

# Statement from the Environment Secretary on flooding

Government response

The Environment Secretary George Eustice chaired a COBR meeting on the response to Storm Christoph this evening.



**Speaking after chairing a COBR on the ongoing response to Storm Christoph, Environment Secretary George Eustice said:**

I want to echo the Prime Minister's thanks to the Environment Agency and emergency services for the huge amount of work they've done to protect over 26,000 homes and properties from flooding, keeping families and communities safe.

However, the danger has not passed. The water levels remain high and there is the risk of possible further flooding next week so everyone needs to remain vigilant, follow the advice and sign up for flood alerts.

This Government is committed to tackling the risk of flooding and we will continue to push on with our £5.2 billion programme of investment in flood and coastal defences to protect 336,000 properties over the next five years.

Find out if you're at risk of flooding in [England](#)

Sign up for flood [warnings](#)

Get help during a [flood](#)

What to do after a [flood](#)

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# Call between COP26 President Designate Alok Sharma and US Special Presidential Climate Envoy John Kerry

Press release

COP26 President Designate Alok Sharma and US Special Presidential Climate Envoy John Kerry spoke today, on Secretary Kerry's first full day in his new role.



COP26 President Designate Alok Sharma and US Special Presidential Climate Envoy John Kerry spoke today, on Secretary Kerry's first full day in his new role.

Mr Sharma congratulated Secretary Kerry on bringing the US back to the Paris Agreement yesterday, noting the great importance of the accord being fully universal again.

They agreed that there is no time to waste on tackling climate change. They noted that our two countries are once again tightly aligned in prioritising this shared challenge and will work together to raise global efforts ahead of COP26 in November.

Mr Sharma said that, as hosts of COP26, the UK had sent a clear message to the world in setting an ambitious new Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in December and that he looked forward to seeing the US's own ambitious NDC in the coming months.

Mr Sharma and Secretary Kerry agreed on the particular importance of international climate finance, and for both the UK and the US to work closely with countries who are especially vulnerable to climate change. They also noted the encouraging growth in the shift to renewable energy across the world.

The pair agreed that their respective officials should work together closely. They looked forward to speaking regularly in the run up to G7 and COP26, and to meeting in person at the soonest possibility.

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## [The need for all actors to engage in peaceful and constructive dialogue in the Central African Republic](#)

- At Security Council briefing on the Central African Republic, UK welcomes citizens' "determination in exercising their right to vote" on 27 December but condemns intimidation and violence
- UK calls on those responsible for attacks on MINUSCA peacekeepers to be brought to justice
- UK reiterates importance of maintaining UN arms embargo to prevent arms falling into wrong hands

Thank you, Mr President, and thank you to SRSNG Ndiaye for today's briefing. I also want very much to welcome Foreign Minister Baipo-Temon. I look forward to hearing her perspective and vision for how the country can be unified.

Mr President, let me start by saying that the United Kingdom commends the Central African people for their determination in exercising their right to vote in the elections on 27 December, despite facing intimidation and violence. We firmly condemn this increase in armed group violence over recent weeks, and stress the need to ensure protection of civilians and humanitarian workers. We urge all parties to renew their commitment to the 2019 Peace Agreement and to cease violations of that agreement immediately.

The United Kingdom also wants to thank the women and men of MINUSCA for their perseverance in such adversity. We again express our deepest condolences to the families and governments of the seven peacekeepers whose lives have been lost since December. Any attack on UN peacekeepers sent by this Council to serve in communities that need them most, any such attack, is reprehensible. We call for those responsible to be brought to justice. Our support for the work of the mission remains unwavering and we stand ready to discuss strengthening of the mission to meet its operational needs.

Mr President, following the confirmation of presidential election results by the Constitutional Court, it is now incumbent upon all parties to respect the Court's ruling. We urge all parties to exercise restraint and to abstain from declarations that may destabilise the situation.

It is imperative that all political actors, from both the government and opposition, engage in peaceful and constructive dialogue on the way forward for the country, with the support of the SRSG and the Peace Agreement guarantors. The needs of the Central African people, including the many thousands displaced as a result of this latest wave of violence, must come first.

In closing, Mr President, I would like to address the issue of the arms embargo. We have taken note of the points raised today. As others have highlighted, the arms embargo exists to prevent weapons from falling into the wrong hands and from fuelling armed group violence. It is not intended to prevent the government from obtaining the equipment necessary for defence and security sector reform; a number of standing exemptions exist for this very purpose. We believe it is important to maintain these measures, pending further progress on the key benchmarks set out by the Council in April 2019, in particular regarding weapons management.

I welcomed earlier the Foreign Minister of the Central African Republic, who I know is next on the speakers list. And I'd just like to address a question to her:

Madam Minister, given the standing exemptions which exist for the security forces of the Central African Republic and the other procedures for requesting new exemptions when required, and the fact that, to my knowledge, no requests from your government for exemptions on weaponry have been rejected, it would be extremely helpful if you were able to set out clearly whether, and if so, how, the arms embargo is preventing the government or its security partners from acting.

