

Myanmar: UK national statement after Security Council closed VTC

The UK welcomes the briefing on the situation in Myanmar that Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener provided Security Council members today. The UK requested this meeting because we are concerned by the recent escalation of conflict between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army in Rakhine and Chin States, and the heavy toll this is taking on civilians at the time of a global Covid-19 crisis.

The conflict has already led to a spike in internal displacement, additional restrictions on humanitarian access, and an increased number of civilian casualties, including the killing of World Health Organisation employee U Pyae Sone Win Maung on 20 April. All this comes at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic puts vulnerable populations at risk of a humanitarian emergency, especially refugees, IDPs, and the Rohingya community who face additional restrictions.

The UK recognises that Myanmar is taking steps to address the pandemic. These include measures to slow the spread of the virus; a public awareness campaign led by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi; a Covid-19 Economic Relief Plan to alleviate some of the economic hardships; and a joint commission between the Government of Myanmar and ethnic armed organisations to coordinate efforts against Covid-19 across the whole country.

The UK supports these initial positive steps. However, while conflict continues in Rakhine and Chin States, vulnerable people there are at even greater risk than elsewhere from Covid-19. The conflict also makes it more challenging to address the long-term underlying causes of conflict in Rakhine and to create conditions conducive to the safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation of Rohingya refugees, which remains an important and urgent priority. In this light, the UK expresses concern about refugees risking perilous boat journeys in the Bay of Bengal where a regional solution is essential.

Therefore:

1. Noting the Tatmadaw's announcement of a unilateral ceasefire on 9 May, the UK urges the Tatmadaw to extend this to include an immediate cessation of hostilities in Rakhine and Chin States.
2. The UK encourages the Myanmar authorities and all other actors to ensure unhindered humanitarian access to allow for safe and independent delivery of humanitarian supplies to all parts of Rakhine and Chin States, including IDP camps.
3. Noting the steps taken across Myanmar to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic,

the UK urges the lifting of restrictions on internet access and action to ensure freedom of movement and equitable access to healthcare for all communities in Rakhine State, including conflict-affected populations, IDPs, and the Rohingya community.

4. Noting the National Strategy on Resettlement of IDPs and Closure of IDP Camps and recognising the challenges to its implementation created by Covid-19, the UK encourages Myanmar to ensure that any work to find durable and dignified solutions for IDPs is carried out in consistency with international best practice and the standards set out in the national strategy including on consultation.

The UK continues to appreciate the efforts of the UN, ASEAN and many donor countries in the support they are giving to Myanmar at this time, and underscores also its appreciation towards Bangladesh for its efforts providing protection and assistance to refugees until they are able to return to Myanmar.

[Constructive engagement in the UN-led process is needed to achieve peace in Yemen](#)

Thank you, Mr President. Let me also thank Martin and Ramesh for their briefings. I find myself feeling a little, "Here we are again." We're thanking the two of you for your ongoing and painstaking efforts in extremely difficult circumstances – Martin, for your resilience in trying constantly and consistently to shepherd the parties into talks, and Ramesh, for you and your team's long-term efforts in what is one of the worst humanitarian situations in the world. So it's with a very genuine sense that I thank you on behalf of the United Kingdom and your teams for what you're doing.

Colleagues, at a time the Yemenis are reflecting and offering each other Ramadan blessings, they're being hit by the plight of COVID-19. Official figures, as Ramesh has said, told us that COVID-19 has caused well over 50 deaths. And UK-funded modelling suggests the number of Yemenis suffering from COVID-19 is already in the thousands. The United Kingdom has provided over \$940 million since the beginning of the pandemic to support the global response to COVID-19. And we've also pledged \$2 billion dollars to GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, to vaccinate 75 million children against deadly infectious disease around the world.

But I want to encourage the government and the Houthi authorities to continue engaging with the United Nations to ensure an effective national response. We

also call on the Houthi authorities to be transparent in reporting cases so that the World Health Organization can identify requirements, procure equipment and ensure supplies reach those in need.

Martin Griffiths's proposals for a political framework and a nationwide ceasefire really are the only game in town. There is no military option. We've proved that over several years. Those delaying agreements and delaying talks are simply prolonging the misery of the people of Yemen for no obvious strategic or tactical advantage. So the United Kingdom is resolute in supporting Martin Griffiths's efforts, and I welcome the close coordination of P5 Ambassadors to Yemen in this endeavour.

