

# Opportunity created by ceasefire announcement in Central African Republic

Thank you Madam President,

I would like to thank our all briefers; Special Representative Ndiaye, Ambassador Bankole, Ambassador Skoog and Ms. Derom for their presentations. I also welcome the participation of President Touadéra and I support the findings in the Secretary-General's report. I would like to make four key points.

Firstly, the United Kingdom welcomes President Touadéra's call on Friday for a unilateral ceasefire. We now urge the President to press for real progress on the peace process. It is imperative that all political actors, including the government, armed groups and the opposition, move ahead with a constructive and inclusive national dialogue. A fully inclusive and sustained peace process is the only solution on the table and is critical if the Central African Republic is to attain lasting peace and security. The United Kingdom welcomes regional engagement and welcomes the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region joint roadmap announced in September.

Second, like France, the US and others here, the United Kingdom remains concerned by credible reports of human rights abuses committed by the Russian mercenary group, Wagner, in CAR. These abuses are not only wrong, they are a driver of conflict and undermine the vital work of international peacekeepers and the Central African authorities.

Wagner does not offer long-term security answers in Africa. The United Kingdom joins other Council members in calling for a full investigation of Wagner's human rights abuses, and in stressing that their activities must comply fully with the United Nations arms embargo.

Third, the increase in violence perpetrated by armed groups who are signatories to the Peace Agreement is unacceptable. The United Kingdom is ready to agree appropriate measures, including UN sanctions, in response. Higher levels of violence contribute to the increase of internally displaced people and food insecurity and causes further harm to the civilian population.

Finally, Madam President, we are concerned by continued reports of Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) violations, which hinder MINUSCA in the execution of its mandate. The sustained and coordinated disinformation campaigns against the UN and the mission are also unacceptable. We call on the Government of the CAR to work with MINUSCA to ensure that SOFA agreements are fully implemented and respected.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that this moment, following the

ceasefire announcement, is an opportunity to advance a peace and security for the people of the Central African Republic. In this context, MINUSCA's role in the country remains critical, and I welcome the Secretary-General's recommendation to extend MINUSCA's mandate.

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## Chancellor sets new standards for environmental reporting to weed out greenwashing and support transition to a greener financial system

- Chancellor publishes roadmap setting out details on new Sustainability Disclosure Requirements
- Requirements will mean businesses must start disclosing their environmental impact
- Businesses and consumers will have a better understanding of whether their investments are aligned with net zero
- Rishi Sunak will call on the investment community to help cement UK's status as the best place in the world for green investment

The new requirements, which will also apply to pension schemes, investment products and asset managers and owners, are part of the government's landmark reforms to create a greener financial system.

Around 70 per cent of the UK public want their money to go towards making a positive difference to people or planet. But the lack of common definitions around environmental sustainability is leading to greenwashing, misleading investors and consumers about how green a product really is.

The new Sustainability Disclosure Requirements (SDR) will ensure investors have the information they need to make informed decisions about where to put their money.

**Following the publication of a new report setting out further details of how SDRs will work, the Chancellor said:**

We are already a world leader in green finance, and today's roadmap will give us the opportunity to set new global standards for sustainability that will boost the economy, protect the planet and support our net zero goals.

We want sustainability to be a key component of investment decisions, and our plans will arm investors with the right information to make more environmentally-led decisions

The report, entitled [Greening Finance: A Roadmap to Sustainable Investing](#), comes ahead of the UK hosting COP26 next month and is part of the Chancellor's plan for the UK to lead the world in green finance and sustainable investing.

The roadmap outlines the legislative and regulatory changes that will be made across the economy to arm investors and consumers with the right information by setting world-leading standards on environmental sustainability reporting.

First announced at the Chancellor's Mansion House speech earlier in the year, the new integrated regime will bring together and streamline existing climate reporting requirements – such as the UK's commitment to implement mandatory reporting aligned with the Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) – and go further.

This will ensure consumers and investors have all the information they need to make investment decisions that drive a positive environmental impact.

This includes requiring every investment product to set out – for the first time – the environmental impact of the activities it finances, and justify clearly any sustainability claims it makes. Asset managers will also need to set out how they incorporate sustainability into their investment strategy to allow consumers to make informed judgements about the kind of firms they want to invest in.

