, Hon. Keith Bell. I count them both now as friends.
2. The Minister and myself led for TCI. We were supported by teams of practitioners including Permanent Secretaries for National Security from the Bahamas and TCI, the Admirals Chief of Staff, the Commander of the Bahamas Defence Force, and his opposite numbers from TCI Policing and the TCI Regiment.
3. The British High Commissioner from the Bahamas and crucially the US Ambassador – who owns the Treaty on behalf of the US – and her Deputy – also from the Bahamas attended as did a senior British Naval Officer attached to the relevant US Combatant Command and UK Home Office and Border Force Officials.
4. They had the confidence to come here – believing it would be worthwhile – because in TCI we have travelled a long way since late 2019 when we announced our National Security Strategy, established a Secretariat, vowed to establish a Regiment and placed the destabilising impacts of illegal migration at the top of the threats we face alongside the devastating impacts of hurricanes.
5. Our allies also came here because during the last two years the external environment we are all seeking to manage has not get better – it has got worse – it is a a wicked problem, a problem that is changing, morphing even accelerating away from you as you seek to solve it. As has been evident in international media the push factors out of Haiti have got worse, not better over the last two years. Recent natural disaster and political shocks has meant Haiti is in no position, at present, to stop the problems on its Northern shore that we face – the problem set if faces is unfortunately huge.
6. This, I'm afraid, sits within a much wider global context that the world is now on the move – mainly from the South to the North and from the East to the West. Populations that were once static now have just sufficient funds to travel and through the internet and global communications cannot only see a

better life but have someone already there they can reach out to that can facilitate their travel and manage their arrival. This is a long-term global trend and we are on the wrong end of it.

7. Being an archipelago of Islands just over 100 nautical miles, from a country whose population is 240 times our size, and who is experiencing the lawlessness evident in that country, is frankly not a comfortable place to be – particularly when any long-term solution to Haiti will take decades and require much more international support than is seemingly available. TCI can't wait for that, welcome as it will be when it comes, but I assure the Government of Haiti that no place in the world wants a more stable, more secure and more prosperous neighbour to our South, more than we do.
8. If the situation is getting worse another reason our allies came is because they now know we are serious because we have shown that seriousness. I said two years ago – when I first travelled to Miami and Nassau – that our allies should not underestimate my ambition, and they should not underestimate TCI's ambition, and that was because it was hard for us in TCI – to overstate the threat illegal migration was to us.
9. Despite the deteriorating situation in Haiti – and despite the complications that slowed us down during the pandemic – we are in a much stronger place today than we were in 2019. We are now building from a position of increasing strength. There has been many significant successes. Many sloops are now turned around at sea before they reach our waters and for that we can thank our allies with whom we are now in much closer communication. Over the last two years this has genuinely started to become, if you like, a team sport.
10. I don't say this as often as I should because I fear fate – I fear hubris – but for those that do get past these outer rings of defence we in TCI have become predictably good – almost metronomically good – at intercepting the large wooden sloops that used to be a regular sight washed up on our beaches having successfully landed their human cargo.
11. We have become more effective, in the short term, mainly through the better co-ordination of our efforts and through the brilliance of the work done, 365 days a year, by those who are at sea or who monitor our borders from land. They have grown in determination and purpose over the last two years and that isn't a commodity that can be bought, but instead fostered. I commend the leadership of those in roles where this strong morale and determination to succeed has been developed and I particularly call out the leadership of the Maritime Branch, the Radar, the Immigration Task Force and the Regiment.
12. What the TCI public are not seeing, is those abandoned wooden hulls left on the beaches to rot covered in discarded clothing. We don't believe a large vessel such as this has got past us in close to 2 years. Instead the public are seeing the pictures of the victims of people smugglers arrested and being

landed at South Dock for rapid repatriation to Haiti. These images still enrage, I know, and there are costs involved in this which I will come onto later – but the costs are frankly manageable when compared to the damage inflicted on our society when we miss one of these large vessels and on the overall common good if we ever return to the position we were once in, when hundreds were arriving in each vessel we failed to stop.

