

Statement of the Syria Small Group Ministerial meeting

We, the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, and the United States continue to strongly support a political resolution of the Syrian crisis on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

We support the efforts of United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen to move forward with the political process. A political solution as set out in UNSCR 2254 is the only way to bring a sustainable peace, stability, and security to the Syrian people, and would facilitate the withdrawal of all foreign forces that came into Syria after 2011. Such a solution must preserve the territorial integrity, unity, and sovereignty of Syria.

We took note of the Constitutional Committee's launch in 2019. We urge continued engagement with the committee to ensure substantial progress on the discussion of the constitution in line with the committee's mandate and procedures. We stand behind Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to convene the fourth round of meetings, which must discuss substantial issues in order to achieve meaningful progress. Steps should be made to advance all of the other dimensions of the political process, including towards the convening of UN-supervised free and fair elections in a safe and neutral environment as outlined in UNSCR 2254, in which internally displaced persons, refugees, and the diaspora must be able to participate.

After almost 10 years of conflict, the people of Syria have suffered deeply. Hundreds of thousands have been killed and millions forcibly displaced. Now facing COVID-19 and continued economic difficulties, we want to highlight again the importance of providing safe and unhindered humanitarian access for all Syrians currently in need of it, including areas where conditions are noticeably deteriorating, as in Idlib province and South Syria. We would also like to urge the international community to continue supporting Syrian refugees and their hosting countries and communities until Syrians can voluntarily return home in safety, dignity, and security. We also oppose forced demographic change and commit to disburse no assistance for any resettlement of Syrian refugees that is not in line with UNHCR standards.

Additionally, we want to reinforce that efforts toward a political solution in line with UNSCR 2254 must result in progress toward facilitating the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of IDPs and refugees, the release of Syrian detainees, and holding all those responsible for atrocities accountable. We stress the importance of sufficient international support to assist host countries of refugees to help them in their efforts to fulfil the needs of refugees and maintain the resilience of host communities.

There is no military solution that will bring peace, security, and stability to Syria. Progress on the political process as outlined in UNSCR 2254, in

addition to the establishment of a nationwide ceasefire also as outlined in UNSCR 2254, remains the only path forward towards a better future for all Syrians.

We reiterate our commitment to the enduring defeat of ISIS and other UN-recognised terrorist groups throughout Syria including in the Northwest and the South, including al-Qaeda and HTS. We express our deep concern regarding the terrorist threat in the South of Syria and commit to supporting humanitarian efforts there. We deplore the possible further internationalisation of the Syrian conflict by the transfer of combatants, including militants, and equipment by various parties to other areas of conflict.

Cooperating to implement peace in Sudan and South Sudan

Thank you Mr President and thank you to both for your comprehensive updates.

I would like to start by welcoming the improvements in bilateral relations between the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan. The United Kingdom wishes to commend the role that the Government of South Sudan played in facilitating the negotiations that led to the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement on 3 October.

The United Kingdom calls for the swift implementation of this agreement, including in the Two Areas.

We also welcome the resumption of negotiations between the Government of Sudan and SPLM- Al Hilu. We continue to urge all parties to engage constructively, without preconditions, in order to deliver a peaceful and swift resolution.

Madam President, we are also encouraged that last month saw a high-level meeting between representatives of Sudan and South Sudan to discuss the final status of Abyei and other border areas. The indicated willingness of both governments to seize this opportunity is long overdue.

It is however, disappointing that this rapprochement has yet to translate into progress on the ground in Abyei. We call on both countries to build on this renewed engagement at the senior and local levels, towards resolving the final status of Abyei.

Madam President, turning to UNISFA, the United Kingdom commends the role that the Mission has continued to play in supporting peace and security in Abyei.

We welcome UNISFA's ongoing engagement with the Governments of Sudan and

South Sudan, the implementation of the Quick Impact Projects, the removal of explosive hazards and the continuation of humanitarian support. UNISFA's continued efforts to support women's empowerment in Abyei are also critical.

