

# On top of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, the human rights situation is stark

Thank you President. Let me thank USG Griffiths, DSRS G Potzel and Dr Morgan Edwards for their briefings.

Let me start by offering condolences to Pakistan following the devastating flooding in their country this week. Our thoughts are with the victims and their families. As my Minister Lord Ahmad has said, we are working with the Pakistani authorities to establish the support and assistance they need. The United Kingdom stands with the people of Pakistan at this time of need.

President, Russia has called for this meeting one year after the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan. As we reflect on that anniversary, we should also recall the Soviet Union's ten year occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 until 1989 that created the conditions for devastating civil war and the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s.

Today, it is clear that the situation in Afghanistan remains critical and the needs of the Afghan people acute.

As we have heard, over 24 million Afghans are in need of humanitarian support and nearly 20 million are facing acute food insecurity. Economic stability and the delivery of basic services are essential to end the cycle of suffering in Afghanistan. There remains a vital need to inject liquidity into the country to avoid economic collapse.

While UK personnel have left Afghanistan, our commitment to the Afghan people remains resolute.

Between April 2022 and March 2023 the UK has committed \$676 million in aid to Afghanistan and our Foreign Secretary co-hosted the UN humanitarian pledging conference earlier this year, raising \$2.4 billion.

By contrast, Russia contributed nothing to the UN Humanitarian Response Plan, and China pledged \$2m.

On top of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, the human rights situation is stark. There are credible allegations of extra-judicial killings and detentions and disappearances, including civil society activists and former security forces and government officials.

The last few months have also seen the imposition of deplorable restrictions on the rights and freedoms of women and girls, including on access to education, jobs and services and on their freedom of movement and dress. It is clear to all but the Taliban that the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in society is a pre-requisite for a stable, prosperous Afghanistan.

The Taliban have also been repeating other mistakes from the past – not least the harbouring of the leader of Al Qaida, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, in downtown Kabul in breach of their international commitments.

We again call on the Taliban to meet its commitments:

- To ensure principled, unhindered humanitarian access across the country
- To uphold basic human rights, most pressingly for women and girls.
- And to ensure Afghanistan is never again a permissive environment for terrorist groups.

Strong and consistent UN leadership remains crucial to ensuring a well-coordinated and prioritised response and UNAMA has our full support in delivering its mandate provided by this Council.

President,

One year ago, this Council adopted resolution 2593 which set out our shared expectations of the Taliban. We hope the Council can continue to speak with one voice to press the Taliban on its commitments, and to support the Afghan people in overcoming the challenges ahead. We thank the UN for their ongoing and tireless efforts.

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## [Our commitment to championing civil society participation at the UN](#)

Thank you Madam Vice Chair,

Let me begin by echoing the concerns raised by the representative of Estonia on the impact of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine on civil society and NGOs.

As we begin our work this session, we recall the importance of this Committee. This Committee exists because we recognise that civil society is essential to our work at the UN. Their engagement enriches the evidence base at our disposal, making our meetings more effective and more substantial. In turn, this helps ensure that what we do here has an impact on the ground.

For these reasons, the UK is committed to championing civil society participation at the UN. Regrettably, we do this in the face of opposition, with a small group of Member States opposing civil society engagement with the UN, seeking to stifle their voices, afraid of the scrutiny that civil society provides.

Those states deliberately bring inertia to this Committee. Dozens of NGOs have been deferred for eight or more Committee sessions. The politicisation

of this Committee is another example of the worrying increase in reprisals against organisations who seek to engage with the UN.

We were therefore pleased to see that, during this year's regular session, some Member States brought the arbitrary deferral of NGOs to a vote in the Committee, as has happened on several previous occasions. Those NGOs put forward to the vote, were ones that had been consistently deferred for years despite responding satisfactorily to Committee questions. We were disappointed that the vote was blocked in the committee by a no-action motion, but we were happy to co-sponsor the decision at ECOSOC, the Committee's parent body, where it was adopted by a wide margin.

We look forward to joining the Committee in January. As we have set out previously, we plan to use our membership to work with others to improve the working methods, promoting transparency to reduce arbitrary deferrals.

This Committee's role is to facilitate NGO access, not impede it. During this resumed session, in order to fulfil our collective commitment to inclusive multilateralism, we urge Committee Members to address the backlog of deferred applications fairly and transparently, and to promote a safe and welcoming space for civil society participation at the UN.

Thank you.

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## **A renewed agreement this January will be critical to meet the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people**

Thank you President.

Thank you to Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and ASG Joyce Msuya for their sobering briefings.

Let me join others in welcoming our new Irish colleague, Ambassador Fergal Mythen to the Council.

The UK continues to stand with the Syrian people in their desire for a sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict. As we have said many times, the only way to achieve this is through the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 2254. This includes: a nationwide ceasefire; unhindered aid access; release of the arbitrarily detained; conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified refugee return; and free and fair elections pursuant to a new constitution.

Special Envoy Pederson's ongoing efforts to deliver 2254 have our full

support.

We are disappointed that the regime continues to stall discussions on political and constitutional reform. We are further disappointed that Russia has used the fallout of its own aggression in Ukraine as a pretext for undermining political progress in Syria, by asserting that Geneva should no longer be the venue for what should be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned Constitutional Committee talks.