13. While some large sloops do – pathetically – continue to attempt to breach our defences we have now seen a noticeable shift in our opponent’s behaviours. As we get better, Darwinian like, so do they. Our main challenge now is fast boats, or far smaller boats, and as a result we have to shift and develop our own operations and build different types of capability. Some of those boats, and crucially fuel for them, are being stolen from our marinas and coastline and we have to both put an end to that while recognising – that rather like a chess game – we are forcing our opponents now into errors in that when they commit crime here in TCI – and we arrest them here in TCI – which we will – they start to illuminate the wider network of facilitators who live here amongst us and are in Haiti presently beyond our reach.
14. There is therefore a strategy that is now being built – and the conference was part of us confirming our future maritime strategy – that can tackle shifts in their future methodology. It’s less about ‘how they come at us’ but who is facilitating the trade. It’s less about the soldiers and more about the Generals. What we need is a way to seriously degrade the smuggler’s ability to do damage to us. We need a ‘network’, if you like, to take down a ‘network’ and as I will come onto the people of TCI are part of this solution. You are not victims and you are not passive observers.
15. This requires us, as an individual Territory and as an alliance, to do four things really well:
  - a) to increasingly build sophisticated concentric circles of defence that allow the alliance the maximum opportunity to intercept vessels before they make landfall;
  - b) to have a far better understanding – through surveillance and intelligence – of incoming vessels long before they reach our waters so we have time and space to interdict them at a point of our choosing, but crucially to understand who is profiting from this trade;
  - c) to then lift our sights from just intercepting sloops or fast boats, to taking down the networks particularly here in TCI who facilitate this trade and;
  - d) to do all we can to reduce the pull factors that bring irregular migrants to our shores. On this last point the Haitian Community that are here lawfully, the TCI business community and the wider public have a significant role to play and I will come to that.

So let me first update you – in detail – on how we in TCI are going to do those four things really well.

16. The Maritime Police: are truly on the front line of our Territory's defences and they are doing a magnificent job. We must invest in success. Under Mr WARRICAN's leadership their numbers will close to double next year and two new Maritime Patrol Boats will be ordered this coming year for delivery in 2023. The Regiment will also provide them with a further reserve of well-trained manpower to draw on, as they need.
17. The Radar: As previously announced the radar coverage is about to triple. The equipment has been procured and will shortly be operational – locking Providenciales down through 360 degrees. The staff at the Radar have, in the interim, seriously professionalised. We made an early decision to double their numbers and that has paid dividends. I commend the leadership of that team in particular. These are now some of the most effective public servants we have.
18. A Coastguard: We are scoping out how all our Maritime assets can be brought together into a Coast Guard to bring greater efficiencies. A preliminary report was presented at last week's National Security Council and work will continue on its feasibility. For the moment one large law-enforcement agency that can cover the protection of our borders from all threats – be they smuggling, environment or illegal fishing of our waters – has logic to it but what none of us want to do is disrupt the success the Maritime Police presently enjoy. Change needs to be carefully managed.
19. So as an interim step, the Government has committed to building a new Marine Base and within that there will be a Maritime Operations Control Facility that will fuse all activity working in support of this mission. As part of the journey, a decision was made by the NSC last week that the Radar Operation – that now does so much more than just irregular migration – will move from the Ministry of Immigration to the Maritime Police bringing two first class, but separate units together, to ensure maximum collaboration. That will happen on 1 April.
20. As our radar becomes ever more comprehensive, we risk becoming a victim of our own success and we may have many more sightings of suspicious craft. How we best resolve if these are 'friend or foe' depends on the increase in numbers that the radar see – we don't necessarily want the Maritime Police having to intercept each one which would be inefficient. So the NSC has not ruled out investing in fixed wing drone technology to complement our radar activity if that becomes necessary, and the NSC has received some preparatory briefing on this.
21. The TCI Regiment. As promised the Regiment has been formed and was stood up during the pandemic. It has a presence in both Grand Turk and Providenciales.

It's already operational and gaining plaudits for its support to counter-migration work from the Minister of Immigration. It's staffed by brilliant committed people, regular and reserve alike, and it will grow year-on-year over the next two years to be around 100 Marines. Given how new it is, it's already operating well beyond our early expectations but by 2023 it will be operating on land and sea to a very high standard indeed.

