

# Promoting peace, stability and security in the Central African region

Thank you, Mr President.

We first want to express our condolences to the Government and the people of Burundi for the recent death of President Nkurunziza.

We'd like to express our appreciation for the work the Mission is undertaking across Central Africa to support and promote peace, stability and security in the region.

Although there has been progress in a number of areas, countries across Central Africa continue to face serious political and security challenges that could be exacerbated by COVID-19, as the SRSB has set out for us this morning. It remains vital that all countries continue to work together to mitigate the spread of the virus in ways that will strengthen rather than undermine peace and security and to ensure the protection of civilians. We should ensure that our response is built on the protection and promotion of human rights, inclusive and resilient economic recovery, as well as the maintenance of international peace and security.

The United Kingdom particularly welcomes the ongoing efforts of UNOCA in conflict prevention and mediation efforts across the subregion. We encourage UNOCA to continue to enhance its work on early warning analysis and greater coordination with UN country teams in the subregion.

The United Kingdom shares UNOCA's continuing concerns over the situation in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon. High levels of violence are having tragic yet preventable consequences for civilians. We welcome the Secretary-General's call on armed actors to refrain from attacks against civilians in Cameroon and SRSB Fall's visit to Cameroon, which focused on the North-West and South-West crisis and elections.

The UK continues to call for restraint, an end to the violence and unhindered humanitarian access to affected populations. We urge UN agencies to scale up their rapid response mechanisms with increasing focus on the issue of gender-based violence.

Mr President, we welcome steps taken by the Government of Cameroon to implement recommendations of the national dialogue in October 2019, including passing legislation granting special status to the North-West and South-West regions. Further inclusive dialogue remains vital to progress towards a just, peaceful and durable resolution to the crisis, which meets the reasonable demands of the moderate majority. The United Kingdom continues to urge all parties to remain engaged in peace building efforts. Human rights violations and abuses in the North-West and South-West regions must stop.

The Government of Cameroon's joint investigation with the UN into the

appalling attacks in Ngarbuh in February and the publication of the findings which attributed responsibility to Cameroonian soldiers were welcome steps. We urge the Government of Cameroon to maintain this momentum and ensure the perpetrators are brought to justice. It is critical that human rights, including freedom of speech, association and assembly, are respected and that all reports of human rights violations and abuses are investigated and prosecuted. The right to engage in political debate and commentary must be protected as it is the cornerstone of any democracy. We encourage all of Cameroon's international partners, including UNOCA, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Peacebuilding Commission, as was the AU, ECCAS and the Commonwealth, to continue to support efforts to restore peace in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon.

Mr President, the situation in the Lake Chad basin also remains of concern. The spread COVID-19 and the drawdown of humanitarian actors will compound the worsening humanitarian situation there. The civilian population in areas controlled by non-state armed groups are at particular risk and humanitarian actors must be able to access these populations in order to prevent further deaths from malnutrition and treatable diseases.

The United Kingdom continues to recognise the importance of regional cooperation in supporting stability in the Lake Chad basin, including through the Multi-National Joint Task Force. We express our condolences for the innocent lives lost in attacks by terrorists and violent extremist groups, including the dozens of civilians reportedly killed in Nigeria's Borno state on the 9th of June. We hope that all relevant international partners will continue to support efforts to tackle terrorism and stabilise the region.

Mr President, turning to the situation in Burundi, the UK welcomes the broadly peaceful conduct of elections on the 20th of May, although we have concerns about the fairness of the electoral process. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the importance of all actors preserving a peaceful climate during this period of transition. We look forward to working with the President-Elect and hope to see Burundi forge a path towards stability, democracy and prosperity.

Finally, Mr President, we remain concerned about the security and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic and efforts by armed groups to undermine the peace agreement and progress towards stability. The United Kingdom calls on all armed groups to adhere to the peace agreement and to abide by the Secretary-General's call for an immediate global ceasefire in the fight against COVID-19 ahead of milestone elections in December.

Thank you very much, Mr President.

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# Trio receive jail term for dumping mustard gas bombs in a Lincolnshire lake

A trio of wartime memorabilia hunters have received jail sentences for dumping WWII mustard gas bombs in a Lincolnshire lake – making them the first in the country to be sentenced for possession of a chemical weapon.