Thank you, Mr President.

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## **Home Secretary's statement on coronavirus: 21 January 2021**

Good afternoon.

I am joined today by Dr Vin Diwakar, NHS England Regional Medical Director for London, and Martin Hewitt, Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council.

The rollout of our fantastic vaccination programme continues to make good progress.

The brilliant NHS is vaccinating people at the rate of 200 jabs per minute.

And as of today, four million, nine hundred and seventy-three thousand, two hundred and forty-eight people have been vaccinated across the United Kingdom.

The NHS are working as quickly, efficiently and as fairly as possible to get the vaccine to priority groups.

And I want to take this moment and opportunity to counter some of the disinformation about the vaccine – especially any messages targeted towards those from an ethnic minority background.

This vaccine is safe for us all.

It will protect you and your family.

It is our best chance of beating this virus.

So I urge everyone across our wonderfully diverse country to get the vaccine when their turn comes to keep us all safe.

But we are sadly not out of the woods yet, this virus remains severe and it is a deadly threat.

Our NHS is under immense pressure and large numbers of people are still falling ill and, sadly, dying.

So it is absolutely crucial that you stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives.

Since yesterday, thirty-seven thousand eight hundred and ninety-two people have tested positive for coronavirus.

As of 19 January, thirty-eight thousand, six hundred and seventy-six people were in hospital with coronavirus. That is up 4.8 per cent from the week before.

Of those who have tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, sadly ninety-four thousand, five-hundred and eighty people have died. That's one thousand, two-hundred and ninety fatalities since yesterday.

Every death is a tragedy and these numbers demonstrate, that this country remains in the grip of a pandemic.

My thoughts go to all of those who have lost loved ones.

The sacrifices that millions of you are making day in, day out are starting to make a difference.

By staying at home, you are helping to keep those you care about safe, and contributing to this national effort.

But there is still a small minority who refuse to do the right thing.

To them, my message is clear: if you do not follow these rules, then the police will enforce them.

Police officers are now moving more quickly to handing out fines when they encounter breaches. And they have my absolute backing in doing so.

As we have done throughout this pandemic, we are constantly reviewing our approach to ensure that we can crack down on the most serious cases of rule-breaking.

And today I can announce that next week we will be introducing a new £800 fine for those attending house parties, which will double for each repeat offence to a maximum level of £6,400.

These fines will apply to those who attend illegal gatherings of more than 15 people in homes.

The science is clear: such irresponsible behaviour poses a significant threat to public – not only to those in attendance, but also to the wonderful police officers who attend to shut down these events.

From the outset, we have given the police the necessary powers to enforce the rules, which are in place to stop the spread of the virus.

As this latest measure demonstrates, we will not stand by while a small number of individuals put others at risk.

I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to our police forces and our fire services for their extraordinary contribution throughout the pandemic.

They are out there each and every day, supporting our communities, risking their own health to keep the rest of us safe.

And we have seen in their own commitment during this whole response to the flooding caused by Storm Christoph.

During such a difficult time for this country, the commitment and courage shown by our emergency services has been truly inspiring.

Everyone has a role to play in our fight against this virus.

So please: stay at home so we can protect the NHS and save lives.

I will now hand over to Martin Hewitt, Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council.

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# Parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan: UK statement

World news story

Delivered by Nicola Murray, Deputy Head of Delegation, at the OSCE Permanent Council on 21 January 2021.



Madam Chairperson,

I would like to thank Ambassador Umarov for raising the issue of the Parliamentary elections held in his country on 10 January, and to thank Ambassador Domański and his team for their valuable work conducting ODIHR's mission in Kazakhstan. The UK was pleased to support the mission by funding four out of the 24 long-term observers.

Kazakhstan remains an important and strategic partner country for the UK. We look forward to continuing and expanding our bilateral cooperation in 2021, as Kazakhstan marks its 30th anniversary of independence. However, we were concerned to hear ODIHR's preliminary statement on 11 January, which stated that, although the elections process was technically well prepared amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the elections themselves lacked genuine political competition and many procedural aspects, on the day, lacked full transparency.

These elections, sadly, were a missed opportunity for the Government to pilot their announced political reforms and to ensure that the electoral system fully lives up to Kazakhstan's international obligations and commitments.

Madam Chair,

I would like to finish by thanking ODIHR for their work thus far and look forward to receiving their final report. These reports continue to give all participating States a valuable and accurate account of elections across the OSCE region, and set a standard we should all aspire to meet. We hope that the Kazakh government will address the recommendations in ODIHR's final report.

The UK will always support Kazakhstan to strengthen its democratic institutions and the rule of law.

Thank you.

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