

Detention of Zaza Gakheladze in the Georgian breakaway territory of South Ossetia: UK statement

World news story

Nicola Murray, Deputy Head of Delegation, expresses UK concern at the detention of Georgian citizen Mr Gakheladze at the OSCE Permanent Council.



I'd like to thank my Georgian colleague for raising this issue today.

In July, the UK joined other States in this council in expressing our concern at the detention and alleged shooting of Georgian citizen Mr Gakheladze in the Georgian breakaway region of South Ossetia. Today we reiterate that concern as we note that Mr Gakheladze has been arbitrarily imprisoned for 12.5 years, and we call for his immediate release.

All Georgian citizens should have the right to travel within Georgia's internationally recognised borders. These ongoing detentions and so-called "borderisation" activity (which has continued despite the current pandemic) are specifically designed to destabilise the region and have a direct negative impact on civilians living on both sides of the Administrative Boundary Lines. This must stop.

We note the importance of the work of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia in this context and we call on Russia to allow them to fulfil their full mandate to monitor on all sides of the Administrative Boundary Lines.

We remain unwavering in our support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and we encourage all parties to implement the six-point agreement of 2008 and its Implementing Measures in full. The recent European Court of Human Rights judgment in the case of Russia and Georgia reinforces the calls for Russia to stop its continuing violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Thank you.

[Scottish schoolgirls succeed in UK cyber security competition](#)

Girls in Scotland have demonstrated their digital skills and codebreaking prowess by seeing off competition from thousands of rivals in the UK's flagship cyber security contest.

Pupils at nine schools in Scotland have been successful in reaching the semi-final stage of the 2021 CyberFirst Girls Competition, run by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) – a part of GCHQ.

More than 6,500 girls nationwide entered this year's qualifying round, with teams from more than 600 schools tackling online cyber security puzzles for a chance to be named local champions and progress to the UK Grand Final.

The highest scoring teams will next take on their rivals in semi-finals in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and English regions. Schools that have already accepted their place in the virtual semi-final include: Hyndland Secondary School in Glasgow and Carluke High School in Carluke.

The NCSC is highlighting the strong nationwide participation in the contest and the success of semi-finalists today on the International Day of Women and Girls in Science.

The CyberFirst Girls Competition is aimed at girls aged 12 to 13 starting to think about what subjects to take for their initial qualifications and its ambition is to inspire them to consider a career in cyber security – an industry where women are still under-represented.

NCSC Deputy Director for Cyber Growth, Chris Ensor said:

On International Day of Women and Girls in Science, we're pleased to say that thousands of girls came forward to compete in this year's CyberFirst Girls Competition and we congratulate the top teams which now go forward into the semi-finals.

These girls have opened the door to what could one day be an exciting and rewarding career, where more female representation is undoubtedly needed.

We owe a special thanks to teachers who encouraged pupils to take up this fun opportunity to engage with – and hopefully be inspired by – cyber security.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman said:

It is marvellous to see so many girls showing an interest in cyber security and well done to those who made it to the next round.

The cyber security industry needs talented people and I hope everyone who took part had fun and felt inspired to consider an exciting career cracking codes, disrupting cyber attacks and protecting our online spaces.

UK Government Minister for Scotland Iain Stewart said:

The UK Government is proud to be working with Scottish schools to support girls into cyber security.

This competition is a great opportunity for girls right across the UK to learn together and develop digital skills for a 21st century workforce.

Best of luck to the Scottish pupils who have worked incredibly hard to get this far.

Since launching in 2017, more than 37,000 girls have taken part in the CyberFirst Girls Competition.

This year's semi-final rounds will take place simultaneously on Friday 19 March in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and five English regions: the North of England, Central England, the South West, the South East and London.

Deputy First Minister John Swinney said:

The CyberFirst Girls Competition is a fantastic opportunity for girls to develop new skills and get a taste of just how rewarding a career in cyber security can be.

Good luck to all those taking part this year.

