

Lord Frost call with European Commission Vice President Maroš Šefčovič: 3 March 2021

Press release

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This was their first meeting since Lord Frost took up the role as Minister co-chairing the Partnership Council and the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee with the EU.

He underlined, as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster had in his letter of 2 February, that progress still needed to be urgently made to address the direct and often disproportionate impact that aspects of the Protocol are having on the citizens of Northern Ireland, contrary to its intended purpose. He acknowledged the work of the Joint Committee over the last few weeks since the Commission's triggering of Article 16 of the Protocol on 29 January, but noted that these discussions had not yet resolved the current difficulties.

Lord Frost explained that the measures announced today, following official-level notification to the Commission earlier this week, were temporary technical steps, which largely continued measures already in place, to provide more time for businesses such as supermarkets and parcel operators to adapt to and implement the new requirements in the Protocol. He underlined that these were needed for operational reasons and were the minimum necessary steps to allow time for constructive discussions in the Joint Committee to continue without the prospect of disruption to the everyday life of people in Northern Ireland in the coming weeks.

He noted that such operational measures were well precedented in other international trade arrangements, and that they were entirely consistent with

our intention to discharge our obligations under the Protocol in good faith.

He and Vice President Šefčovič agreed that both parties would remain in close contact.

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Thank you Mr Chair,

Firstly, let me congratulate Guinea for assuming Chairpersonship of the Group of 77 and China. We look forward to working constructively with you and we thank Guyana for their engagement as the previous Chair. Congratulations also to the newly appointed ACABQ members. We trust that the newly-expanded ACABQ will continue to provide us with timely, technical and evidence based advice to inform our deliberations.

Mr. Chair,

The UN's 75th year has brought with it unprecedented challenges, many of which the organisation is still grappling with. The response to those challenges has been enhanced by many of the reforms that have been shaped and authorised by this Committee in previous years. Once again, in this session we will have the opportunity to take decisions that will ensure the UN is equipped to respond to current and future challenges it will face, and I hope we are able to do so.

Like any organisation, the UN's greatest asset is its people. It is our responsibility as a committee to do what we can to ensure they are provided with the framework in which to thrive and deliver the mandates that we as member states entrust to them to the high standard we expect. Strengthening the UN's human resources framework – to ensure a truly modern, agile, mobile and diverse workforce – will help us achieve this goal, especially as the UN seeks to build back better after the COVID pandemic.

UN staff need to be provided with opportunities for skill and career development through a modern approach to mobility, along with training and effective performance management, so they can achieve their potential and deliver for the organisation. Having the best staff, with expertise from across UN operations, who are well trained and motivated, in the right place and at the right time, will help ensure the organisation is able to deliver

high quality results. This must go hand in hand with fostering a culture of respect, wellbeing and inclusion, where all staff feel valued and diversity is celebrated. We know that delivery improves and credibility increases when organisations have staff who understand the people they serve. The GA has a crucial role to play in making decisions that enable the organisation to manage their staff better and in a more modern way. For these reasons we very much hope the committee can come together to support the Secretary-General's proposals to strengthen the UN's human resources framework in this session.

We must also ensure that our seconded military and police personnel, who bring much needed expertise to help the UN deliver on some of its most vital mandates, are able to do their jobs without risk or concern for their standing. This matter affects member states from across regions and delegations, including those that have secondees and those that would like to in the future. It is crucial that we work together as a Committee to reach a long-term agreement for this long-running issue: one that enables all member states to participate, and does not jeopardise the position of currently serving secondees.

Mr. Chair,

Strengthening a culture of accountability is central to a more effective United Nations. We look forward to discussing the continued implementation of these initiatives and the early results of their progress, including on delegation of authority, results-based management, and enterprise risk management.

We also look forward to discussing ways to improve the efficiency and administration of the organisation's use of air travel. We heard in the main session how the new working methods we have all relied on over the last year can help make the UN a more inclusive, accessible place to work, expanding opportunities for all staff, not decreasing them. We encourage the Organisation to continue to employ these methods where appropriate to enhance opportunities, and reduce the organisation's costs and carbon footprint. This is important as the world seeks to recover from the economic impact of COVID, and address Climate Change.

Mr. Chair,

This session may feel a little like déjà vu for some delegates. I know many of the same reports have been negotiated in previous years. But if the past year has taught us anything, it is that we must be prepared in advance for the unexpected and not wait. Now is the time to take the decisions that will set the organisation up for the future. If not the ultimate impact will be on the ground, felt by the people the UN serves. We look forward to working together with you all to achieve solutions to these important agenda items.

Thank you.

Shining a light on human rights violations in Syria

I'd like to start by thanking the Commission of Inquiry and the civil society briefers for their compelling testimony on the current situation in Syria, which underlines that the human rights violations and abuses that have characterized the conflict in Syria continue. These are human rights abuses that are real, harrowing, scarring violations of fathers, mothers, sisters, sons and daughters.