We regret however, that the Mission continues to face obstacles to delivering its mandated activities.

It is clear that these blockages are severely affecting the stability and security of the region. This comes at a time when there have been increasing incidents of violence, including attacks on peacekeepers, and criminal acts, alongside the continued appalling rates of sexual and gender based violence in the region.

We urge both parties to work with the Mission to progress the establishment of the Abyei Police Force as a mechanism to ensure stability and security issues are addressed.

Madam President, there is a clear need to boost the Mission's civilian and police components to empower UNISFA to best support the local community.

We therefore repeat our call on the Government of Sudan to facilitate the issuing of all outstanding visa requests, especially those for police personnel.

This Council has also repeatedly called for both the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan to facilitate the operationalisation of Athony Airstrip.

COVID-19 had underlined the importance of ensuring swift MEDEVAC provision for UN personnel. This is particularly the case for UNISFA given its remoteness and the continued denial of this request unfortunately shows a disregard for the safety of UN personnel.

Finally, we repeat our call for all parties to fully respect International Humanitarian Law and allow humanitarian actors to deliver aid to those in need without hindrance.

In closing, Madam President, the UK commends the vital role UNISFA plays in maintaining the stability of Abyei and the assistance it provides to the achievement of a final settlement on its status. We urge the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan to see the UN as a key partner in supporting their efforts on this matter.

Thank you.

[UK and Japan sign historic free trade](#)

agreement

The UK-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) will be signed by International Trade Secretary Liz Truss and Japan's Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu in Tokyo later today (Friday 23 October).

The British-shaped deal is the first agreement that the UK has secured that goes beyond the existing EU deal, with enhancements in areas such as digital and data, financial services, food and drink, and creative industries.

It brings together two of the world's most technologically advanced nations, placing the UK at the forefront of shaping new global standards on digital trade.

Benefits include:

- Cutting-edge digital & data provisions that go far beyond the EU-Japan deal, including enabling free flow of data, a commitment to uphold the principles of net neutrality and a ban on unjustified data localisation that will prevent British businesses from having the extra cost of setting up servers in Japan.
- Supporting UK car and rail manufacturing jobs at major investors in the UK like Nissan and Hitachi through reduced tariffs on parts coming from Japan, streamlined regulatory procedures and greater legal certainty for their operations.
- Strong tariff reductions on key agricultural products like pork, beef and salmon will benefit farmers and food exporters.
- A boost for UK brands with protections for more iconic UK agricultural products, from just seven under the terms of the EU-Japan deal to potentially over 70, including English sparkling wine, Scotch beef and Welsh lamb.
- British consumers to benefit from cheaper, high-quality Japanese goods – from udon noodles to Bluefin tuna and Kobe beef.

This deal could boost trade between the UK and Japan by over £15 billion and drive economic growth in the long run, benefiting all parts of the country and Scotland, London and the East Midlands in particular. The signing of this FTA, and its subsequent ratification, will not only strengthen the UK economy but also help us to build back better from Covid-19.

Today's signing of the agreement also signals Japan's strong commitment to supporting the UK's accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement

for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), one of the world's biggest free trade areas, covering 13% of the global economy in 2018 and more than £110bn of trade in 2019.

International Trade Secretary, Liz Truss said:

Today is a landmark moment for Britain. It shows what we can do as an independent trading nation, as we secure modern and bespoke provisions in areas like tech and services that are critical to the future of our country and the reshaping of our economy.

Trade is a powerful way to deliver the things people really care about. At its heart, this deal is about creating opportunity and prosperity for all parts of our United Kingdom and driving the economic growth we need to overcome the challenges of coronavirus.

The agreement also has a much wider strategic significance. It opens a clear pathway to membership of the Comprehensive Trans-Pacific Partnership – which will open new opportunities for British business and boost our economic security – and strengthens ties with a like-minded democracy, key ally and major investor in Britain.