The challenges, covering cryptography, logic and networking, will be set by the NCSC with input from cyber security industry partners. The winners of these events will earn their place at the Grand Final in April, where the UK champions will be crowned.

More information about the competition can be found on the NCSC's [website](#)

Over 350 additional military personnel deployed in Scottish Covid response

In the largest single deployment of military personnel in Scotland since the start of the pandemic, the uplift will take the total number of Armed Forces personnel supporting the Covid response in Scotland to 466.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

The UK Armed Forces have demonstrated their professionalism and resilience throughout this pandemic.

They are dedicated to delivering support to the fingertips of these islands and the increase of personnel in Scotland shows our commitment to assist the civil authorities wherever and whenever needed in the fight against Covid-19.

An additional 33 defence medical staff, from across all three services, will join their 57 colleagues already working as part of the Vaccine Quick Reaction Force. Split across three vaccination teams, military personnel will assist NHS staff at vaccination centres in Dumfries and Galloway and Fife.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

The vaccine roll out is the largest medical deployment this country has ever seen. I'm grateful for the efforts of our armed forces as we work together as one United Kingdom to make sure everyone eligible can get their jab as quickly as possible.

The strength of our Union is never clearer than in the power of our united response, and with over 13 million people vaccinated across the whole of the UK, we are on track to meet our target of offering a first dose to the top four priority groups by 15 February.

As part of the Scottish Government's programme of Asymptomatic Testing a total 320 personnel, from Regiments based across Scotland, will support the roll out from 15 February.

170 personnel from the 39 Engineer Regiment, based at Kinloss Barracks, and 75 personnel from both the 2nd Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, based at Leuchars Station, will now spend an initial week planning and preparing, before helping administer

the tests the following week.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said:

Our fantastic British Armed Forces have played a key role in the fight against Covid-19 in Scotland – from coordinating the emergency response in the early days of the pandemic, to setting up testing sites in the summer, and assisting with the first vaccination centres. We are grateful for all their efforts to keep us safe and help defeat the virus.

Getting jabs into arms is essential, and I am grateful that military personnel will continue to help with Scotland's vital vaccination programme.

Alongside the rollout of vaccines, testing remains extremely important. I am pleased that the expertise of our armed forces will help set up Scotland's new asymptomatic testing programme.

As we continue to see during the pandemic, the strength of the Union and support offered by the UK Government has never been more important.

The Armed Forces have supported Scotland in a range of ways throughout the pandemic; currently 32 planning and liaison staff are working with NHS Scotland and the Scottish Government. 24 logistic support staff, mostly from Edinburgh-based 3rd Battalion The Rifles, are also assisting health boards run vaccination centres in Grampian, Dumfries and Galloway, Borders and Lothian.

The 98 members of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards already deployed to help set up 80 Vaccine Centres across Scotland will successfully complete their task on Monday, when they handover the sites to NHS Scotland.

Since March 2020, the UK Armed Forces have provided Scotland with planners, logistics specialists and aircraft medical evacuation capability, as well as the delivery of a Mobile Testing Unit service throughout last summer.

Across the UK there are over 5,200 personnel committed to winter and COVID-19 operations are supporting 80 different tasks in the UK and abroad – this includes the vaccine rollout, NHS support and community testing across the UK.

MarineGuard Systems secures new international deals with UKEF support

About the transaction: MarineGuard Systems

Region	Southampton
Sector	Security
Export location	Germany
UKEF support	Bond support scheme

Southampton-based MarineGuard Systems designs, develops and installs marine security systems on superyachts and offshore facilities.

New banking facilities have made it easier for MarineGuard to fulfil contracts worth £18.3 million to install security systems on superyachts being built at two shipyards in Germany.

The guaranteed bond, provided by Santander UK in conjunction with UKEF, means that the business immediately receives cash previously held as a retention by boatyards in Germany, so working capital can be released back into the business at an earlier stage.

The facilities also mean that MarineGuard can reallocate equity to target new work outside of its core business, supporting its continued growth with opportunities to diversify and branch into new markets.