22. The site for a regimental barracks has been acquired and is being developed. Fast boats will be procured that can both work in support of counter smuggling and post disaster relief operations. It will be equipped and armed to the highest of standards. The Regiment's officers will be trained at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and plans are already underway for a British Army Training Team to be with us again next year to train what will be further recruits. A Non-Commissioned Officer cadre will be run to develop the leadership of our people probably in conjunction with other Overseas Territories. We have permanent on-island support from one, if not to my mind the best line Regiment the British Army has – 'The Riles' – and as an OT we are unique in securing this type of day-to-day support. My thanks to my good friend, General Sir Patrick Sanders, for being so forward leaning on this.
23. A Border Force: Led by the Minister, stood here with me, and his new Permanent Secretary, and championed by the Premier, next year should see profound changes to the way we organise our defences at our ports of entry. Those entering our country illegally, or overstaying, come as much by air as by sea. The first step will be to combine the enforcement arms of Customs and Immigration to form a Border Force. That decision has now been taken. As I speak a top team from our Immigration Ministry is in UK looking at their digitised airport security features including pre-registration and e-gates. If we get this right, and I believe UK Border Force and Home Office will support us, in what is intelligence led border protection, those we know will do us 'no harm' – such as locals returning home and those arriving from our main markets – should have a seamless arrival and departure at our ports while our Border Force officers focus properly on those who bring the greatest risk.
24. Wider Immigration Ministry: This move to a Border Force will be a very public manifestation of much deeper changes that will be occurring at the Ministry of Immigration, led by the Minister, and to support him we have appointed a new top team who will be in place by the New Year under PS Althea Been that includes, for the first time, a Deputy Secretary drawn from Policing to ensure there is an operational and enforcement mind-set at the top of the Ministry and alongside him a further new Deputy Secretary who, as a then Head of Department, cut his teeth on improving customer service.
25. This top team is a team charged with delivering 'change'. An Immigration Ministry focussed on serious enforcement against those that break the law, while giving excellent service to those who work inside the law, underpinned by the roll out of e-government to standardise and give transparency to

process. That is the destination the Cabinet and NSC believe is not only in reach, but one that must be achieved. If our colleagues get this right this should feel – over the next couple of years – like a once in a generation change.

26. And now to Sentencing: there has to be far greater consequences for those who facilitate this trade. They are not just smuggling people, they are undermining our society and there are the aggravating factors we saw last week where they put those they take money from, in genuine peril. We are expecting a Cabinet paper in the very near future but my understanding – and it is for the Legislature in the end to decide – is that the proposed minimum tariff for facilitating this trade will be a suggested 7 years in prison and an unlimited fine. That legislation is particularly important as we turn our attention to going after the networks that facilitate this trade.
27. Moving away from our territorial waters – I mentioned reducing the costs of repatriation. Once overloaded, unseaworthy craft, are in – or close to – our territorial waters we cannot turn them around. There are maritime conventions linked to safety of life at sea – known as ‘SOLAS’ – that prevent this, that no Sea Captain anywhere in the world can ignore, and frankly we are not in the business of facilitating the potential mass drowning of migrants. We in TCI are bigger than that.
28. However, the closer the Sloops can be identified to the Haitian shore the better, and therefore in conjunction with our allies we need to know what is happening well beyond our horizon. The deployment of a Royal Navy Wildcat Helicopter last year started to show us how valuable it was if we could extend our reach and therefore our and our allies warning. The more recent basing in TCI of US Coast Guard and Department of Homeland Security airframes has built on this and will continue. It was also good having the Royal Navy and its helicopter in our waters in October exercising with our Regiment and then patrolling.
29. We generally expect a significant uptick in migrant boats at this time of year and as a result the Helicopter from the Cayman Islands is with us for periods over December and January – paid for by the UK – fulfilling this role – pushing our understanding out well beyond our horizon.
30. But we know this is short term and we know we need something more persistent than that. In the recent meetings the Premier, Deputy Premier and myself had in London the UK Minister committed to support us with a long term maritime surveillance asset. While not yet confirmed I expect that to be a fixed wing specialist aircraft with long term persistence – able to observe for hours – and equipped with the relevant surveillance capabilities. That will not only support our own interdiction operations but also work in collaboration with our allies so more vessels can be returned to Haiti before entering our waters.