Martyn Tasker (40) was jailed for 5 years for possession of firearms, plus 16 months' concurrent sentence for possession of a chemical weapon. His wife Michaela Tasker (32) and friend Stuart Holmes (50) were both handed a 12-month jail sentence suspended for two years for possession of a chemical weapon.

They all pleaded guilty to breaching environmental laws by dumping hazardous material in the lake in addition to the chemical weapons charge.

Holmes also pleaded guilty to dumping a substance likely to harm human health or pollute the environment.

High Court Judge the Honourable Mr Justice Jeremy Baker in Nottingham Crown Court today passed sentence on the joint prosecution by the Environment Agency and the Crown Prosecution Service.

During sentencing, he highlighted that the trio's acts had 'huge and wide-ranging consequences', sparking the largest multi-agency response of its kind – and the situation only came to light when two of the three sought medical help for burns and trouble breathing.

The court heard that in September 2017, the Taskers came across wartime memorabilia in Roughton Woods, near Woodhall Spa – land which was historically requisitioned by the MoD for military training – and dug up a half-buried box of mustard gas bombs.

They messaged a friend who used to repair weapons in the Territorial Army to ask what they'd found, but didn't get an immediate identification.

Ten days later, the pair returned with Mr Holmes and uncovered a total of 16 canisters and three earthenware bottles.

One bottle was prised open – exposing what Mr Tasker called 'really smelly oil' inside – before his friend texted, confirmed the containers were full of mustard gas, and advised alerting the authorities.

But Holmes had already poured the three bottles of mustard gas onto the ground so he could take the empty bottles home with him, along with 10 unopened canisters. The group left the other six canisters, but didn't report their find – despite knowing what a dangerous substance they'd uncovered.

Later that day, they decided to dump the canisters in Stixwould Lake, where Holmes worked. They secretly took a dinghy, rowed out into the lake, and left the containers to sink to the bottom, before burning their clothes.

The mustard gas bombs pulled from Stixwould Lake, Lincolnshire

The next day, Martyn Tasker sought treatment for blisters on his forearms and soon after, Michaela Tasker was treated for breathing difficulties.

Only then did the pair alert the police – but they lied about the circumstances and still didn't tell officers about the bombs they dumped in the lake.

But it wasn't long until inconsistencies emerged from their stories and all three were arrested.

Authorities then launched a major operation to secure the woods, lake, and suspects' homes, and to recover the hazardous chemical.

In what has since been hailed the biggest operation of its kind, Lincolnshire Police led more than two dozen organisations including the Environment Agency, emergency services, and the Army, in an 11-day response.

It saw roads closed, drones deployed, safety cordons put in place, and at least one home evacuated while teams worked around the clock to tackle the tactical challenges of safely removing the bombs from the lake while keeping themselves, and nearby residents, safe.

Environment Agency sonar equipment usually used for fish surveys finally determined the bombs' location in the lake before Royal Navy divers were sent in to safely retrieve them.

The bombs were immediately transferred to the specialist defence science and technology lab in Porton Down. There, testing confirmed that the containers were still sealed and had not leaked.

Everyone involved risked exposure and nasty side effects including burns, blisters, respiratory damage, vomiting and diarrhoea. Multiple public meetings were held to address concerned local residents.

Following the sentencing, Ben Thornely, Incident Management Lead at the Environment Agency, said:

Mustard gas is extremely toxic, so dumping it in a lake near people's homes and in a popular woodland enjoyed by Scouts and dog-walkers was appallingly dangerous.

Luckily the old, corroded containers didn't leak and were safely disposed of by professionals who showed bravery, ingenuity and

collaboration to keep people safe.

This incident was entirely unique, so it's satisfying the judge recognised the grave threat posed and we hope this sentence sends a clear message – we won't hesitate to take action against those who so carelessly put people and our precious environment at risk.

Chief Inspector Phil Vickers, of Lincolnshire Police, said:

This operation challenged the emergency services, military and partner agencies in ways that we have never experienced in Lincolnshire before – in fact some of the issues had never been faced anywhere before.

The operation was testament to the planning and preparation that goes on behind the scenes to protect our communities in times of need, and whilst that has meant flooding and extreme weather in the past, the same principles applied when faced with this new challenge.