Dame Carolyn Fairbairn, CBI Director-General, said:

The signing of the UK's first independent trade agreement is a milestone for our economy and will be welcomed by businesses in many sectors.

This deal has the potential to support jobs across the country through lifting British farming exports and supporting our manufacturing and services sectors. Consumers will also benefit through greater choice.

Ultimately, trade is a powerful lever of economic growth. The CBI and its members will now work with government to take full advantage of the opportunities and ensure the benefits are felt in all parts of the UK.

The UK stands firm in trade negotiations to ensure any future trade deals protect our NHS and maintain all existing protections for our high standards of food safety and animal welfare.

Once signed, the final agreement text will then be laid in Parliament for 21 sitting days for scrutiny under the Constitutional Reform and Governance (CRaG) Act. The government will also publish a full report on the agreement, providing an explanation of the CEPA, including any significant differences or enhancements between the UK-Japan CEPA and the EU-Japan Agreement.

UK Task Group Exercise and Engagement in Montserrat

The UK Task Group in the Caribbean assembled in Montserrat following a day of engagement activities and Disaster Relief exercises.

RFA Argus spent the day conducting tasking on the British Overseas Territory of Montserrat, a volcanic island so covered in lush green vegetation that it is known as the 'Emerald Isle of the Caribbean'. The Crisis Response Troop were landed ashore to conduct Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) exercises in the deserted volcanic exclusion zone on the south of the island, while the Wildcat helicopter from 815 Naval Air Squadron collected aerial photography to assist the local scientific community with their work monitoring the active volcano on Montserrat.

Commando Helicopter Force (CHF) inserted the Mobile Air Operations Team by fast-roping from 845 Naval Air Squadron Merlin helicopters. A safe landing zone was prepared and then teams of combat engineers and medics from 24 Commando Royal Engineers and small teams from 47 Commando Royal Marines and 3 Commando Brigade also fast-roped to the ground.

The chance to land in the volcanic exclusion zone is a rare opportunity for the Crisis Response Troop to test their equipment ashore in a deserted environment without direct interaction that could create the risk of COVID transmission to the clean bubble that is maintained on board RFA ARGUS. The Wildcat helicopter from 815 Naval Air Squadron flew on tasking to support the local community, particularly scientists of the Montserrat Volcanic Observatory (MVO).

The 203 Flight Commander, Royal Navy Pilot Lieutenant Jim Carver said: "outreach projects are routine business for Wildcat Flights. 815 NAS has formed a good relationship with the MVO in previous years, and we were keen to continue that this year despite COVID restrictions. Due to social distancing measures we were unable to fly the scientists and maintenance crews around the volcanic survey sites, but we were able to gather airborne imagery of parts the volcano that are only accessible by helicopter and pass them back to the MVO researchers".

Commander Kate Muir is the head of the UK Task Group in the Caribbean. She said: "Montserrat provided the task group with an exceptional opportunity to

refresh its disaster relief skills in the exclusion zone, which minimises the risk of COVID transmission. Although we could not meet with anyone from Montserrat, we were really pleased to be able to support the Montserrat Volcano Observatory with some photographic survey work. My thanks go to Governor Pearce and the Royal Montserrat Defence Force for enabling our visit and for keeping my teams safe. I hope that the rest of hurricane season is kind to Montserrat!"

Governor Andy Pearce said, "I am delighted to welcome RFA Argus back to our shores for this short but extremely useful visit. I know the MVO are particularly grateful for the helicopter support. Montserrat always offers a unique space to complete life-saving HADR training and I am very happy the crew had the opportunity to learn here. While it is a real shame that we could not interact as we usually would, face to face and in the community due to COVID-19, I am looking forward to the return of Royal Navy support next year."

Though not able to meet in person, the Governor and Commander Muir were able to speak together on a dial in for local radio station ZJB Radio. Here the hosts asked questions about the activity of the UK task group and how they would respond to any events like a hurricane in the time of COVID.