I welcome your update, Martin, that you have received responses to your most recent proposals from the government of Yemen. And so I urge also the Houthis to do the same. You said that they were engaged, but I think we need more than engagement. Yemenis cannot wait any longer. And constructive engagement in the UN-led process is the only way to achieve the peace they deserve. And I want to echo Martin's comments on the importance of the inclusion of women in both his Advisory Council but also in the talks process.

In the light of the COVID-19 outbreak, I want to welcome again the unilateral ceasefire and its subsequent extension announced by the Saudi-led coalition. It is important that fighting does not hamper efforts to tackle the outbreak. This move, which has not been reciprocated, demonstrates the serious intent of the coalition to bring an end to this dreadful conflict.

And during this particularly crucial time in the peace process, I want to note with concern the evidence documented in the United States' letter of 21st of April to the Sanctions Committees is established under Resolutions 2231 to 2140. That letter outlines evidence collected during two interdictions of vessels containing significant amounts of weapons and arms of apparent Iranian origin. I welcome the sharing of such information; I encourage others to do the same. Such arms shipments pose a grave impediment to the cause of peace in Yemen, and they must stop.

The tragic situation in Yemen has been complicated further following, to say the least, the poorly timed declaration of the Southern Transitional Council. And I want to welcome the swiftly agreed Security Council statement on the 29th of April regarding that declaration and highlight the ongoing risk of violent clashes in the South. All parties have recommitted their support for the Riyadh Agreement, and so I call on them to engage with the Saudi-led efforts and de-escalate and implement their obligations under the agreement.

We welcome the announcement that a humanitarian pledging conference will take place virtually on the 2nd of June, and Ramesh gave us details of that. And we strongly urge all donors to step up and provide significant and timely humanitarian funding. The United Kingdom provided over a billion dollars in funding since the conflict began. And in this year, we will also be making a substantial pledge.

I note with concern, though, that across Yemen, unprecedented access restrictions remain. In the north, the Houthis must deliver on the minimum

operating requirements that the international community has clearly set out. These include swiftly approving all sub-agreements, fully implementing the World Food Programme's retargeting and biometric pilot, and allowing humanitarian agencies to operate independently and freely. Donors will only be able to give funding if such restrictions are lifted and humanitarian organisations are able to deliver assistance effectively. And we are supportive of UN agency efforts to do everything they can to reduce risk and ensure aid is reaching those in need.

We remain extremely concerned that the Central Bank of Yemen will soon run out of foreign currency reserves, causing an economic collapse of humanitarian and political consequences. Significant external financial assistance to Central Bank of Yemen is urgently needed to keep imports coming in, and that risk is now even more unpredictable due to the secondary impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak. It is imperative that the government of Yemen urgently comes up with a credible plan that reassures potential donors the Riyadh agreement is enacted with the Central Bank of Yemen remaining operationally neutral as negotiations proceed.

We've talked previously in this Council about the devastating impact that an oil leak from the SAFER oil tanker would have on Yemen and the region. I urge the Houthis again to either allow the removal of the oil or to allow a repair mission to proceed. Continued inaction on this issue is reckless, dangerous and threatens an environmental and humanitarian catastrophe.

I also want to note that prior to Ramadan, the Houthis promised to release members of the persecuted Baha'i faith. I call on them to do so, and all who have been wrongly detained – including journalists, as set out by Martin Griffiths today – and that is especially important in the context of COVID-19.

Finally, let me finish where I began. I want to thank Martin again for his continued efforts. He was right to talk at the beginning of his remarks of bringing us hope over progress, just as he is right to say that the hope is realistic. And I call on all in Yemen to bring real hope to the people of Yemen.

Thank you, Mr President.

Transport Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 14 May 2020

Good afternoon and welcome to today's Downing Street press conference.

I'm pleased to be joined by Professor Jonathan Van-Tam.

Latest data

Let me start by updating you on the latest information from the Government's COBR data file.