SDR will also set out expectations for certain firms around the publication of transition plans in the context of the UK's net zero commitment.

The Roadmap also sets out more details on a new green finance rulebook – the UK Green Taxonomy – which will create a shared understanding of which economic activities count as green. Relevant companies and financial products will be required to report their environmental impact against the UK Green Taxonomy.

The Roadmap also acts as a call to action for the pensions and investment sector, setting expectations that they will use the information generated by the SDR to start shifting financial flows to align with a net zero economy.

Specific reporting requirements, including scope, timing and detail, will be developed following public consultation.

**Further information:**

[Greening Finance: A Roadmap to Sustainable](#) has been published.

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# US and UK research labs collaborate on autonomy and AI

The Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL), in partnership with the UK's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), have demonstrated for the first time the ability for the US and the UK to jointly develop, select, train, and deploy state-of-the-art machine learning algorithms in support of the armed forces of each of the 2 nations.

This research is designed to support adjacent collaborating US and UK brigades with enduring wide-area situational awareness. It aims to improve decision-making, increase operational tempo, reduce risk to life, and reduce manpower burden.

The dual in-person and virtual demonstration was hosted jointly at AFRL's Information Directorate in Rome, New York, and at Dstl's site near Salisbury on 18 October 2021. The demonstration highlighted integrated artificial intelligence (AI) technologies across the 2 nations, showcasing the ability to share data and algorithms through a common development and deployment platform to enable the rapid selection, testing, and deployment of artificial intelligence capabilities.

The event was made possible by a UK and US Partnership Agreement concerning autonomy and artificial intelligence collaboration, established in December 2020. This was the first of a rotational series of events to be hosted by the joint and international signatories of the Autonomy and Artificial Intelligence Collaboration (AAIC) Partnership Agreement.

Leadership participants from both the US and the UK attended in person, with virtual participation by attendees from all services and the United States Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering (OUSDR&E).

The AAIC Partnership Agreement effort is led by the United States Department of the Air Force (with AFRL as the lead agency for the US Air Force) in partnership with OUSDR&E, the US Navy and Army, and the UK's Dstl.

Dr Robert W Sadowski, US Army DEVCOM, said:

We are dedicated to getting robotics and autonomous systems capability into the hands of the warfighters.

Advances in robotics and autonomy will make our formations more capable and mission-ready while providing protection to our warfighters through unprecedented stand-off while enabling enhanced lethality on the battlefield.

The 4-year partnership agreement includes objectives to accelerate joint

UK/US development and sharing of AI technology and capabilities. It spans from foundational research in test verification and validation, to AI algorithm research and development, to joint experiments advancing the joint all-domain command and control capabilities of both nations.

Dr Lee M Seversky, AFRL lead for the demonstration and the US Project Agreement, said:

The October 18 event demonstrated how the UK and US can integrate AI technology to create the first end-to-end machine learning research, development, and deployment ecosystem, enabling rapid data sharing, algorithm development, evaluation, and deployment.

AI will play a critical role in accelerating decision making to meet the pace and scale of the future battlespace.

During the demonstration, the simulated scenario focused on how the UK and US can cooperate and share AI capabilities to support the 'close' fight. Where both countries operate in adjacent areas, they are able to share data, AI algorithms and capability tightly during mission execution.

The demonstration brought together key technologies from both nations. The UK's Model Cards are able to present to a commander the ability to quickly understand, explore, and select appropriate machine learning (ML) models to deploy in mission. The US StreamlinedML is a government-owned, extensible open platform to quickly build ML workflows, train and evaluate ML models, and deploy them regardless of the source or ML software stack use – taking advantage of the best of breed ML technology spanning commercial, academia and government.

Dstl's Todd Robinson heads up the UK element to the project, and said:

This collaboration with AFRL and the US services is crucial to drive the very latest AI technology into military operations and innovative research in both nations.

The demonstration is just the first step toward our ambition of deploying novel AI that can learn in the field into an experimental trial environment, something that hasn't been done before and is only possible due to this collaboration.

