

# COP26 President speech at opening of Placencia Ambition Forum

COP26 President Alok Sharma gave a [video speech](#) at the opening of the Placencia Ambition Forum on Monday 20 April 2020:

We can't all meet in person today.

It is only right that we follow the best scientific advice on COVID-19 and do everything we can to avoid the spread of this deadly disease.

We must also follow the best scientific advice on climate change.

It tells us failure to act will have irreversible consequences.

As temperatures continue to rise, droughts and heatwaves will become more common.

Crops will fail.

Sea levels will rise.

Hurricanes will become stronger and more intense.

Lives will be lost.

Communities uprooted.

Nature and biodiversity will be devastated.

And a catastrophic economic cost will be exacted.

We know that many people are already feeling these devastating effects.

Whether we live in the South or the North, the East or the West, we share one life-giving but fragile planet. And all our futures are intrinsically linked.

As incoming Presidency, with our partners Italy, we pledge to keep a focus on increasing climate ambition and action, even through this very difficult period.

I wanted to commend Belize for its leadership in hosting the Forum and ensuring the voices of the most vulnerable are heard.

The Placencia Ambition Forum serves as a timely reminder that climate change is an existential issue.

The world needs to see more ambition to tackle the climate crisis. More ambition on adaptation and resilience, more ambition on mitigation, and more ambition on support to vulnerable countries. And that ambition needs to

translate into real world action.

Every country must come forward with the highest possible ambition in their nationally determined contributions and long-term strategies.

I want to recognise those countries that have already shown leadership with more ambitious NDCs – the Marshall Islands, Suriname, Norway and, of course, just recently, Chile.

I hope many more will follow in their footsteps. The UK will play its part and come forward with an increased NDC well ahead of COP26.

Together we can build resilience in our communities, societies and economies, creating jobs and tackling climate change.

Our Presidency is committed to raising the voices of those most affected, but least able to address climate change. We will work to ensure these communities are supported to recover in a clean, resilient, inclusive and healthy way.

To do so we need to transform global financial flows. We will use our presidency to unlock action by the financial sector.

I look forward to welcoming you to COP26.

The focus of the forum is to drive climate action and ambition in Nationally Determined Contributions in the lead up to [COP26](#) and beyond in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

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## [Protecting Civilians affected by Conflict-induced Hunger](#)

Thank you very much, Mr President.

I would like you to, if you may, Jose, to pass on our welcome and thanks to the Foreign Minister for being with us today. And I wanted before him to congratulate the Dominican Republic on your efforts to ensure that this issue was properly discussed and debated and also to ensure transparency for the Security Council in so doing. So thank you for that.

Let me also thank our briefers today but more importantly, thank them and their teams – and their vast teams, in many cases – for the actions that they are carrying out around the world in some of the most dangerous places. And it's particularly nice to see David Beasley back and well.

Our briefers today have rung a huge alarm bell about situations across the

world and they've all made clear that as the world faces this COVID-19 pandemic, this issue presents an ever more urgent challenge. Many people will die from this virus, but it's a sad reality that every year many people will also die from food insecurity caused by conflict. And the risk of a further knock on impact from the virus on the food supply was made very clear by our briefers. And put simply, have a better chance of survival. And so I would urge all member states today to respond generously to existing humanitarian appeals.

Now, the UK is one of the largest humanitarian donors but humanitarian aid is a last resort. It's a sign of political failing.

And Mr President, I want to focus today on two countries on this Council's agenda, Yemen and Syria, whilst recognising the important comments made by our briefers on other situations in the world.

In Yemen, more than half of the population – a staggering 15.9 million people – are severely food insecure. And we therefore urge the Yemeni political leaders, particularly the Houthis, to respond constructively to the call by the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to immediately cease hostilities, focus on reaching a negotiated settlement, and do everything possible to counter a potentially disastrous outbreak of COVID-19. And that must include in facilitating unimpeded humanitarian access. Taking these actions is more important than ever to avoid a worsening of food insecurity and the already dire humanitarian situation in Yemen. Political leaders must now show real leadership and they must act in the interests of their people.

In Northwest Syria, the United Nations reports increased rates of stunting from malnutrition. Today, three out of ten displaced children under five years old in the Idlib region are stunted. The Syrian regime will not allow aid to flow from Damascus to the civilians in that area. So those children, like millions of other civilians in Northwest Syria, are entirely reliant on the cross-border delivery of humanitarian aid. It is crucial, therefore, that this Council renews the UN Security Council Resolution 2504 before it expires in July to allow the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to deliver the food, medical items and other assistance that people so desperately require.

And beyond the Northwest, we are deeply concerned for the fate of civilians all over Syria and needs to see effective humanitarian access across the country. And that concern is why the UK has given over \$4 billion since the conflict began to Syria and Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries.

Mr President, it is unacceptable, illegal and inhumane to use hunger as a weapon of war. We call on all parties to conflict to recall their obligations under international humanitarian law, protect the most vulnerable, including women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons, refugees and internally displaced persons.

But, Mr President, this Council's response to this challenge must include horizon scanning for future problems. In UNSCR 2417 the Council asked the Secretary-General to provide it with early warning about conflict-related

famine and food insecurity conditions. Through this mechanism, the Council must consider the situations in Yemen and in South Sudan. It is our hope that the Secretary-General will consider further ways to continue responding in a timely manner to this request and member states should not constrain his ability to do so.