31. We are also starting to develop a partnership with the UK that will give us access to the product of satellites that will provide surveillance of the waters we must protect – not least from illegal fishing. There are also long-term boundary disputes with our neighbours that alongside this need to be settled. The Premier raised this in particular with the UK Minister, and the FCDO's International Treaty Team in London know that we must make headway on these issues so – as far as the global work they undergo – this will be re-prioritized in our favour.
32. There is then our relationship with Haiti. Haiti is not our enemy. Haiti has always been our neighbour and always will be our neighbour. We are bound together, for better or for worse, for the rest of time. As a result I was speaking regularly to the then Haitian Minister of Foreign Affairs – Claude Joseph – including when he was Prime Minister – and myself and the Premier had hoped for a visit from him next year.
33. He is no longer in office and so I hope to speak to the interim Foreign Minister this week. The new Haitian Consul, who is a professional serious diplomat, and who I have been impressed by since her arrival – has been instrumental in helping build this relationship and the Haitian Government and Haitian Consul works with us collaboratively on repatriation – and for that I am grateful in that not all countries – including the United States – had such a straightforward arrangement with Haiti, during the height of the pandemic, as we did. They were accepting flights from us when they were not accepting flights from others.
34. I and the NSC have to live in the real world, not the world we would wish it to be, and we have to be realistic that the push factors out of Haiti are not going to reduce any time soon. The trend is the opposite way. We in TCI have to be in charge of our destiny, not the victim of others. What is entirely within our personal gift is we can reduce the pull factors that bring irregular migrants to our shores.
35. As digital government rolls out in TCI – and I applaud the Governments determination to digitise – it will become increasingly clear who is, and who is not, on the island legally. We must stop employing those in TCI who have no right to be here. It's simply no good us complaining about irregular migration and then employing someone here illegally to do the garden, work on a building site, look after a child or work in a store or bar. If we are to succeed that must be completely socially unacceptable. We should be ashamed if we do it.
36. There is also a serious responsibility on the Haitian Community here in TCI to support the islands that they now call their home. If you send money to Haiti to facilitate this trade you are damaging the society you live in. If you harbour or support a person who entered the Territory illegally you deserve the Islands condemnation. You are not part of TCI's amazing future, you are damaging and hurting it. I know there are leaders in the Haitian



community pushing this message and they are right to do so.

37. If this is what we are doing on our own – what are our allies doing.
38. The Bahamas – who have suffered worse than we have in recent years – are in the process of seriously building their defences. Ten times our size their own naval assets are growing. The signing of what is known as a ‘Shiprider’ agreement on board Her Majesty’s Bahamas Ship NASSAU last week will allow the Commodore who commands the Bahamas Defence Forces to station a vessel far closer to our waters and it can operate in the passage between Haiti and ourselves. That goes for ratification to our House of Assembly next week. We will then have our people on board and in support of our and their priorities.
39. That immediately compliments the US Coast Guard deployment that works along the coastline of Haiti and that starts to open up the opportunities for a ‘Task Force’ to deploy – not just individual vessels. That brings into play aerial assets – including our own future surveillance platform. As we collectively do this we are quickly starting to make the passage from Haiti far harder because our combined defences overlap. An action point from the conference was for the Bahamas to take the lead to develop far more ambitious tri-lateral joint operational plans in this area on behalf of us all. I have every confidence they will.
40. Our people are everything and investing in their training and development is essential. If we get this right we become not only interoperable in a practical sense but also relationships and trust further develop across national boundaries. Its trust above all that make alliances work. A very practical output from the conference was the US taking on the overall training brief and we expect, in reasonably short order, world class training being delivered to those who serve at sea delivered by those we work alongside. The UK has some specific training expertise that can also be sown into this trilateral effort, for the good of all.
41. What is fundamental to going after the networks and using our scarce resource wisely is information and intelligence. As an alliance we have become very good recently at what might be called tactical tip-offs – indeed many successes start as we react to real time sharing between ourselves – but what we have yet to do is properly develop that intelligence to do long term damage to our opponents extended network. The UK – through its Policing and serious crime expertise, its defence intelligence and its intelligence led immigration work – are well placed to support this and TCI, supported by the UK, was asked by our partners at the conference to take the lead on this.
42. That sits well for TCI because beyond UK support – which we will get – we are increasingly going to have, for ourselves, a sophisticated intelligence collection operation that we need in TCI to provide exactly those sort of

leads to take down networks here, be they linked to the smuggling of people, guns, drugs or the murder of our citizens.