The report on arbitrary detention released by the Commission of Inquiry is of particular concern. The industrial-scale system of arbitrary arrests, torture prisons and enforced disappearances, are a clear attempt to silence the Syrian people. Moreover, their inhuman experiences and detention centres is designed to instill fear. Women and girls have faced rape, sometimes gang rape, and male detainees have endured rape with objects and also genital mutilation. Meaningful progress on the issue of detainees of missing persons is a central element of Security Council Resolution 2254. As a starting point, Syrian authorities should provide comprehensive lists of the names of all detainees clarifying the whereabouts of the 128,000 who have never emerged from arbitrary detention, including by providing their families with notifications of burial sites of detainees who have died.

The Commission of Inquiry documents 32 separate instances of the use of chemical weapons by Assad's forces. Each use of a chemical weapon constitutes a war crime, and is the reason why the outstanding issues in Syria's initial chemical weapons declaration are not academic in nature. We will continue to use monthly Security Council discussions to press for progress between the Syrian authorities and the OPCW's declaration and assessment team.

I also want to reiterate the UK's commitment to respond robustly to any further use of chemical weapons by Assad's forces. It is important that we do not stand silent in the face of the atrocities documented by the Commission of Inquiry. Since 2012, the UK has contributed over \$18 million to support Syrian and international efforts to gather evidence and assist victims of human rights violations and abuses, including support to the UN international, impartial and independent mechanism. We have supported doctors to produce over 360 forensic medical reports, which can act as court-standard evidence of sexual violence and torture. We have trained 118 doctors to conduct evaluations in accordance with the Istanbul Protocol standards. Our support to the Commission for International Justice and Accountability to gather evidence and prepare legal cases for use in national and international courts has contributed to the first conviction of a former member of Daesh and just last month, led to the first ever conviction of a former Syrian official, Eyed Al-Ghari, in Germany for crimes against humanity. This should send a clear message to the Assad regime that they cannot act with impunity.

We will continue to support this work, to shine a light on human rights violations and abuses in Syria and support the delivery of humanitarian aid

to Syria.

I would like to conclude that as we mark the 10 year anniversary of the conflict in Syria, the only sustainable solution is a UN-facilitated political process, in line with Resolution 2254, which protects the rights of all Syrians and in which civil society, women and minorities play a role.

Thank you, Mr President.

Renewing progress towards peace in South Sudan

- UK notes progress towards peace in South Sudan is “too slow and too limited” and calls on government to act in interests of its people
- UK expresses concern at levels of humanitarian crises and severe malnutrition and calls for Government to partner with donor communities and the UN to solve the crisis

Remarks by Ambassador Jonathan Allen at the Security Council, 3 March 2021

Thank you very much, Madam President. Let me begin by thanking Jackline Nasiwa for her briefing. And let me also take this opportunity to commend the outgoing SRSR, David Shearer. David, I and many others have seen over the years your genuine, personal and tireless commitment towards peace and stability in South Sudan. You have always put the people of South Sudan first. Members of this Council saw that first hand during our visit in 2019. This has been a distinguished tour of duty, and my country thanks you for your service.

Madam President, twelve months on from the formation of the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity, I want to welcome the appointment of a unified Cabinet, Governors and Deputy Governors in all states. We hope that those appointed can deliver tangible improvements to people's lives.

South Sudan's endorsement with a roadmap for implementing transitional justice mechanisms, including the Hybrid Court, is also welcome. And I urge the Government of South Sudan to expedite the memorandum of understanding with the African Union on the Hybrid Court.

Madam President, whilst these steps are welcome, overall progress has been too slow and too limited. Time after time, this Council expresses its concerns and calls for action. Yet what we and the people of South Sudan continue to see is inaction on a number of issues. Power vacuums at local

level have directly led to further suffering and civilian casualties. The Government needs to show the world that it's serious about peace. As the next step, we call for South Sudan to complete the reconstitution of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly. We also call on the Government to ensure adequate training and resourcing of the Necessary Unified Forces. Such action does not require any easing of the arms embargo, but should the Government wish to submit exemption requests, they are free to do so for the consideration of the Sanctions Committee.

Madam President, we must acknowledge that more people are in need of assistance than at any time since South Sudan's independence nearly a decade ago. 8.3 million people are dependent on humanitarian assistance to survive. 60 percent of the population is facing crisis levels of food insecurity. 1.4 million children under the age of five face severe malnutrition in 2021 – that's 10 percent of the entire population. We must do all we can to scale up the humanitarian response.

The UK is giving over \$175 million this year in response to needs in South Sudan, in addition to our large scale funding of COVAX, providing vaccines around the world. I want to remind Council members of the importance of our passing of UN Security Council Resolution 2565 and provisions within it calling for access to vaccines in conflict zones, which I hope will apply fully in South Sudan next year.

Reporting from the UN Commission on Human Rights provides further devastating insight into the impact of conflict on civilians. Violence against civilians continues. Rape and starvation are used as weapons of war. Now is clearly not the time to downgrade the Human Rights Council's oversight of the situation.

The South Sudanese government needs to show it understands the severity of the plight of its people, to take responsibility and act in partnership with donor communities and the UN to solve the crisis. It should include full respect for the Status of Forces Agreement. And I want to state our unequivocal support for UNMISS and recognise the crucial protection role played by UNMISS.