The demonstration successfully showed the integration of 15 state-of-the-art machine learning algorithms, 12 UK and US datasets, 5 automated ML workflows for training and retraining models based on mission needs, and the ability to deploy the models as a service to target end users and platforms.

This is the first of a series of joint technical and operation experiments planned under the 4 year partnership agreement.

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## National Highways' congestion-busting M4 scheme opens to traffic

National Highways, the company responsible for England's motorways and major A-roads, teamed up with Swindon Borough Council, Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership and developers Persimmon and Redrow to deliver extra lanes at junction 15 of the M4 and improve local road access from the motorway.

The £17 million project started last summer and will improve journey times and reliability for motorists by tackling congestion at both the busy M4 junction and on the A419, particularly at peak times in the area.

Mark Fox, South West Head of Scheme Delivery for National Highways, said:

Our roads are vital and these improvements at junction 15 of the M4 will ultimately improve journeys and unlock local economic growth.

I'm so pleased that we are able to open this new junction in time for Christmas and can't wait to see the benefits it will bring to people living and working in the area.

The improvements to traffic should be immediate, but the benefits will continue for decades as the new junction encourages investment in the area.

Despite the winter weather and Covid restrictions, we made great progress on the scheme and were able to open it on time and on budget, easing congestion for thousands of road users and the local community.

The M4 junction 15 scheme included:

- widening of the southbound carriageway between Commonhead roundabout and M4 Junction 15, providing a dedicated left lane for London-bound traffic
- widening of the M4 Junction 15 northbound exit to the A419
- improving the A346/Marlborough Road entry slip
- widening of the M4 Junction 15 eastbound exit-slip
- M4 junction 15 westbound exit-slip road, lengthening of the 3-lane section
- widening the M4 Junction 15 southbound gyratory
- upgrade of existing footpaths

National Highways engineers came up with an ingenious solution that saved millions of pounds and cut 12 months off the construction time of the scheme.

The use of 29 pre-cast concrete subway units acted as both bridge supports and eventually a subway at M4 junction 15. The solution avoided the need to demolish a bridge on the A419, approaching the junction from the north, with work progressing while the road remained open above.

For the scheme, National Highways invested £5 million from its Growth and Housing Fund, which supports economic growth, facilitate employment opportunities and enable housing development across the country. This was jointly funded by Swindon Borough Council (£4.8m), SWLEP (£3m) and Persimmon and Redrow (£4.35m).

The upgrade follows the start of two major Swindon Borough Council schemes – the Wichelstowe underpass project further west near junction 16 of the M4, and improvement work at the White Hart junction, a vital link between the A419 and A420.

Swindon Borough Council's £4.8m investment will complement more than £72.5m in road improvements at the nearby New Eastern Villages development.

Councillor Gary Sumner, Swindon Borough Council's Cabinet Member for Strategic Infrastructure, Transport and Planning, said:

Improving junction 15 of the M4 has always been a strategic priority for the Council in order to relieve the frequent peak rush-hour bottlenecks and create a quick, easy route onto the motorway.

I am incredibly pleased the work has now finished as it will bring enormous benefits to our local residents here in Swindon and motorists who use the A419 corridor.

It is also great news for businesses and our local economy as it enhances our first-class transport links and makes us an even more attractive place for firms looking to relocate here.

Paddy Bradley, CEO, Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership, said:

These works will help safeguard the growth of local Swindon businesses and the wider region for years to come. Reductions in journey times and less congestion will benefit local residents, businesses and visitors to this area.

Inevitably, construction work at a vital junction causes temporary disruption and so I'd like to thank the motorists, drivers and passengers, for their patience whilst this vital improvement scheme was completed.

National Highways' Growth and Housing Fund has been used to match-fund infrastructure projects to unlock developments around the country.

The company has approved contributions to 28 projects at a total cost of £94.8 million. This investment has in turn attracted up to £129 million in other public contributions and £102 million in private match funding and is anticipated to deliver up to 1.74 million square metres of commercial floor space, 44,000 homes and 45,000 jobs over the lifetime of the developments.

To date the specialist fund has made huge improvements and brought benefits to local communities, unlocking homes and jobs in Exeter and Taunton elsewhere in the South West, as well as Darlington, Harrogate, Scunthorpe, Grantham, Warrington, Derby, Oldham, Northampton, Durham, Daventry, Leicester and Southampton.