43. Some of that preparatory work is already well underway. It will however require legislation to come to the House of Assembly, legislation that will be best in breed in the Caribbean, world class in terms of providing Judicial – rather than Executive – over-watch to ensure proportionality and necessity – while also ensuring those that can really do us harm, and make fortunes from the misery of others, don't have the freedom to communicate locally or regionally as they work against the interests of the law-abiding citizens of these Islands.
  44. Put succinctly – we can't possibly close them down in a network in physical space if we give them complete freedom of movement and communication in digital space. More on that in the New Year, once the legislation is in draft and there is time for proper considered consultation. Rather like building a Regiment for TCI, this is one to get right.
  45. Finally, a word on atmospherics at the conference that I think says something to TCI's growing place in the region. Friendship, already established through joint work at the practitioner level, quickly turned into fellowship at the leadership level. We liked each other, a lot. I've done a lot of this type of engagement in the past and rarely have I seen three delegations lean in so completely towards each other wanting to find solutions to problems too large for even the largest of us to handle alone.
  46. The National Security Team that organised this presented TCI as a professional, serious partner and more than ready to carry our own weight while contributing to the security of the alliance. And it sat comfortably with the way the Premier, Deputy Premier and other team members presented at the JMC in London. Let nobody doubt, TCI is a serious player with serious ambition and we have reached the point where we are taken seriously by those whose opinion we respect and whose partnership we are grateful for.
  47. So thank you United States, thank you Bahamas, thank you UK and, I end as I started, by saying a huge thank you – to the men and women who guard our borders, by day and by night, at sea and on the land. Behind the scenes we will do everything we can to provide you with the ability to be as good as I know you can be – and want to be – because you show us that every night. You are indeed the guardians of our dawn and we all thank you for it.
  48. And so may God bless these Turks and Caicos Islands.
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# NHS COVID Pass for 12-15 year olds for international travel

- Fully vaccinated 12-15 year olds are now able to access a NHS COVID Pass letter for international travel
- Follows government decision to extend the vaccination programme to include offer of both doses of vaccine to all 12-15 year olds
- Children remain exempt from certification in domestic settings and at the UK border

Children in England who have had a full course of a COVID-19 vaccination will be eligible for an NHS COVID Pass letter for travel from today (Monday 13 December).

This will allow those children who have had both doses of an approved vaccine to travel to countries, including Spain and Canada, which now require 12-15 year olds to be fully vaccinated in order to gain entry, avoid isolation, or access venues or services.

Proof of vaccination will initially be provided via a letter service including an internationally recognised 2D barcode, with a digital solution via NHS.uk to be rolled out early next year. The letter service can be accessed by calling 119 or via NHS.uk.

Health and Social Care secretary Sajid Javid said:

From today, I can confirm the NHS COVID Pass is being rolled out to 12-15 year olds for international travel, allowing even more people to be able to prove their vaccine status for travel where it's needed.

The move will enable families to plan holidays in 2022 with greater confidence, as parents can be reassured they will be able to evidence their child's vaccination status once they have had both doses of the vaccine.

It can take up to 7 days to receive a COVID Pass letter.

Children will remain exempt from domestic certification policy in England and will not require an NHS COVID Pass to gain entry to venues.

Chief Executive of NHSX Matthew Gould said:

This is another example of the NHS COVID Pass service responding to the changing situation, while maintaining the integrity of the NHS COVID Pass itself.

The vaccination programme will be extended to offer all children aged 12-15 a

second dose of an approved vaccine no sooner than 12 weeks after the first dose following the government's acceptance of JCVI advice on 29 November.

In the last year the NHS COVID-19 vaccination programme has delivered over 100 million life-saving doses, preventing at least 24 million infections, hundreds of thousands of hospitalisations and almost 130,000 deaths.

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## Health and Social Care Secretary Oral statement on COVID-19

Mr Speaker, with permission I'd like to update the House on COVID-19.