Bringing together 27 agencies to protect the community of Woodhall Spa and surrounding area was no mean feat – everyone pulled together and we witnessed bravery from our military, insight from our specialist advisors, ingenuity from the Environment Agency and commitment from all involved.

This was truly a successful multi-agency team effort – we achieved our aim of protecting the community from harm, and used our wide range of skills and experience to do so.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the partners who worked on 'Operation Saddleback' in the initial response and then into the recovery stage led by East Lindsey District Council – Most of all I would like to thank the local community for their patience and support throughout.

The Environment Agency takes all reports of pollution seriously – if you suspect a pollution or other environmental incident, report it to our 24-hour hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

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## New rules on face coverings coming in on Monday will help keep passengers safe

- from Monday 15 June everyone must wear a face covering when travelling by public transport in England
- under the new rules, operators will be able to prevent passengers who refuse to follow the rules from travelling and police will be able to issue fines of £100
- over 3,000 extra staff will be deployed from Monday to support the travelling public, reminding people about the need to wear face coverings and helping vulnerable passengers

New rules requiring passengers to wear a face covering on their journey will come into force on public transport across England from Monday, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has confirmed today (Friday 12 June).

The advice is clear that people should continue to avoid taking public transport where possible, but by mandating the use of face coverings government is asking passengers to play their part in helping to protect each other as the numbers of people travelling gradually start to rise across the country, following the careful easing of restrictions when it's safe to do so.

Over 3,000 extra staff from British Transport Police, Network Rail, Train Operating Companies and Transport for London will be deployed from Monday at key transport hubs and interchanges across England – providing dedicated reassurance, advice and friendly assistance to people as they follow social distancing guidance.

They will also support existing staff by helping to manage congestion.

Alongside this, hundreds of thousands of face coverings will be handed out for passenger use at many locations across the rail network in England from Monday. The one-off initiative, which will run for several days at a number of stations, will see coverings provided free of charge to support passengers and help them travel safely.

Under the changes, operators will be able to stop passengers who refuse to follow the rules from travelling and direct them to leave services. The police and Transport for London authorised personnel will also be able to issue fixed penalty notices of £100, or £50 if paid in 14 days. Exemptions for the use of face coverings will apply to those with certain health conditions, disabled people and children under the age of 11.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

We've seen how the COVID-19 pandemic has unlocked a community spirit right across our nation, and we now need to extend this to our transport network so we can help keep one another safe.

If you do need to travel, in the same way that you would pick up your phone, wallet or keys when you leave the house, please remember to bring a face covering.

Our fantastic transport staff will be on hand to provide help and advice, and free coverings will be given out at key train stations to help kick-start this initiative. This is another small, sensible step we can all take to help us defeat this virus.

The Regulations, which will be made under the Public Health Act 1984 and come into force on Monday, will make face coverings mandatory on buses, coaches, trams, ferries, aircraft and trains. In addition, some operators will amend their conditions of carriage, allowing them to enforce the requirement in a similar way to the rules on having a ticket for travel, meaning they can implement the changes in the way that works best for them.

The change from Monday will coincide with the easing of certain lockdown measures, including the reopening of non-essential retail stores. While social distancing and hand washing remain by far the most important disease prevention measures, when necessary to use public transport, people may be more likely to be in enclosed spaces for longer periods of time where we know there is a greater risk of the spread of the virus and social distancing is likely to be difficult to follow consistently.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) has set out that using face coverings as a precautionary measure in this setting can provide some additional protection to fellow passengers and can help people to avoid unknowingly spreading the virus if they have it, but are not showing symptoms.

The government has been engaging with local authorities and operators ahead of Monday's change. New guidance setting out further details of the changes for operators and passengers will be published ahead of the change coming into force.

Face coverings are not the same as face masks. It is important that people do not use medical grade PPE masks to ensure these remain available for frontline staff. Last month, the government set out advice for people on [how to make their own face coverings](#) easily at home, using scarves or other textile items.

To help support the country's economic recovery the government is also exploring new technologies to fast-track greener air travel.

£500,000 in advanced funding will continue the development of a first-of-a-

kind biofuels plant in Immingham, North East Lincolnshire, which will help to decarbonise both aviation and road freight by converting hundreds of thousands of tonnes of waste into sustainable fuel each year.

And, in a ground-breaking partnership between government and the aviation industry, a new “Jet Zero” Council will work to help make the aviation and aerospace sectors environmentally fit for the future.

