

# Statement on launch of Australia-UK FTA

Today we are very pleased to announce the launch of free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations between Australia and the United Kingdom. An FTA between our two nations, close allies with deep historical and people-to-people ties, will support the economic recovery from COVID-19 and take our bilateral trade and investment relationship to the next level.

The FTA will be ambitious and comprehensive. It will contribute to economic growth and job creation, drive increased two-way trade in goods and services worth £18.1bn in 2019, and encourage two-way investment. The UK was the second largest direct investor in Australia and the second largest recipient of Australian Foreign Direct Investment in 2019. UK FDI in Australia was £35.6bn and Australian FDI in UK was £15.9bn in 2018. It will be a modern agreement with best-practice trade rules on emerging and increasingly important issues, including digital trade and innovation, and will include outcomes that benefit the small and medium-sized enterprises who already sell goods and services between our countries, as well as encouraging more to do so.

In responding to the impact of COVID-19, it is more important than ever to support open trading arrangements based on global trading rules that underpin mutual growth and prosperity. Increased protectionism can only hinder the world's recovery from COVID-19, slowing the necessary return of economic and employment growth. We will continue to work closely in multilateral fora including the G20, the Commonwealth and the WTO. The Australia-UK FTA is a top priority and will be an important part of our post-COVID strategies, making it easier for businesses to export, and access goods, services and capital to fuel economic recovery.

Minister Birmingham said:

The Australian Government looks forward to negotiating an ambitious and comprehensive free trade agreement with the United Kingdom, a close friend and an important trading partner.

We will pursue a deal that opens up new opportunities for our farmers, businesses and consumers, supports job creation and strengthens our economies as we recover from the impacts of COVID-19.

As like-minded champions of free trade, the FTA will also signal our shared commitment to global trade liberalisation and the rules that underpin it.

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said:

This is a chance for both our nations to make history. Despite our long friendship and the common values that unite us, our two great countries have never before had a free trade agreement. That can change now the UK has left the EU and become an independent trading nation once again.

An ambitious, wide-ranging deal will renew and strengthen our bond of friendship, help bring greater prosperity to our peoples, and send a clear signal to the rest of the world that like-minded democracies are prepared to stand up for free trade and the rules underpinning international trade.

Increasing trade will strengthen our supply chains and create new opportunities for our businesses recovering from the economic impact of COVID-19. The FTA will serve as a framework for an even closer economic partnership as the UK seeks to strengthen its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. Together, the UK and Australia will promote a liberal free trading agenda that helps maintain an environment for long-term prosperity. To that end, Australia, as a member of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), welcomes the UK's intention to join this group of committed free trading nations. Collectively CPTPP members represented 13% of global GDP in 2018. The UK is determined to turbocharge its economic activity through membership.

In these challenging times, we are all looking for new ways to continue to work and communicate with each other. The first round of negotiations will begin on 29 June in a virtual format. We will work flexibly and creatively to conclude a high-quality agreement as quickly as possible, consulting closely with all interested stakeholders. We remain committed to upholding our high health, environmental, labour, food safety and animal welfare standards in these FTA discussions.

Alongside negotiations, we will also explore ways to build on our deep and historic people-to-people links to ensure the benefits of deeper Australia-UK economic cooperation are distributed as widely as possible.

The Australian FTA negotiating team will be led by Elisabeth Bowes, Chief Negotiator, Regional Trade Agreements Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; and the UK negotiating team will be led by Vivien Life, Director, Asia & Australasia Negotiations Directorate, UK Department for International Trade.

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# Liz Truss kick-starts trade negotiations with Australia and New Zealand

The UK has today (Wednesday 17 June) published its negotiating objectives for free trade agreements (FTAs) with Australia and New Zealand, with talks for each agreement beginning shortly.

The UK, Australia and New Zealand are already important economic partners. UK businesses traded a significant £21bn worth of goods and services in total with both countries last year.

Drinks companies, the automotive industry and professional services firms are among those expected to benefit from removing barriers to trade with Australia and New Zealand.

Government analysis published today shows that the value of UK exports to the two countries could increase by around £1 billion as a result of the deals. Expanding free and open trade in this way is essential to helping businesses and the whole of the UK overcome the economic challenge of Coronavirus.

Trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand will help boost our economic recovery by opening up new markets for businesses, creating jobs and supporting a range of industries across the UK. In the long term, UK workers' wages could increase by £400m and £200m respectively, while consumers are expected to benefit from a greater choice of goods and lower prices.