Since the UK became the first country to approve a vaccine against COVID-19, almost exactly a year ago we've been locked in a race between virus and the vaccine.

The success of our national vaccination programme has moved us ahead in the race.

But now, with the new Omicron variant, we have to work even harder to stay ahead.

Since last week, we've learned two things about this variant.

The first is that no variant of COVID-19 has spread this fast.

There are now 4,713 confirmed cases of Omicron in the UK and the UK Health Security Agency estimates that the current number of daily infections are around 200,000.

While Omicron represents over 20 percent of cases in England – we've already seen it rise to over 44 percent in London and we expect it to become the dominant COVID-19 variant in the capital in the next 48 hours.

There are currently 10 confirmed people in England who have been hospitalised with Omicron.

It's vital we remember that hospitalisations and deaths lag infections by around two weeks.

So we can expect those numbers to dramatically increase in the days and weeks that lie ahead.

In preparation, the UK's four Chief Medical Officers raised the COVID Alert level to 4, its second-highest level, this was done over the weekend.

And NHS England has just announced it will return to its highest level of

emergency preparedness: Level 4 National Incident.

This means the NHS response to Omicron will be a coordinated as a national effort, rather than led by individual trusts.

The second thing we've learned in the past week Mr Speaker, is that two jabs are not enough to prevent symptomatic infection from Omicron.

But a third dose – a booster dose – provides strong protection with analysis by the UK Health Security Agency showing a third dose is 70 percent effective at preventing symptomatic infection and we expect the booster to take effect more quickly than the second dose.

We're already running the most successful booster campaign in Europe.

Over 4 in 10 UK adults have now received a third dose or booster and Saturday was a record, with over half a million boosters given across the UK.

But Mr Speaker, with the race between virus and vaccine so close, we must move faster.

Two weeks ago, we announced we would offer every eligible adult a booster by the end of January.

But in response to the Omicron emergency and as the Prime Minister announced yesterday evening, we're bringing that target forward by a month, and launching the Omicron Emergency Boost.

We've opened the booster programme to every adult who's had a second dose of the vaccine at least three months ago, to offer them the chance to get their booster of getting their booster before the New Year.

So from this morning, anyone over 18 can walk in to a vaccination centre and from Wednesday, they can book online via the NHS website.

The UK government will also provide whatever support is needed to accelerate vaccinations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We have the jabs. The challenge is to get them into the arms.

To meet our ambitious target, the NHS will need to deliver a record number of jabs.

Until now, the highest number of jabs we've delivered in a single day in the UK was over 840,000.

We'll not only need to match that, but we will need to beat it every day.

But we can – and we've got a plan to try and do it.

We're opening more vaccination sites – including pop-up and mobile sites – and they'll be working 7 days a week.

We're training thousands more volunteer vaccinators.

We're asking GPs and pharmacies to do more.

And we're drafting in 42 military planning teams across every region of our country.

Mr Speaker, this collective national mission will only succeed if we all play our part.

Those who haven't had their booster should find their local walk-in vaccination centre or they book an appointment on the NHS website from Wednesday.

Those who have had their booster jab should encourage friends and family to do the same.

Those who have – or have recently had – COVID, should wait 28 days from their positive result to get their booster.

And to those who haven't had their vaccine at all yet, Mr Speaker, I want to say this:

Whatever has held you back in the past, please think again, and book your jab as quickly as possible.

By acting together – to Get Boosted Now – we can protect ourselves against Omicron this winter.

Mr Speaker I acknowledge that our national mission comes with some difficult trade-offs.

We are redeploying NHS staff away from non-urgent services.

This means that, for the next two weeks, all primary care services will focus on urgent clinical need and vaccines, and some urgent appointments and elective surgeries may be postponed until the New Year while we prioritise getting people the booster.

These are steps that no Health Secretary would wish to take unless absolutely necessary.

But I'm convinced that if we don't prioritise the booster now, the health consequences will be far more grave in the months that lie ahead.

Mr Speaker, our Omicron Emergency Boost is a major step but I'm not going to pretend that this alone will be enough to see us through these difficult weeks again.

Because of the threat of Omicron, we are moving to Plan B in England, subject to the will of Parliament.