While the Syrian regime continues to fail in its responsibility to respect the basic rights of Syrians, provide for their needs, or engage in the political process, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate.

Currently, around 14.6 million Syrians require humanitarian assistance – more than 67% of the population and 12 million people are facing acute food insecurity this year.

The UK recognises that early recovery is necessary to address humanitarian needs. This is reflected in our support. Our funding has helped with the rehabilitation of water networks, provided agricultural training and inputs for livestock and vegetable production, and provided apprenticeships and small business grants to help create jobs.

But humanitarian assistance, and particularly cross-border assistance, remains a lifeline for millions. By reducing the UN cross border mandate from twelve to six months, resolution 2642 has caused uncertainty for the UN and its partners, impacting humanitarian operations and early recovery programming, a priority avowedly shared by Russia as well as other Council members.

We therefore call on all Security Council members to work together to ensure a renewed agreement this January to meet the critical needs of the Syrian people. Further uncertainty, or a closing of this lifeline at the height of winter, would be catastrophic for millions of people.

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## **Government re-affirms city status of Gibraltar**

Press release

A full, up-to-date list of cities in the United Kingdom, its Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories has been published.



The UK Government will today (Monday 29 August) re-affirm the city status of Gibraltar, as granted by Queen Victoria, confirming its special status in the Realms of Her Majesty the Queen and the family of the United Kingdom, the Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories.

The Government has undertaken detailed research in the National Archives and established that the City of Gibraltar was granted city status by Queen Victoria in 1842 but was omitted from the list of recognised cities. A newly-published record of 81 recognised cities confirms its place among the official list.

This status is testament to the close relationship between Gibraltar and the United Kingdom, 99% of Gibraltarians reaffirmed their commitment to British sovereignty in a referendum of 2002.

**Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:**

It is excellent to see official recognition given to the City of Gibraltar, a huge accolade to its rich history and dynamism.

This official recognition re-affirms Gibraltar's special status in the Realms of Her Majesty, and rightly signifies the pride that Gibraltarians feel for their community and their distinctive heritage.

**Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Kit Malthouse said:**

The cities in this list are incredibly rich with history and culture, and the local people of those areas are rightly very proud to see their city's significance put to paper.

I'm hopeful people based in these places, particularly the new cities, can reap the benefits of their home's increased global standing and that it will attract more inward investment for local businesses.

In the year of the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, the updated list is being published following the award of eight new grants of city status

earlier this year and the award to Southend-on-Sea in honour of Sir David Amess MP.

The full list of recognised cities from the Overseas Territories include Hamilton (Bermuda), Jamestown (Saint Helena) and Stanley (Falkland Islands) which was awarded the status as part of the Platinum Jubilee competition.

The publication will also highlight those cities which have received the honour of Lord Mayoralty or Lord Provostship.

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## [Baroness Bull CBE appointed Chair of the Expert Advisory Panel for the Cultural Education Plan](#)

Press release

The Cultural Education Plan sets out to ensure all children and young people have access to a diverse range of cultural education and activities



- Baroness Bull to draw on her long and successful career in the arts and higher education to convene and chair expert panel which will oversee the development of the new plan
- She brings a wide range of expertise, first as a dancer in The Royal Ballet, then as a creative leader at the Royal Opera House and also having served on the boards of the South Bank Centre and Arts Council England

Schools Minister Will Quince and Arts Minister Lord Parkinson have jointly appointed crossbench peer Baroness Bull as the Chair of the Expert Advisory Panel for the upcoming Cultural Education Plan.

The plan was announced in the Schools White Paper, [Opportunity for All](#), in March 2022 and will be published next year. The full panel membership will be announced later this year, and will include school and cultural sector leaders, and other experts in cultural education.

The plan aims to articulate and highlight the importance of high-quality cultural education in schools, promote the social value of cultural and creative education, outline and support career progression pathways, address skills gaps and tackle disparities in opportunity and outcome.

The Government will work closely with Arts Council England, the British Film Institute, Historic England and National Lottery Heritage Fund on the project.

Baroness Bull has had extensive expertise in the arts, both as a performer in the Royal Ballet, within creative leadership at the Royal Opera House and in governance roles on the boards of the South Bank Centre and Arts Council England. Over the last decade she has also worked in higher education, developing partnerships between the university sector and arts and cultural organisations. She co-chairs the APPG on Creative Diversity.

In addition, Baroness Bull has served on the boards of the South Bank Centre and Arts Council England, was a governor of the BBC, a judge for the 2010 Booker Prize and a member of the governing body of the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

The Cultural Education Plan Expert Panel members will be appointed in Autumn 2022.

Chair of the Expert Advisory Panel Baroness Bull said:

Every child should have the opportunity to explore their individual and creative potential through high-quality cultural education.

I'm delighted to be appointed to the role and look forward to working with the panel to develop a rich and diverse Cultural Education Plan that will deliver for children right across the country.

## Notes

- This is a voluntary position and there will be no remuneration for the role.
- The expert advisory panel for the Cultural Education Plan will be appointed by the Minister for School Standards and the Minister for Arts.
- Baroness Bull is a crossbench peer in the House of Lords, so serves in a non-party political capacity.