Opportunities for UK businesses include additional access for UK services and investment, the removal of tariffs and other barriers to trade, and the chance to shape the future of digital trade.

Both agreements will include chapters on digital trade to maximise opportunities for businesses to trade digitally. They will also include dedicated SME chapters to help more small businesses to sell their goods and services to Australia and New Zealand for the first time.

These talks are also a logical step towards membership of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), one of the world's largest free trade areas accounting for 13% of global GDP in 2018.

The Government has today reaffirmed its interest in joining the group and is stepping up engagement with its members. UK membership would increase and diversify the UK's £110 billion trade relationship with its members and create opportunities in the world's most dynamic economies. Both Australia and New Zealand support the UK joining CPTPP, and trade agreements with them could facilitate the UK's accession.

**International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said:**

Our new-found status as an independent trading nation will enable us to strengthen ties with countries around the world.

Ambitious, wide-ranging free trade agreements with old friends like Australia and New Zealand are a powerful way for us to do that and make good on the promise of Brexit.

Pivoting towards the Asia-Pacific will diversify our trade, increase the resilience of our supply chains and ensure the UK is less vulnerable to political and economic shocks in certain parts of the world.

**Stephen Phipson, CEO of Make UK, commenting on the start of trade negotiations with New Zealand and Australia, said:**

New trade opportunities and an emphasis on digital trade to boost business as we come out of the current COVID crisis will be welcomed by British industry.

The emphasis on helping the UK's smaller businesses access the opportunities of international trade particularly in liberalising access for UK manufacturing services will be good news for some of our most innovative companies, which sometimes struggle to navigate the intricacies of breaking into new markets.

Business looks forward to being directly and closely involved in the ongoing programme of trade negotiations to ensure the best possible outcomes.

**Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) National Chair Mike Cherry said:**

The UK is embarking on an ambitious new era of independent trade and these new deals are critical to the success of small businesses as well as the wider economy.

Of the small businesses that export, 38 per cent already do so with Australia while 30 per cent are trading with New Zealand, which highlights the potential to build on these existing strong trading links via trade deals with both countries. A comprehensive small business chapter is equally important to ensure that the needs of SMEs are fully catered for in the years to come.

Both nations are in the top 10 most important destination export

markets for small firms over the next three years, making these deals vitally important.

The UK already has a common connection with these nations as members of the Commonwealth and that is why businesses are looking forward to engaging with these trade negotiations in the weeks and months to come.

New Zealand and Australia rank among our closest friends. We share a language, head of state and a system of common law. We have a proud shared history and today we are guided by a common set of values.

Like the UK, both nations have always stood up for what is right and maintained a fierce belief in the merits of free trade, the rule of law, international cooperation and democratic government.

Free Trade Agreements with Australia and New Zealand need to work for the whole of the UK. We have been clear that any future agreement with Australia and New Zealand must benefit British consumers, producers and companies. We remain committed to upholding our high environmental, labour, food safety and animal welfare standards in our trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand.

On the UK side, talks will be overseen by DIT Chief Trade Negotiation Advisor Crawford Falconer.

## **Background**

- Our negotiating objectives for all proposed agreements are also underpinned by one of the biggest consultations ever undertaken with the UK public, businesses and civil society on new FTAs.
- We will continue to speak to businesses and interest groups in every part of the UK to ensure their views are taken into account.
- Negotiations with Australia and New Zealand will be carried out by video conference, ensuring that talks can progress during the Coronavirus pandemic.
- The first round of talks with Australia and New Zealand are expected to take place in the coming weeks

## **The UK's overall negotiating objectives for a free trade agreement with Australia are:**

- Agree an ambitious and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Australia that strengthens our economic relationship with a key like-minded partner, promoting increased trade in goods and services and greater cross-border investment.
- Strengthen our economic partnership focusing on technology, innovation and research and development (R&D). An FTA with Australia provides an opportunity to enhance co-operation on shared global and economic challenges, including supporting innovation and R&D across our

economies. We will seek to set a new precedent with Australia by establishing an ambitious framework for co-operation in these areas, focusing on the role of trade policy in facilitating innovation.