National Highways is also refurbishing the Broome Manor Lane overbridge which crosses the M4 between junctions 15 and 16.

The scheme involves a full bridge deck refurbishment which includes significant concrete repairs, replacement joints, re-waterproofing and resurfacing, with works set to be completed later this month.

### **General enquiries**

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

### **Media enquiries**

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

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## **[Prime Minister's tribute to Sir David Amess MP: 18 October 2021](#)**

The passing of 72 hours has done little to numb the shock and sadness we all felt when we heard of the tragic and senseless death of Sir David Amess. This House has lost a steadfast servant, we have lost a dear friend and colleague and Julia and her children have lost a loving husband and devoted father.

Nothing I or anyone else can say will lessen the pain, the grief, the anger they must feel at this darkest of times. We hold them in our hearts today, we mourn with them and we grieve alongside them.

Sir David was taken from us in a contemptible act of violence, striking at the core of what it is to be a Member of this House and violating the sanctity both of the church in which he was killed and the constituency surgery that is so essential to our representative democracy.



But we will not allow the manner of Sir David's death to in any way detract from his accomplishments as a politician or as a human being. Because Sir David was a patriot who believed passionately in this country, in its people, in its future.

He was also one of the nicest, kindest, and most gentle individuals ever to grace these benches.

A man who used his decades of experience to offer friendship and support to new members of all parties. Whose views often confounded expectation and defied easy stereotype. And who believed not just in pointing out what was wrong with society but in getting on and doing something about it.

It was that determination to make this country a better place that inspired his outstanding record on behalf of the vulnerable and the voiceless. The master of the private members bill and 10-minute rule bill he passed legislation on subjects as diverse as animal welfare, fuel poverty and the registration of driving instructors.

He was a prodigious campaigner for children with learning disabilities and for women with endometriosis, a condition in which he became an expert after meeting a woman at one of the constituency surgeries.

Behind the famous and irresistible beam lay a seasoned campaigner of verve and grit whether he was demanding freedom for the people of Iran or courting votes in the Westminster Dog of the Year contest whether he was battling for Brexit or fighting his way to the front of the Parliamentary Pancake Race.

And as every member of this House will know, and you just confirmed Mr Speaker, he never once witnessed any achievement by any resident of Southend that could not, somehow, be cited in his bid to secure city status for that distinguished town.

Highlights of that bulging folder included a world record for playing most triangles being played at once; a group of stilt-walkers travelling non-stop from the Essex coast to Downing Street; and a visiting foreign dignitary allegedly flouting protocol by saying he liked Southend more than Cleethorpes.

A compelling case, Mr Speaker, and as it is only a short time since Sir David last put that case to me in this chamber, I am happy to announce that Her Majesty has agreed that Southend will be accorded the city status it so clearly deserves. That Sir David spent almost 40 years in this House but not one day in ministerial office tells everything about where his priorities lay.

He was not a man in awe of this chamber, nor a man who sought patronage or advancement. He simply wanted to serve the people of Essex, first in Basildon, then in Southend. And it was in the act of serving his constituents that he was so cruelly killed.

In his recent memoir, Sir David called surgeries a part of "the great British tradition of the people openly meeting their elected politicians". Even after

the murder of Jo Cox and the savage attacks on Stephen Timms and Nigel Jones he refused to accept that he should be in any way deterred from speaking face to face with his constituents.

And so when he died he was doing what he firmly believed was the most important part of any MP's job: offering help to those in need. In the awful moments before we knew the full horror of the tragedy a member of Sir David's constituency association, her voice breaking with emotion, told an interviewer that "we need him, the country needs him". And we do.

This country needs people like Sir David, this House needs people like Sir David, our politics needs people like Sir David. Dedicated, passionate, firm in his beliefs but never anything less than respectful for those who thought differently.

Those are the values he brought to a lifetime of public service. There can be few among us more justified in their faith in the resurrection and the life to come. And while his death leaves a vacuum that will not and can never be filled, we will cherish his memory we will celebrate his legacy and we will never allow those who commit acts of evil to triumph over the democracy and the Parliament that Sir David Amess loved so much.