Through our monitoring and testing programme, as of today:

- 2,219,281 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including a new record of 126,064 tests carried out yesterday
- 233,151 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 3,446 cases since yesterday
- 11,041 people are in hospital with COVID-19, down 14% from a week ago, when 12,802 patients were hospitalised
- and sadly, of those tested positive for coronavirus, 33,614 have now died – that's an increase of 428 fatalities since yesterday.

This new figure includes deaths in all settings not just in hospitals.

Our deepest sympathies go out to the families and friends as the nation battles to defeat the disease.

Main content

Today I'm going to set out how – whilst the country has been at a virtual standstill – this downtime has been used to fix and upgrade the nation's road and rail infrastructure, along with plans to help our economy bounce back.

But before I set out today's transport announcements, let me briefly remind you of the government's roadmap out of this crisis.

As you know, we have established a new COVID Alert System, with five levels – based primarily on the R value and the number of cases.

Throughout the lockdown, we have been at Level 4.

Thanks to the British people, we have brought the R down and we can now begin moving carefully to Level 3.

From this week we're at Step 1, meaning that:

- those who cannot work from home should now speak to their employer about going back to work
- you can now spend time outdoors and exercise as much as you like
- you can meet one person who's not part of your household outside, provided you stay 2 metres apart

Step 2 – from June 1, at the earliest, as long as it's safe, we aim to allow:

- primary schools to reopen for some pupils, in smaller class sizes
- non-essential retail to start to reopen
- cultural and sporting events to take place behind closed doors, without crowds

And then Step 3 – no earlier than July 4, and again, only if the data says it's safe, we aim to allow:

- more businesses to open, including those offering personal care, those in the leisure sector, together with places of worship

We can control this virus if we stay alert.

But what does staying alert actually mean?

Staying alert, for the vast majority of people still means staying at home as much as possible, and working from home if you can.

But it also means:

- limiting contact with other people
- keeping your distance if you go out
- washing your hands regularly
- wearing a face covering in enclosed spaces where it's difficult to be socially distant – for example on public transport
- and if you or anyone in your household has symptoms, you all need to self-isolate

If everyone stays alert and follows the rules, we can control coronavirus by keeping the R down and reducing the number of infections.

This is how we can continue to save lives, and livelihoods, as we begin as a nation to recover from coronavirus.

Transport context

Today I want to update you on the measures we're taking to speed up our economic recovery while keeping people safe.

For 2 months, we've remained in lockdown, travelling as little as possible, and in doing so, the whole country has protected the NHS and helped reduce the number of COVID infections.

But as we begin making tentative steps towards restarting our economy and people in some sectors who can't work from home begin to return to their workplaces, it is clear that transport has a critical role to play.

Last Saturday, I explained why it's our civic duty to avoid public transport, if at all possible.

Because, even when we have 100% of services up and running, there may only be socially-distanced space available for 1 in 10 passengers.

Therefore, in order to help reduce crowding, we set out a [£2 billion programme to put cycling and walking](#) at the heart of transport, with £250 million emergency spending already underway.

Over the past week, we have followed this up by publishing 3 pieces of

detailed guidance.

First, [for local authorities in England](#), explaining how they should prepare for significantly-increased numbers of cyclists and pedestrians.

Next, [for the transport sector](#), to ensure they provide safer services for those travelling, and safer workplaces for their staff.

And third, and most importantly, [for passengers](#).

We're asking the public to help ensure that the transport system does not become significantly overwhelmed by returning commuters.

The guidance makes clear, that if you can't walk or cycle but you do have access to a car, please use it, rather than travelling by bus, train or tram....

Especially where that public transport is liable to be overcrowded.

And, for those people who absolutely need to use public transport...

It also explains how you can best protect yourself and those around you.

Transport upgrades during lockdown

In the coming weeks, as we carefully and cautiously restart sectors of our economy, and people begin to travel once again...

They should notice that, whilst the country has been in down-time...

...with the roads and railways quiet...

We've been busy...

Getting on with essential work....

Fixing the nation's infrastructure...

So we can recover faster when the time comes.

This upgrade programme...

...the kind of work that – at any other time – would cause inevitable disruption and service delays, whilst costing the taxpayer more...

...has instead been carried out in previously unimaginable circumstances of a largely unused transport network.

For example, we completed 419 separate Network Rail projects over Easter, with a further 1,000 upgrades being carried out throughout the May bank holidays.