Tim Alderslade, Chief Executive of Airlines UK, said:

It’s an excellent initiative and the Transport Secretary should be applauded for demonstrating such a willingness to work with the aviation industry to achieve our commitment to net zero emissions by 2050.

There are huge opportunities for the UK to be a world-leader in sustainable aviation fuels production and electric aviation, creating thousands of high-skilled jobs and major export opportunities in the process. It’s a win-win for all of our regions who will stand to gain from this and for the UK’s decarbonisation efforts, and we’re looking forward to taking part.

See also: [Transport Secretary’s statement on coronavirus \(COVID-19\): 12 June 2020](#)

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## [Transport Secretary’s statement on coronavirus \(COVID-19\): 12 June 2020](#)

Good afternoon.

Welcome to today’s Downing Street press conference.

I’m pleased to be joined today by Professor Stephen Powis, National Medical Director of NHS England.

And again by Sir Peter Hendy, Chair of Network Rail, directing the restart of our transport system.

Let me begin by updating you on the latest information from the Government’s COBR file.

The first slide shows the latest information on infections.

Results from the ONS infection survey published this morning estimate that the number of people who tested positive for coronavirus in England fell from



152,000 between 27 April and 10 May, to 33,000 between 25 May and 7 June.

This is encouraging progress and suggests that around 1 in 1,700 people in the community had coronavirus during the latest period of the survey.

SAGE has also confirmed today that their estimate of the R rate for the UK is unchanged on last week, at 0.7-0.9. We want to keep the R number below 1.0. R is the average number of additional people infected by each infected person.

The second slide shows cases confirmed with a test:

6,434,713 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out or posted out in the UK. This includes 193,253 tests carried out or posted out yesterday.

292,950 people have tested positive, an increase of 1,541 cases since yesterday. The graph shows a steadily falling number of identified cases on a 7-day rolling average, despite the increase in testing.

The third slide shows the latest data from hospitals.

535 people were admitted to hospital with coronavirus in England, Wales and Northern Ireland on 9 June, down from 722 a week earlier, and down from a peak of 3,432 on 1 April.

392 coronavirus patients are currently in mechanical ventilation beds in the UK, down from 571 a week ago, and down from a peak of 3,301 on 12 April.

The fourth slide shows what is happening in hospitals across the country.

There are now 5,607 people in hospital with coronavirus in the UK, down 20% from 7,036 a week ago and down from a peak of 20,697 on 12 April.

As the graphs show, while there is some variation, most nations and regions of the UK are broadly following a similar pattern.

The fifth slide shows the daily figures for those who have sadly lost their lives after testing positive for coronavirus.

Across all settings, the total number of deaths now stands at 41,481. That's an increase of 202 fatalities since yesterday.

When measured by a 7-day rolling average, the daily number of deaths currently stands at 174, down from a peak of 943 on 14 April.

Although the number of deaths is now firmly down, our deepest sympathies go out to all those who have lost loved ones.

Transport is instrumental to our recovery...

To connect people with jobs...

To help level up Britain...

And even to make us a healthier, and more active nation.

But as people start to travel, transport also presents one of our biggest challenges...

How we protect passengers. Prevent the spread of the virus. Even as we become more mobile.

Transport use may be the first occasion since the onset of COVID that we've shared confined spaces with others.

So it's critical that we all take a vigilant and cautious approach over the next few weeks.

I'm just going to say this...

If you can work from home, you should continue to do so.

If you cannot work from home, you should try to avoid public transport.

If you must use public transport, you should travel at quieter times of day.

And if you're an employer, you should do everything in your power to prevent staff from travelling... unless it's absolutely vital...

...and please do allow staff to travel at quieter times.

From Monday, it becomes mandatory in England to wear a face covering on public transport – that includes trains, buses, trams, ferries and planes.

A 'face covering' does not mean a surgical mask.

Face coverings can be made at home and you can find the guidance at GOV.UK.

As we move to recovery, it's more important than ever to protect each other...

Preventing those showing no symptoms from infecting others.

I know there's huge public support for compulsory face coverings...

They show respect for our fellow travellers.

But for clarity, transport operators will be able to refuse permission to travel where someone isn't using a face covering...

And this weekend I am taking powers through the Public Health Act leading to fines for non-compliance too.