This council must also be prepared to take robust action to ensure the flow of humanitarian assistance to populations in need. In Security Council Resolution 2417 the Council recalled that it could consider adopting targeted sanctions where appropriate and in line with existing practices, which would apply to individuals or entities obstructing the delivery or distribution of humanitarian assistance to people in need whilst ensuring they do not negatively impact principal humanitarian assistance. So just as it is vital, this Council takes steps to ensure that humanitarian assistance can be received quickly and that the necessary exemptions are made from sanctions regimes to do so, as we have done recently in respect to North Korea. So too, we must pursue those individual actors impeding aid getting to those who so desperately need it.

Mr President, in 2018, at the adoption of Resolution 2417, the United Kingdom's representative concluded his intervention by saying "the lesson is clear: humanitarian aid can only ever be a sticking plaster. The solutions are political".

Mr President, that remains the case.

Thank you.

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## **Extension of Peter Clarke's tenure as HM Chief Inspector of Prisons**

The Secretary of State has announced an extension of up to six months to Peter Clarke's term of office as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, commencing 1 May 2020.

A campaign to recruit a new Chief Inspector has concluded without an appointment, and a new campaign will be run. Mr Clarke's extension will enable appropriate oversight and scrutiny at a critical time for HMPPS, until such point when the new appointee is confirmed.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons is a Royal appointment. Extensions are regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, and have been made in line with the Governance Code on Public Appointments.

HMIP is an independent inspectorate, reporting directly to Ministers, but operating independently of Government and the services under its scrutiny.

HMCIP has a duty to report on conditions for and treatment of those in prisons, young offender institutions, secure training centres, police and court custody suites, customs custody facilities and military detention in England and Wales, and immigration detention facilities within the UK.

## **Biography**

Peter Clarke was appointed to the role of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons on 1 February 2016. Mr Clarke is a retired senior police officer, who served in the Metropolitan Police Service for more than 30 years. He rose to the rank of Assistant Commissioner and also served as Head of the Anti-Terrorist Branch and National Co-ordinator of Terrorist Investigations. In 2014 he was appointed Education Commissioner for Birmingham to conduct an inquiry into the allegations concerning Birmingham schools arising from the "Trojan Horse" letter. Mr Clarke also served on the Board of the Charity Commission until January 2016.

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## **Lord Gardiner of Kimble's statement at an Extraordinary Virtual meeting of the G20 Agriculture Ministers**

May I thank the presidency for convening this meeting at such a critical time. Across the world, so many people have been affected, and her Majesty's Government and all in the United Kingdom are mindful of what is happening in our own country and across the world in these difficult times.

As we all know, this virus knows no borders. We must ensure a coordinated global response by increasing our international dialogue and cooperation to tackle the immediate challenges and ensure high standards of biosecurity which will be paramount to prevent similar events happening again.

As the Ministers responsible for agriculture, we need to ensure the flow of critical agricultural products, foodstuffs, products and services essential for food production and their distribution along food supply chains.

Alongside other measures, the UK has temporarily relaxed elements of competition law to enable supermarkets to work more closely together to ensure people can access the products they need. And delivery hours to supermarkets are being extended to ensure shelves can be replenished more quickly.

Farmers, seasonal workers and input and output distributing agents must be able to move safely as required. I commend the efforts of all workers supporting the immediate and longer term fight against this pandemic.

It is imperative that we keep our markets and borders open and work together to ensure the continued flow of international trade. Global food security can only be achieved by ensuring supply and access to food everywhere.

Those living with low food security are especially vulnerable to the impacts of disruptions to the food system caused by COVID-19. This is exacerbated by existing vulnerabilities caused by climate change and natural disasters. Our response must recognise this.

I would like to praise the work of the Agriculture Market Information System and the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program. These organisations can assist our efforts by tracking the impacts of the pandemic and promoting transparency.

We will continue our work on protecting the foundations of all food production – a healthy environment and a stable climate. We must commit to supporting an environmentally sustainable and inclusive recovery, consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement.

The verdict is clear: working together is integral to protecting human life. My officials and I stand ready to work with our partners around the world to combat COVID-19 together.

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## [Aldi joins Free School Meal voucher scheme](#)



Aldi has confirmed today (Tuesday 21 April) it has signed up to the national voucher scheme, which is one of the ways the Government is supporting children on free school meals during the Covid-19 outbreak.

Aldi joins a range of supermarkets including Sainsbury's, Tesco, Asda, Morrisons, Waitrose and M&S where vouchers can be redeemed. The Department for Education continues to work to get more shops to join the scheme as soon as possible.

Schools can continue to provide meals and food parcels for collection or

delivery themselves, but where this is not possible, the scheme allows schools to provide vouchers to families electronically, or as a gift card in the post for those without internet access.

By giving headteachers flexibility on how they can get meals or shop vouchers to these children, they can make the most appropriate decisions for families in their communities, and provide immediate reassurance that this important support will continue.

The Department has worked closely with the provider Edenred to expand the system and ensure that there is capacity to add Aldi to the list of supermarkets.

Minister for Children and Families Vicky Ford said:

We are focused on making sure that the 1.3 million disadvantaged children who would normally have a free school meal do not go hungry as a result of staying home to protect the NHS and save lives.

We encourage schools to work with their suppliers to arrange food parcels or collections. Where this is not possible, we have launched a national scheme for schools to provide supermarket vouchers. So far, Edenred report that £15 million worth of vouchers have been converted into supermarket gift cards by schools and families.

Today I am pleased to announce that supermarket Aldi has joined the list of supermarkets who can accept the national scheme gift cards and parents will be able to order Aldi vouchers from the week commencing 27 April.

The value of vouchers redeemed continues to increase rapidly as more families benefit from the national system, with £4 million redeemed between Monday (20 April) and Tuesday (21 April).

More information on the free school meals voucher scheme is available in the [guidance](#).

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1. 21 April 2020

Added clarification on value of vouchers redeemed.

2. 21 April 2020

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