Meanwhile, Highways England has been busy accelerating maintenance projects on the nation's roads.

Last week, for example, we opened the vital A14 upgrade 7 months ahead of schedule.

This is a route normally used by 85,000 drivers daily, which will dramatically improve access to the UK's largest container port at Felixstowe and permanently boost the distribution of goods around the UK.

As Northern Powerhouse minister – I can report that – in the North, we've delivered £96 million of rail infrastructure improvements during April.

And throughout the country, we've accelerated maintenance projects on road and rail...

Whilst always sticking to PHE safety guidelines....

So that altogether, Highways England has delivered over £200 million of upgrades, and Network Rail £550 million worth, during April alone.

I'd like to thank the army of transport and construction workers who have been grafting very hard throughout the lockdown.

Building future infrastructure

But to make sure that Britain is ready to bounce-back from coronavirus...

Today I can announce nearly £2 billion to upgrade our roads and railways, to put our transport infrastructure in the best possible shape and to get our economy growing once again.

This package includes £1.7 billion for local roads – making journeys smoother and safer for drivers, hauliers, cyclists, motorcyclists, pedestrians and others...

By filling millions of dangerous potholes, we will make our roads safer – and encourage more people to cycle, or even take part in the upcoming e-scooter trials...

Helping more people play a part in relieving pressure on public transport.

This investment will also help fix damage caused by winter flooding, repair roads and bridges, and fund numerous road improvement schemes.

As more people become mobile again, we'll be building a network of rapid charging stations for electric cars...

Including a big expansion of rapid-charging facilities at motorway service stations...

Helping the country to lock-in the dramatic air-quality improvements we've experienced during the coronavirus lockdown.

A better future

Amid all the sad news and tragedy of loved ones we've lost, we've somehow managed to do things in weeks that would normally take years...

Building new hospitals...

Moving public services online...

Making instant reforms and fast-tracking new laws...

Extraordinary changes in the way that employers and employees work...

Effectively taking large swathes of the economy online almost overnight...

Now we want to keep this momentum going.

If building a new hospital takes 2 weeks, why should building a new road still take as long as 20 years?

If GP surgeries can quickly move online, why are most rail passengers still travelling on cardboard tickets?

We must exploit our newfound capacity to respond at pace and apply it to rapidly improving our infrastructure.

And we must examine why it is that bureaucratic bindweed makes British infrastructure some of the costliest and slowest in Europe to build.

Because whilst many will continue to work from home even after this immediate crisis...

...both the long-term transport trend and the pressing need to level-up communities across the country, dictate that infrastructure will be even more important in stimulating our recovery and supporting new jobs.

So by combining fast home-internet access, with vastly upgraded transport connections, we can help revive many of our small and medium-sized towns which over decades have been left behind.

This has been a devastating start to the year, not just for Britain, but for the world.

And we are only at Phase 1 of the recovery plan.

But we all know that it is our reaction to adversity that will ultimately define how we recover.

We must harness our approach to tackling the pandemic...

And apply it to rebuilding our own infrastructure.

With the same swift action, innovation, and collective determination that has characterised the past few months....

And in doing so, we can emerge stronger.

Funding for Dumfries and Galloway communities

News story

Magnox and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority have announced a £25,000 cash boost to help support vulnerable groups in Dumfries and Galloway.



Newstart Recycle are one of the beneficiaries of the grant in Dumfries and Galloway

The money has been granted to Dumfries and Galloway Council to support the community during the coronavirus pandemic.

The funds will be administered on the council's behalf by the Safe and Healthy Action Partnership (SHAP) and will be given to day centres in Annan; Ecclefechan; Moffat; Langholm and Gretna. Kates Kitchen, Annandale and Eskdale Food Train, Aberlour Trust and Newstart Recycle will also benefit.

The funding forms part of the 12 grants, worth £300,000 in total, Magnox has made available to local authorities or charities where a Magnox site is located.

Gwen Parry-Jones, Magnox Chief Executive, said:

Many community groups are carrying out positive work, supporting the most vulnerable in their areas. This work is vital, and a key part of Magnox's response to COVID-19 is to help other organisations deal with the pandemic wherever we can.