We'll take a gentle approach to enforcement during the first couple of days.

And help will be at hand.

In addition to British Transport Police, and staff working for Network Rail, TfL and Transport Operators...

In the coming weeks we'll also deploy Journey Makers to assist and remind

commuters of the need to wear a face covering...

Plus the Safer Transport campaign will provide plenty of reminders at bus stops, rail stations and on social media.

Remembering your face covering should be the same as picking up your phone, wallet or purse when you leave home.

Please read the guidance, ensure you have a face covering and protect your fellow commuters.

This crisis has tested our nation. Yet through adversity comes possibility...

A greener transport future within our grasp.

For example, through the [£2 billion investment](#) we're making through the cycling and walking programme.

The challenge is to make transport...

Currently our biggest emitter of greenhouse gases...

Part of the solution, not the problem.

Take the aviation sector, which has had an impossible few months...

Yet, despite the obvious challenges, there's a real determination within the industry to have a greener restart.

So we're bringing together leaders from aviation, environmental groups and government...

To form the Jet Zero Council.

This group will be charged with making net zero emissions possible for future flights.

Our goal – within a generation – will be to demonstrate flight across the Atlantic, without harming the environment...

And today we're backing a company called Velocys who are building a plant for aviation biofuels in Lincolnshire.

I'm also excited about a Cambridge University and Whittle Labs project to accelerate technologies for zero carbon flight.

The shared experience of fighting coronavirus has changed us in many ways.

Although it has forced us apart, it has also brought us together.

Although it has tested us, it has also shown us at our very best.

And although it has made us reflect on the past, it's focussed on those plans for the future.

But now, as we become more mobile, we must not forget that this insidious virus is still a threat.

That not only means avoiding public transport if you can...

It also means from Monday, wearing a face covering on public transport.

Avoiding gatherings of more than 6 people...

Including to protest.

I understand that people want to show their passion for issues that they care deeply about.

And we must never be complacent about stamping out racism and discrimination in this country.

But please. For the sake of your health, and that of your friends and families. Don't attend mass gatherings.

We've come a long way.

As we move towards recovery, let's protect lives, as well as livelihoods.

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## [International Ministers discuss a new Coalition for the Sahel](#)

The speech below was delivered by Africa Minister James Duddridge on Friday 12 June at a virtual meeting of international Ministers to discuss the new Coalition for the Sahel – an international initiative to support the security, political and development efforts in the region.

The Sahel region is vulnerable to insecurity and drought, and encompasses Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad.

### **Speech**

It is excellent to be with you to welcome the Coalition for the Sahel.

I am delighted that, today, the UK Minister for the Armed Forces, James Heapey, announced the extension of the UK's deployment of three Chinook helicopters to Operation Barkhane. As you know, the UK is also deploying 250 troops to MINUSMA later this year.

Beyond our security contributions, the UK is also the third largest humanitarian donor to the region and has provided over £500 million in bilateral development and humanitarian assistance since 2015.

This support continues to grow. A significant part of our £764 million contribution to the global COVID-19 effort will be channelled to the region.

And I'm delighted that the UK has just disbursed £10.5 million of funding to Education Cannot Wait, for use in the Sahel. This money, which delivers on Prime Minister Boris Johnson's commitment at last year's G7 meeting, will be fast-tracked to help children access education in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.

The establishment of the Sahel Coalition is a positive step that the UK welcomes. I would like to highlight three ways in which the Coalition can support progress in the region.

First, it provides an opportunity for us to develop a joint vision for tackling instability and driving forward development in the region. This will increase coherence and allow us to hold each other to account on our commitments.

Second, it will help us to focus on tackling the drivers of instability. I saw the potential for joint work to address these issues when I visited Mali in 2016 and saw international efforts to build Malian security capacity and, more recently, when I was in Nouakchott in February for the G5 and Sahel Alliance meetings. I am pleased to see that the Coalition's structures reinforce the principle of ownership from those in the region.

Third, the Coalition provides a timely opportunity to make sure that respect for humanitarian principles and human rights law are woven into every aspect of our activity. We welcome that this is reflected in the Coalition's terms of reference. Humanitarian actors must be able to access those most in need, through a neutral, needs-based response.

We welcome the role the Coalition will play in the Sahel and look forward to contributing to its important work.

Thank you.