- Increase the resilience of our supply chains and the security of our whole economy by diversifying trade.
- Futureproof the agreement in line with the Government's ambition on climate and in anticipation of rapid technological developments, such as Artificial Intelligence.
- The Government has been clear that when we are negotiating trade agreements, the National Health Service (NHS) will not be on the table. The price the NHS pays for drugs will not be on the table. The services the NHS provides will not be on the table. The NHS is not, and never will be, for sale to the private sector, whether overseas or domestic.
- Secure an agreement which works for the whole of the UK and takes appropriate consideration of the UK's constitutional arrangements and obligations.
- Throughout the agreement, ensure high standards and protections for UK consumers and workers and build on our existing international obligations. This will include not compromising on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food safety standards.

**The UK's overall negotiating objectives for a free trade agreement with New Zealand are:**

- Agree an ambitious and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with New Zealand that strengthens our economic relationship with a key like-minded partner, promoting increased trade in goods and services and greater cross-border investment.
- Work together to reinforce our mutual interest in sustainable and inclusive trade policy.
- Supporting both Governments' Net Zero commitments on climate change, we will seek provisions that maintain the right to regulate for each party and support opportunities for global growth in low carbon sectors and associated research and development.
- Increase the resilience of our supply chains and the security of our whole economy by diversifying trade.
- Futureproof the agreement in line with the Government's ambition on climate and in anticipation of rapid technological developments, such as Artificial Intelligence.
- The Government has been clear that when we are negotiating trade agreements, the National Health Service (NHS) will not be on the table. The price the NHS pays for drugs will not be on the table. The services the NHS provides will not be on the table. The NHS is not, and never will be, for sale to the private sector, whether overseas or domestic.
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# New tech to tackle leaves on the line and de-ice platforms set to revolutionise British rail travel

- twenty-five projects across Great Britain win share of £9.4 million in fourth round of First of a Kind competition
- projects including innovative 5G wifi infrastructure, hydrogen-powered freight trains and speedy new seat-switching app awarded funding
- government-backed fund aims to bring new technology onto the railways to make them cleaner, greener and safer, as the UK leads the way to net zero carbon emissions

Automatic de-icing concrete on platforms and a rapid seat reservation-swapping service could soon make journeys easier by banishing slippery surfaces in winter and guaranteeing passengers a seat, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced today (17 June 2020), following a national competition to make the railways cleaner, greener and more passenger-friendly.

The Department for Transport, in partnership with Innovate UK, has awarded 25 pioneering projects a share of £9.4 million in the 2020 First of a Kind (FOAK) competition, which encourages innovation in the rail industry.

Inventors have come forward with a host of ambitious projects to transform rail travel, including low-energy concrete slabs that automatically heat up in freezing conditions to help prevent passengers from slipping on icy platforms and the Seatfrog Train Swap app, which will allow passengers to quickly and remotely update their seat reservation to another service.

Several winning projects will also help the government reduce the railway's environmental impact and support decarbonisation, including a world-first zero emission machine for removing and replacing rails, and hydrogen-based steam turbines to provide zero-emission, low-noise rail freight.

Other schemes supported by the competition include next-generation lightweight composite poles to provide passengers with faster, more reliable 5G wifi, and the development of safer and more resilient glazing for train windows to help prevent glass windows being smashed and protect passengers.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

I am delighted to announce the winners of this year's FOAK competition, which will support better, more environmentally friendly journeys. Crucially, these pioneering projects will also ensure that passengers have a more efficient, reliable and responsive railway, making their journeys simpler and easier.

From clever technology on platforms to prevent icy surfaces, new 'seat-switching' apps and improved 5G wifi connections, harnessing innovation will be crucial to modernising the network and making our railways greener and cleaner, as we build beyond coronavirus (COVID-19) and look to the future.

Ian Campbell, executive chair of Innovate UK, said:

These high-quality projects illustrate the appetite of UK organisations to develop new and exciting innovations for rail transport that improve customers' user experience, optimise railway efficiency, and are environmentally sustainable.

Now in its fourth year, the competition was open to organisations of all sizes and sectors whose technologies could help to create a greener, more cost-effective and customer-friendly railway with greater capacity.

Previous winners include new technology from Porterbrook in partnership with emissions specialist Eminox, which successfully reduces harmful emissions from diesel trains by over 90%.

South Western Railway completed a six-month trial in March of the technology that saw an emissions reduction system fitted to the exhaust of a Class 159 train used by passengers between Waterloo and Exeter.

The trial delivered immediate reductions in pollution from nitrous oxides by over 80% and hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide and particulate matter by more than 90%, and is the first successful transfer of proven automotive technology to a rail environment.