Richard Webb, CEO and Founder of MarineGuard Systems, said:

Working with the team at Santander has been a breath of fresh air. With the current uncertainty, our priority has been on building reserves so that we can service our clients and grow the business through new revenue streams.

The release of funds has been pivotal for us, allowing us to focus on new business endeavours.

Jo Whatley, Relationship Director, Santander UK, commented:

It has been a pleasure assisting MarineGuard Systems with their working capital need. Working together, the solution we've put in place means the business can continue as a world leading expert in the field of superyachts, while also embracing opportunities to diversify and take their skills to other markets, ultimately helping to fuel growth at an important time for the business.

Julie Robertson, UKEF Export Finance Manager, added:

Helping companies grow their businesses by backing their exports is what UK Export Finance is all about. By helping MarineGuard Systems to fulfil this deal, we are supporting jobs in this important industry.

Putting the right finance and insurance in place can give you the exporting edge, helping you to win contracts, fulfil orders and get paid.

[Tell us about your business](#)

[New Bovine TB Partnership launched](#)

Press release

Biosecurity Minister Lord Gardiner attended the first Bovine TB Partnership meeting today



The Government's newly formed Bovine TB Partnership held its inaugural meeting today (11 February), attended by Biosecurity Minister Lord Gardiner.

As part of the Government's response to Professor Sir Charles Godfray's [review of the Government's bTB Strategy](#), the Government has worked with industry and stakeholders to co-design the new bTB Partnership to encourage shared ownership, coordination and decision-making surrounding England's 25 year bTB eradication strategy.

The group will be a driving force helping to progress the Government's aim of eradicating the disease and absorbs the advisory function formerly performed by the bTB Eradication Advisory Group for England (TBEAG).

The Partnership is made up of members who have extensive experience and

expertise in the farming industry, veterinary science, conservation and academia.

Biosecurity Minister Lord Gardiner said:

The wealth of experience and expertise brought to the table by this new Partnership will be invaluable in helping to achieve the Government's ambition to eradicate bTB from this country by 2038.

We have made extensive progress in tackling this disease to date and I look forward to working closely with the group to build on this progress, ensuring that this disease is eradicated as quickly and effectively as possible.

Bovine TB Partnership Chair and experienced Norfolk farmer John Cross said:

We have 17 years of the 25 year TB Strategy left, the timeline is ambitious as it should be, and I am really anticipating that the high calibre of this new Partnership will give TB eradication a real boost.

We have a large, broadly based group here that represents an amazing collective intellect to pitch against this disease, with a positive forward looking , science based approach. If we all work in true partnership this pathogen will be defeated.

The Partnership will:

- Contribute to setting strategic direction of the bTB disease eradication programme, helping to identify priorities, and address specific opportunities, risks and issues, as an integral part of the bTB Programme's governance.
- Help set standards, monitor progress, and identify where new approaches might be needed.
- Co-design potential new policies and communications.
- Help to identify new evidence sources/requirements and ideas and captures wider views to inform discussion as needed.
- Engage widely to advocate agreed bTB policy to a range of stakeholders.
- Encourage formation of and work closely with local groups and create opportunities for stakeholders/local groups to work together.
- Engage with developments in wider domestic agriculture policy, helping to build understanding of the potential implications for future disease control and helping to influence the design of future policy to benefit the goals of the bTB Strategy.
- Provide expert advice to government on policy matters and implementation.

A work plan will be devised by the Partnership to establish the priorities

for the coming year.

The full terms of reference and members of the Partnership can be found [here](#).

The Government is currently consulting on the next phase of its strategy to eradicate bTB in England by 2038. This follows the Government's response to the Godfray Review which set out plans to phase out intensive culling in the next few years, and outlined the need to continue tackling infection in both cattle and wildlife. It also set out priorities that include a transition to badger vaccination, accelerating work to develop a deployable cattle vaccination and improving diagnostic testing. The consultation can be accessed [here](#).

Published 11 February 2021