Madam President, one year on from the formation of a transitional government and almost 10 years from the creation of South Sudan, we have sadly little to applaud. We can say that it could be worse, but only because so often it has been worse. There are multiple systemic failings and sadly, the elite do not choose to put the interests of the people first. We need an approach which incentivises those elites to cooperate in the interests of all.

I note that the representative of South Sudan has again today chosen not to participate in our meeting. Indeed, we have not seen him here for a year. I understand he has said he does not want to join us because he feels that his country is criticized in our meetings. It seems to me that if more time was spent by the leadership of South Sudan in listening to others rather than ignoring inconvenient voices, then things might improve.

Madam President, we cannot let the systemic drift continue. With renewed effort from us all, including from the government and the politicians in

South Sudan, substantial progress can be achieved. We should seize this opportunity so that when we meet again ahead of the 10 year anniversary of South Sudan's independence, we – and more importantly, the people of South Sudan – can have something to celebrate.

Thank you, Madam President.

Chancellor Statement – Budget press conference

Good afternoon.

Earlier today I presented the Budget to the House of Commons.

And I'm speaking to you now, directly, to explain what this Budget means for our economy and for you at home.

I want to be honest with you about the problems we face and our plan to fix them.

This time last year we all began a collective national effort to constrain coronavirus, shield the vulnerable and protect jobs and businesses.

Since then, the Government has announced more than £280 billion to protect people's lives and livelihoods.

Our plan is working.

The independent Office for Budget Responsibility has today shown that because of interventions like the furlough the economy is now expected to recover more quickly and fewer jobs will be lost.

But we still face significant challenges.

People are being told to stay at home; businesses are still closed.

It's going to take us a long time to fully recover from the damage coronavirus has done to our economy.

Today's Budget is a three-part plan to protect the jobs and livelihoods of the British people.

The first part is this: we're going to keep economic support in place until well past the point that we exit lockdown.

The furlough scheme, support for the self-employed, business grants, business rates holidays, tax cuts and the temporary universal credit uplift, have all

been extended, and generously.

Taken together, this year and next, we're spending £407 billion to support people and businesses through coronavirus.

I said whatever it takes, and that means for however long it takes.

But that unprecedented level of support, combined with the damage coronavirus has done, places huge strain on our public finances.

Simply put: we have to get borrowing and debt back under control.

So the second part of today's Budget begins fixing that.

Now, some people think we should ignore this problem or, worse, there are some who think there is no problem at all.

But I think that's wrong.

If we don't act, once the economy has recovered, to control our borrowing we won't be able to fund the stronger public services people want to see and when the next crisis comes along, we won't be able to respond with the boldness we have this time.

So I want to be honest with you now, today, about how we'll begin fixing the public finances.

The choice I've made is, as much as I can, to protect working people, small businesses and public services.

And so, while I have chosen to freeze personal tax thresholds some of the most generous in the world I am not going to increase the rates of income tax, national insurance or VAT.

And I am not going to find the money we need by taking it from public services like schools or the NHS.

Freezing tax thresholds is fair, asking more of those on higher incomes.

And we're going to ask large businesses, who have made a profit, to contribute as well.

Two years from now, well past our recovery, in 2023, corporation tax on company profits will increase to 25%.

The United Kingdom will still have a lower corporate tax rate than the United States, Japan, Canada, France, Italy and Germany.

And we're protecting small businesses, by keeping their corporation tax at the current rate of 19%.

This means seven in 10 businesses will see no tax increase at all only the largest, most successful companies will pay the new higher rate and they can now plan with certainty.

I know the British people don't like tax rises.

Nor do I.

But I also know they dislike dishonesty even more.

That's why I've been honest with you about the problem we have and our plan to fix it.

So right now, we're going long, extending our support for people and businesses well beyond the end of lockdown.

And while it is important to control borrowing and debt, those measures only take effect after the economy has recovered.

But today's Budget is not just about fixing problems.

Today's Budget is also about laying the foundations of our future economy.

We're building our future economy by doing things that haven't been done before and doing them for everyone, everywhere.

Our success with the vaccine has shown us this country can be a scientific superpower, leading the world through the coming technological and scientific revolutions.

Towards a future where growth and jobs go hand in hand with tackling climate change.

Where we are known around the world as the best place to invest and do business.

And where we redraw the economic map with decent jobs in every corner of our country.

To do that, this Budget is helping people develop new skills, start an apprenticeship, and get better paid jobs.

This Budget is helping small business owners get the training, skills and technology they need to compete with bigger firms and become the high growth companies of the future.

And this Budget is bringing prosperity to the whole United Kingdom with new freeports around the country and the largest pro investment tax cut in modern British history.

Making the time to invest right now and the place to invest right here.

So that is our Budget, our plan, our numbers.

But the number that in so many ways defines the last twelve months, is not included in today's Budget document.

I want to finish my remarks by acknowledging all those who have lost their

lives to Coronavirus.

To the family and friends left behind, your loss, felt most acutely in the quietest of moments must be overwhelming.

But I promise you.

We will meet this moment with the passion and energy it demands...

And we will build a fairer and more just country in their memory.

Our recovery begins today.