OpenSpace Thameslink also received funding for its plans to provide station management with a set of next-generation tools to help with crowd management at London St Pancras International. The project, in conjunction with Govia Thameslink Railway Ltd, immediately found this helped with easing crowds to help maintain social distancing during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The full list of winners are:

## Customer experience

Project	Lead organisation	Summary
Train Swap	Seatfrog Ops Limited	Allows passengers to quickly and remotely update their seat reservation to a new service.
Dynamic Capacity Management	Esoterix Systems Ltd	Introduces utility-style ticketing that adjusts to travel patterns and rewards particular choices, using a monthly subscription that will help customers to save money on a large upfront fee.

Project	Lead organisation	Summary
Next-generation composite poles for a 5G-enabled railway	Hive Composites Ltd	Installation of lightweight composite poles along railway lines, to improve wifi speed, consistency and connection on the rail network for all rail passengers.
Illumin-heated concrete platform copers slabs	Sheffield Hallam University	Illuminated and heated low-energy concrete slabs used on railway platforms that automatically switch on in freezing conditions to help prevent passengers from slipping on ice.
LAMINAR	iProov	Demonstrates how biometrics can dramatically enhance the passenger experience, reduce congestion, improve safety and enhance security.
Track to Train communications to Transport for Wales	Ingram Networks Ltd	Lab-based study into new very high-speed communications technology for railways demonstrating very cost-effective trackside to train communications infrastructure over the whole 8km length of the heritage railway in Leicestershire, at speeds of 10Gbps+.

## Environmental sustainability

Project	Lead organisation	Summary
Prototype zero emissions Trac Rail Transposer (TRT-e)	Unipart Rail Limited	A zero-emissions machine that removes and replaces rails.
LoCe: Less oil, Cleaner exhaust	Porterbrook Leasing	Transferring novel retrofit technology onto one of Porterbrook's Class 170 Turbostar vehicles to enable mid-life diesel engines to rapidly become more environmentally sustainable.
Zero-emission rail freight power	Steamology Motion Ltd	A hydrogen-based steam turbine system that delivers zero-emission power solutions for existing rail freight locomotives.
Daybreak	Riding Sunbeams Ltd	Focuses on decarbonisation of the railway industry. It has developed direct connection between renewable energy generation and overhead lines of the railway systems.
Resi-Glaze	Far-UK Ltd	Aims to develop an innovative and resilient glazing solution to ensure passenger safety on trains and potential CO2 emissions saving.

Project	Lead organisation	Summary
HydroFLEX Raft Production	BCRRE	A power pack design to enable a hydrogen train to work in service, minimising the loss of passenger saloon space.
A novel, low environmental impact, composite railway footbridge	Associated Utility Supplies (AUS) Ltd	A low environmental impact footbridge, which will be the first railway footbridge made entirely from fibre reinforced polymer. It will be significantly easier to install than the equivalent steel bridge, greatly reducing network disruption and local environmental damage.

## Optimised and cost-effective maintenance

Project	Lead organisation	Summary
Integrated Optical Fibre Sensing (OptRail-PRO) to	rcm2 limited	Optical fibre sensors that monitor the condition of switches and crossings on railway tracks.
Train Axle Crack Monitoring	TAMON – Perpetuum Ltd	Helps to reduce returns to depot by using sensors and pattern-recognition technologies to monitor for cracks in train axles.
High-Speed Cryogenic Blasting for Rail Cleaning to Alleviate Low Adhesion	The University of Sheffield	High-speed cryogenic cleaning system for tracks to prevent low adhesion and slow running of trains.
InnoTamp	Fugro	Data gathering to ensure the maintenance of optimum rail alignment.
Thermal Radiometry for the Remote Condition Monitoring of Railway Vehicles	Rail Innovations	Uses thermal radiometry camera technology to measure temperatures of mechanical systems on moving trains. This enables automatic alarms to be sent over the Internet in the event of an over-temperature occurrence.

## Optimised railway operations

Project	Lead organisation	Summary
Minimising disruption of overhead line renewals via novel headspan assemblies	Associated Utility Supplies (AUS) Ltd	Span wire clamping system to enable rapid, low-cost overhead line equipment headspan renewals with minimum network disruption.
Trainserv Software User Trial and Preparation for Commercialisation	Cogitare Ltd	Trainserv integrates multiple sources of real-time data for use by rail workers to help them improve services and respond to incidents.