Meaning that we must use face coverings in indoor public place people should work from home if they can and, from Wednesday – subject to this House's approval – you'll need to show a negative lateral flow test to get into

nightclubs and large events, with an exemption for the double vaccinated.

Once all adults have had a reasonable chance to get their booster jab, we intend to change this exemption to require a booster dose.

Even with Plan B Mr Speaker, we still have far fewer restrictions than Europe.

I can also confirm, Mr Speaker, that from tomorrow fully vaccinated contacts of a COVID-19 case will now be able to take daily lateral flow tests instead of self-isolating.

This is a vital way to minimise the disruption to people's daily lives – and avoid a so-called 'Pingdemic'.

And I can reassure this House that the UK has sufficient lateral flow tests to see us through the coming weeks.

If anyone finds they are unable to get a kit online, they should check the website the following day or pop down to their local pharmacy and pick up a kit.

And from today, I can confirm the NHS COVID pass is being rolled out to 12-15 year olds for international travel, allowing even more people to be able to prove their vaccine status for travel where it's needed, from today.

Taken together, these are proportionate and balanced steps: keeping the country moving, while slowing the spread of Omicron and buying us more time to get more boosters into more arms.

We're also taking steps to keep people safer in Adult Social Care, and we know that, sadly, people in care homes and those who receive domiciliary care are more likely to suffer serious health consequences if they get COVID-19.

So we're expanding our specialist vaccination teams to get more boosters to the vulnerable and those providing care.

But even as we do so, we must go further to protect colleagues and residents from Omicron.

So we are increasing the frequency of staff testing and, with a heavy heart, we must restrict every resident to just three nominated visitors – not including their essential care giver.

This is a difficult step, and I understand that it comes with an impact on physical and mental wellbeing.

But we know that from previous waves that it's one of the most effective things we can do to protect vulnerable residents.

We are also increasing our Workforce Recruitment and Retention Fund with £300 million of new money, this is in addition to the £162.5 million we announced in October.

The funds will help pay bonuses, bring forward pay rises for care staff, fund overtime, and increase workforce numbers over the winter.

Mr Speaker, I know that Honourable Members had hoped that the days of this kind of COVID-19 update were behind us.

After our successful reopening in the Summer, it is not an update I wanted to deliver.

But the renewed threat of Omicron means we've got more work to do to stay ahead of the virus.

We can, if we all play our part. And boosters are the key.

We've achieved so many phenomenal things over the last two years.

I know we are weary. But it's on all of us to pick up, step up and do phenomenal work once again to play our part and Get Boosted Now.

I commend this statement to the House.

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## [Western Balkans: Readout – Foreign Secretary hosts Western Balkans Foreign Ministers in London](#)

Press release

The Foreign Secretary has hosted the Foreign Ministers of the Western Balkans in London for talks.



Foreign Secretary Liz Truss today (Monday 13 December) convened a meeting of the six Foreign Ministers of the Western Balkans in London to discuss strengthening economic and security ties and supporting freedom and stability in the region. The UK's new Special Envoy to the Western Balkans, Sir Stuart



Peach, also attended as did the EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák and US Deputy Assistant Secretary Gabriel Escobar.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

The UK is stepping up its efforts to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the region. This is a critical moment for the Western Balkans and it is important that the peace, freedom and democracy that was hard won over 20 years ago is maintained.

I recently hosted the G7 Foreign Ministers' meeting in Liverpool where a discussion was held on the Western Balkans and Ministers welcomed the stepping up of the UK presence. I want the UK and our allies to build closer economic and security ties with the region, which will boost jobs and growth and help support a freer, wealthier, more secure Western Balkans.

I also welcomed representatives from the EU and the US to these discussions and emphasised the need to work together on stepping up our efforts to find lasting solutions to reduce tensions in the region.

As part of this effort, the UK has appointed Sir Stuart Peach as Special Envoy to the Western Balkans. He has long experience in the region, as former UK Chief of the Defence Staff and Chair of NATO's military committee, and will visit the region tomorrow to take forward our engagement.

This is part of the FCDO's mission to create a global network of liberty based around deeper economic, tech, security and development ties. As freedom-loving democracies, the UK will help the Western Balkans defend and advance the cause of liberty. They have our full support to not only survive, but thrive.

ENDS

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