The day finished with the arrival of the Royal Navy Offshore Patrol Vessel, HMS Medway. She sailed close to Argus to take receipt of a transfer of stores and mail, which is always an important boost for the Ship's Company moral. This presented an opportunity for the whole Task Group to be photographed, and so with two ships aligned the Wildcat and Merlin helicopters flew in formation to capture the entire UK Task Group with the striking green of Montserrat as a backdrop.

Both ships have now sailed on to continue their patrols in the Caribbean, ready to respond in the event of a hurricane or to provide support to the British Overseas Territories when needed, and also to assist international partners with counter-narcotics operations in the region.

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Sustaining Support for the Rohingya Refugee Response conference: closing statement

Joint closing announcement by Co-Hosts

Statement from the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):

We are grateful to all who have participated in today's conference, including those who have announced or pledged funding for the international humanitarian response, those who are supporting members of the Rohingya communities in other ways—not least by hosting them—and most importantly, representatives of Rohingya communities themselves.

The situation in the region remains an acute humanitarian and human rights crisis more than three years after the August 2017 violence, which caused hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people to flee their homes in Myanmar to seek safety in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. There are currently 860,000 Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar district. There are an estimated 600,000 Rohingya people in Myanmar's Rakhine State who face ongoing violence and discrimination, and Malaysia, India, Indonesia, and other countries in the region are together hosting nearly 150,000 Rohingya refugees.

The voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees and others internally displaced to their places of origin or of their own choosing in Myanmar is the comprehensive solution that we seek along with Rohingya people themselves. To that end, we underscore the Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire and the cessation of fighting to enable safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all communities in need of assistance. To resolve the crisis in Myanmar, the Government of Myanmar must take steps to address the root causes of the violence and displacement in Rakhine State and create the conditions for voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable returns. This includes providing a pathway to citizenship and freedom of movement for Rohingya, guided by the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State's recommendations and encouraged and supported by countries in the region. Myanmar must provide justice for the victims of human rights abuses and ensure that those responsible are held accountable.

We are grateful to the government and the people of Bangladesh and other countries in the region for their continued support and hosting of Rohingya refugees. We acknowledge the responsibility they have undertaken and we assure them of our continued donor commitment to support the humanitarian needs of Rohingya refugees throughout the region, especially in Bangladesh. This support needs to go hand-in-hand with increased support to host communities. While we continue efforts to secure long-term solutions, a focus on more sustainable response planning and financing in Bangladesh could more effectively support the government's management of the response and maximize limited resources to benefit both Bangladeshi

and refugee communities.

The crisis is having a devastating effect on vulnerable members of Rohingya communities, particularly women and children who require gender and age-sensitive interventions. The crisis is also affecting the wider region, with refugees, mainly women and children, desperately attempting to reach other countries in the region. We greatly appreciate the efforts of those governments that have allowed the safe disembarkation of Rohingya refugees in distress at sea. We assure governments hosting Rohingya that donors are committed to supporting these refugees.

We will continue to provide strong support for displaced and stateless Rohingya people, wherever they are in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and other countries in the region. The international community has demonstrated its strong commitment to the humanitarian response with the announcement of funding today totaling some USD 600 million, which significantly expands the nearly USD 636 million in humanitarian assistance already committed so far in 2020 under the Bangladesh Joint Response Plan and the Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan. Since the outbreak of violence in August 2017, a total of nearly USD 2.8 billion has been provided to the Rohingya crisis response in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and the region. This is in addition to USD 700 million in development commitments to Bangladesh from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.

We remain steadfast in our engagement with countries concerned towards finding solutions to the crisis. We will continue to work together to maintain international attention on the Rohingya crisis and to shift from short-term critical interventions to a more sustained and stable support.

Background

The co-hosts, the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), recognize the following countries and agencies for their participation in the conference:

Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brunei, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam; the Asian Development Bank (ADB); the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), BRAC, InterAction, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), the United Nations

Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Coordination Office (UNDCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN-Habitat, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Bank.