Project	Lead organisation	Summary
<b>Cleartrak on Train Testing (CoTT)</b>	Garrandale Limited	Innovative and efficient system for processing toilet waste, reducing cost and maintenance requirements.
<b>IRIS: Information system for railway station staff</b>	Liverpool John Moores University	A new kind of information system for frontline station staff to enhance communication and enable them to help passengers in making travel decisions/planning more effectively.
<b>Railway Optical Detection and Obstructions-Tunnel &amp; Station Monitoring</b>	Vortex IoT Limited	Sensors and data analysis tools to detect and identify intrusion and obstructions on the track, and send real time situational alerts to the rail control centre to prompt further investigation.
<b>Improving resilience through a surface water flooding decision support system</b>	JBA Consulting	Seeks to develop a first-of-a-kind surface water flood forecasting and early warning system for Network Rail using technology and data to map the surface water flood likelihood in real time, ahead of the event and forecast rainfall intensity.
<b>Improved railway operations through train-mounted water addition</b>	CoCatalyst Limited	Spraying a small amount of water from the train when slippery rails are detected to improve train traction and braking, and prevent subsequent services from being affected.

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## [Flood asset repairs continue during the coronavirus pandemic](#)

The 3 named storms in February – Storm Ciara, Dennis and Jorge – caused extensive disruption and severe impacts with many areas flooded, including parts of the Midlands.

With ground already sodden from last autumn's heavy rains and floods, the area quickly became flooded, with many rivers, including the Severn, reaching some of the highest levels ever seen or reaching levels not seen since 2000.

Sadly homes and businesses were flooded and Environment Agency flood defences prevented the flooding being much worse by protecting 14,500 properties from flooding in the devastating February floods.

Making sure flood defences are in top shape to protect communities again is a

priority for the Environment Agency and a £7.5m flood recovery programme of the repair of flood defences in the Environment Agency's West Midlands area\*, damaged in the February floods is now underway. The programme includes £300,000 maintenance of the Severnside defences in Bewdley, Worcestershire.

The work, which will improve the standard of flood protection to 270 properties, includes resetting the block pavers that sit under the flood barriers to reduce seepage during a flood, following damage caused during the October and February floods. It also includes the resealing of the elements of the barrier that remain in place and the recladding of the floodwall at Gardners Meadow.

All work is being carried out whilst following government guidelines on social distancing and ensuring contractors are also following the correct procedures.

Richard Henderson, Asset Recovery Manager for the Environment Agency, said:

During coronavirus we are continuing to maintain and operate our flood and coastal defences to ensure they protect people and property from flooding. We carry out regular checks, tests and repairs that ensure our defences can continue to reduce flood risk to homes and businesses.

Repairing our flood defence assets in Bewdley will make a big difference to reducing flood risk to more than 270 properties.

The sheer volume of water in the system in the February floods put pressure on many of our flood defences. Since then, where possible, and, whilst adhering to government guidance due to the current pandemic, our teams have been inspecting defences to check for any damage and the need for any repairs, so that we can ensure they are ready for any future floods. We have also used drone footage to help with the process.

This work is going well and the repairs we are carrying out in Bewdley will extend the life of the Severnside flood defences.

The Severnside Scheme protects properties on the town side of the river, and consists of concrete flood walls, demountable barriers and two pumping stations. The work is expected to be complete by the end of August.

Environment Agency teams work around the clock to help protect people from flooding, but flood risk can never be eliminated completely, everyone still has a responsibility to take steps to protect themselves.

Check whether you're at risk of flooding, and [sign up](#) to receive our free flood warnings, or call 0345 988 1188. By registering, you can choose how you'd prefer to be reached – by text, phone call to a mobile or landline, or even email – giving you vital notice to prepare if flooding is expected.

\*The Environment Agency's West Midlands' area includes Shropshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Staffordshire, Birmingham and the Black Country.

## Notes to editors:

- According to Met Office statistics, February 2020 was the wettest February on record for England with double the average monthly rainfall. It was also the 5th wettest of any calendar month since 1862 and some areas experienced a month's worth of rain in 24 hours. In England 154.9mm rainfall fell, 258% of the average rainfall for the month. Some places received over 4 times the average monthly rainfall.
- The level of the River Severn at Bewdley reached 5.48m in February 2020. In November 2000, pre-Severnside defences, the level was 5.56m. In February 2014, the level was 5.04m.
- The Severnside North Scheme, completed in 2004, consists of 60m of concrete flood wall, 180m of demountable barriers and 1 pumping station.
- The Severnside South Scheme, completed in 2006, consists of 140m of concrete flood wall, 450m of demountable barriers and 1 pumping station.