In this time of national crisis, Magnox has agreed with the NDA

that we should make available up to £25,000 at each site from the Magnox Socio-economic Scheme for use by local community groups on COVID-19 related activities. Magnox is committed to assisting the communities surrounding our sites, as our communities have supported us for over 50 years, and we hope this funding will go some way to supporting the essential work being delivered.

Elaine Lamont, Public Health Practitioner and Chair of the SHAP said: "There is some absolutely amazing work happening across Annandale and Eskdale to provide vital support to people who may be struggling during these challenging times. This funding will provide some extra help to our local services and community groups so that they can continue to reach out and provide a crucial lifeline to those in greatest need."

Council Leader Elaine Murray said: "The Covid-19 emergency is clearly an unprecedented challenge for us all. Our Council is committed to supporting vulnerable people in our community. This funding from Magnox to help people in Annandale and Eskdale is very welcome and I would like thank them for their generous contribution. It will make a significant contribution to the local agencies striving to look after vulnerable people in difficult circumstances."

Deputy Leader Rob Davidson added: "Magnox has been a long-standing supporter of its local community in Annandale and Eskdale. This contribution is very much appreciated as the council and partner agencies work tirelessly to ensure that vulnerable people are looked after during the Covid-19 crisis."

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1. 14 May 2020

We have added quotes from Dumfries and Galloway Council

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[A new bridge opens – a major milestone for Mytholmroyd flood defences](#)

The new bridge, designed to help reduce flood risk in Mytholmroyd, is planned to open to motorists and pedestrians next week on Monday 18 May.

This is a major milestone in the £35m Mytholmroyd Flood Alleviation Scheme

which will better protect around 400 properties.

The existing Caldene Bridge will start to be demolished shortly after and excavation works is already underway to widen this section of the river. All work is being carried out in line with government and industry guidance for safe working during the coronavirus pandemic.

The area beneath the new bridge will be nearly twice the size of the old bridge, which will help better protect homes and businesses from the risk of flooding in the future.

Replacement of the existing Caldene Bridge is a vital part of the Mytholmroyd flood defences. The old bridge was a major constriction to flood flow, and contributed towards the Boxing Day 2015 flood event in the village. Widening the river channel at Calder Grove, will have a significant benefit for reducing flood risk in the village and this required a new wider bridge.

The new bridge has been built at the widened channel, 30m upstream of the existing bridge. It is a two-span structure, with a central pier and is more than 12m wider than the existing Caldene Bridge. The height of the bridge deck was dictated by the existing road levels on both Caldene Avenue and Burnley Road

Paul Swales, senior flood risk advisor for the Environment Agency, said:

Completing the construction of the new bridge is a major milestone for our project team as this has been by far the most complex part of the Mytholmroyd Flood Alleviation Scheme – we have had to carry out diversions of many utility services.

It is a vital element of the new flood defences as the new bridge structure, channel widening, together with the new raised bridge parapets and flood defence walls will reduce flood risk for the local community.

However it is still really important that people sign up for our free flood warning service as we can never completely eradicate the risk of flooding, especially with climate change.

Calderdale Council's Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Resources, Cllr Jane Scullion, said:

We're very pleased to see another major component of the Mytholmroyd Flood Alleviation scheme nearing completion.

The scale and complexity of this project cannot be overemphasised, and we would like to thank those who live in, work in and travel through the area for their continued patience during this important work to help protect the village from future flooding. There is still more to do but this is a key part of in the overall work to make the valley safer.

The flood defences have been developed by the Environment Agency in partnership with Calderdale Council. Design and construction of the scheme is being carried out by main contractor VBA, a joint venture comprising VolkerStevin, Boskalis Westminster and SNC-Lavalin's Atkins business. Work is continuing on the scheme in line with government and industry guidelines around safety during the coronavirus pandemic.

The cost of rebuilding the bridge has been around £7m from Government funding with a £1.6m contribution from the European Union, through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This funding was provided under Priority Axis 5 of the ERDF which promotes climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management.

For more information about the Mytholmroyd Flood Alleviation scheme [visit](#)

If you have any queries about the scheme please email:
mytholmroydFAS@environment-agency.gov.uk

To register for the Environment Agency's flood warning service [visit](#) or contact Floodline on tel: 0345 988 1188. If you are already registered, do check that your details are correct.