We encourage all those who may be at risk of flooding to take steps to protect themselves by:

- signing up for free flood warnings via Floodline on 0345 988 1188
- keeping up to date with the latest flood information on [GOV.UK](https://gov.uk)
- checking our [live flood warning map](#)
- downloading our free Smartphone Flood Alert App
- follow us on Twitter at [@EnvAgencyMids](https://twitter.com/EnvAgencyMids) to keep updated on the work we are doing.

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## [Reaching an inclusive and Syrian-led political process in Syria](#)

Merci, Mr President.

Mr President, I'd like to begin by once again thanking the Special Envoy for his briefing, and a thank you also to Miss Noura Ghazi for joining us today and for her heartfelt yet clear eyed appeals for justice. We felt the pain you expressed on behalf of so many Syrians. Thank you.

We remain deeply concerned at the security situation in north-west Syria and we welcome the 5th of March ceasefire agreed between Russia and Turkey, which brought a vital period of relative calm to the north-west and allowed some of the million people displaced during the regime and Russian offensive at the beginning of this year to start returning to their homes. But recent weeks have seen fierce fighting between extremists and regime forces and in recent days we are concerned to hear reports of renewed Russian airstrikes, some of which cause civilian casualties on the 8th of June and prompted others to flee. The UK fully supports the request of the UN Special Envoy and Secretary-General for a lasting cessation of hostilities in the north-west and throughout Syria. This Council and the UN have repeatedly warned a continued escalation in fighting would have catastrophic consequences for the three million Syrian civilians in the north-west. We urge all parties to show restraint and to redouble efforts to work together and with the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy to find a political solution, particularly at a time when Covid-19 poses a severe threat in a country already weakened by conflict.

As we agreed unanimously in Resolution 2254, and have reiterated many times since, the only sustainable solution to the crisis in Syria is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. And yet, despite this unanimous agreement, the Syrian regime, aided and abetted by a permanent member of this council, has ignored Resolution 2254 and continued to subjugate the interests of the Syrian people to its pursuit of a military solution. The devastating effect of this policy on the Syrian people and the Syrian economy are increasingly clear and compounded, as we heard from Mr Pedersen, by global factors. The collapsing economy in Syria is exacerbating the plight of civilians in all parts of the country. While Covid-19 and the problems of the Lebanese economy are clearly important, contributing factors, the main cause for the state of the Syrian economy remains the years of conflict, corruption and mismanagement by this regime. Unless the regime resolves to engage genuinely in political dialogue, to focus on reform and address the legitimate concerns and aspirations of the Syrian people, there will be no sustainable solution. While the crisis intensifies, the UK continues to support OCHA and the World Health Organisation in providing lifesaving assistance to those who need it most. Whilst the cross-border aid mechanism is a temporary measure to achieve this, the Secretary-General has made clear in his report that there is not yet any alternative either in the north-west or the north-east.

It is with this in mind that UN Security Council Resolution 2504 must be renewed for a further 12 months and cross-border assistance into the Northeast must be reauthorised.

We note that last week, Assad sacked his Prime Minister, and at the end of May he appointed a new set of governors, no doubt to give the impression that he is doing something to address the problems facing Syria and his failure to deal with them. But that is not what Syrians have been calling for. What they need and what they deserve is a better Syria, and for the concerns and grievances that brought them into the streets in 2011 to be addressed. It is in this connection that we greatly commend the work of Noura Ghazi for the

rights of the families of the detained. We have discussed time and again at these council sessions the need for the regime to engage properly on the detainee's file.

Limited prisoner swaps and not enough. We urge the regime to make widespread releases of political prisoners and vulnerable people and to ensure medical care is available for those still in detention. This is all the more important given the threat posed by Covid-19. We are proud the UK is able to support Noura's work through the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Finally, Mr President, we have heard criticism again today of sanctions against the Syrian regime. The way to achieve the removal of these sanctions is clear. Rather than interfering with aid, bombing schools and hospitals and detaining and torturing its people, the regime must heed the cause of its population and engage seriously with Special Envoy Pedersen and the UN led political process, to achieve a peaceful end to the conflict.

As we say again, goods and medical supplies used for humanitarian purposes are not subject to EU sanctions, which the UK continues to apply, and additional exemptions from sanctions are available for humanitarian activity in Syria. I would note again that the UK and our European partners are among the leading donors to humanitarian aid to Syria, including in regime held areas. Thank you, Mr President.