

Stressing the imperative of a lasting ceasefire in Idlib

Thank you, Mr President.

I think the worst nightmare on Idlib has come to pass. As Mark just told us, the UN have been warning of this day for a long time and this is in an environment where nightmares happen 24/7. Idlib has long been, if you like, the refuge of last resort for all those people who had to flee the attacks on Aleppo and elsewhere. And now, having thought they were safe in Idlib, they find themselves under even greater attack.

As my foreign secretary has said, this is a vicious campaign of attrition and it continues to force civilians to flee by targeting their schools, hospitals and emergency first responders. And we condemn the repeated flouting of international humanitarian law. Mark explained that millions of people now face a protection crisis.

Now we know that an investigation by the UN Board of Inquiry is underway into why deconflicted sites have been targeted. And we heard the figures for those sadly killed in January, including airstrikes that put out of action Al-Shami Hospital, which was the last remaining surgical hospital serving southern Idlib. And since 1 December, the continued onslaught from Syrian forces by Russian and Iranian forces has displaced over 550,000 people. And to put that in context, it's more than the entire population of Sochi.

Turkey has made efforts to seek a peaceful solution in Idlib and to prevent millions more Syrians having to seek refuge. But we've seen the Syrian authorities frustrate and ignore the Memoranda of Understanding. Multiple ceasefires have been broken often and they are violated as quickly as they are announced after one or two days. Geir outlined the attacks that we've seen in the last few days that led to Turkish fatalities and increased the risk of a further regional conflagration. And we're deeply concerned at the impact of this escalation on Turkey, who are already hosting over three and a half million refugees who have fled the repression in Syria.

So, Mr President, the UK, along with France and the United States, called this meeting so that we can once again call for an immediate, genuine and lasting ceasefire in Idlib and for a lasting solution to the situation there. Both of the UN representatives briefing today have stressed the imperative of this. And we've heard a lot of superlatives today, including what Mark described as the largest single allocation from the surf since the war began. How many more imperatives, Mr President, are we going to need before the Syrian authorities commit and stick to a ceasefire? I think it would be very good if the Syrian representative, when he gives his intervention, could explain why not a ceasefire and why not stick to the ceasefires that have been agreed already. We never get, Mr President, a very clear answer to that question. And yet the numbers of people, including children who are suffering from current Syrian policies, continues to rise.

Mr President, council members have said time and again that the only sustainable way forward for Syria is a political solution and a resolution 2254. The offensive being perpetrated in Idlib and the failure of multiple ceasefires only serves to underline that it's the UN and this Security Council and not the Astana format, which should remain the guardian of this process. And our absolute priority should be a sustainable solution in order to address humanitarian disaster in north-west Syria. And Mark has set out exactly what that means in terms of numbers.

But I'd also like to use this opportunity to encourage the Secretary-General to consider if the UN, beyond the critical humanitarian role it's already playing, if the UN can assist in any way in achieving a lasting ceasefire. As Security Council members, the United Kingdom stands ready to support any UN-backed agreement. For the record, we continue to support the Special Envoy's work on the political process and encourage him to pursue all of the elements under Resolution 2254.

And as discussed at last week's humanitarian session, the mass destruction and displacement is already inflicting a terrible toll on the people of north-west Syria. There are over three million people stuck in this ever-reducing pocket, with a population density greater than that of the Gaza Strip. The UK is already providing over \$50 million in humanitarian assistance to north-west Syria this financial year, and we're looking at what more we can do to help. We have spent over \$3 billion to help Syria since the conflict began. And I would like the Syrian representative to explain why the conflict is continuing when it is hurting so many of his own people.

Finally, Mr President, I want to close with a tribute to the UN, both on the political side and on the humanitarian side, for the work that they do in these terrible circumstances and without the necessary assistance from the host government.

Thank you.

[Concern for the deterioration of human rights in Crimea](#)

Thank you very much, Mr President, and thank you for scheduling this important debate today. And thank you, Prime Minister, for taking time to come here. I think it's very important that the Security Council can hear from the OSCE. And congratulations on your Chairmanship in office, and you have the United Kingdom's support.

The OSCE is a very key pillar of the rules-based international system by the UN itself. And it's a crucial institution for European and Euro-Atlantic security. And as you've highlighted, Prime Minister, it's important in

discharging that responsibility that the OSCE can make a real difference on the ground. And as other speakers have noted, the people of Ukraine feel this need particularly acutely.

Your recent visit to Ukraine is very welcome. And you had the opportunity to witness at first hand the reality for people living near the line of contact. We believe that you are correct to prioritise the OSCE's response to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. The United Kingdom supports the push for full, safe and unimpeded access for the Special Monitoring Mission, as well as adequate resources ensuring that it's able to fulfill its mandate.

As other speakers have noted, we, too, are deeply concerned by the deterioration of human rights in Crimea since the illegal annexation, including arrests; ill treatment; torture and intimidation against political opponents and minorities; and the denial of basic human rights and religious freedoms to those who don't accept the forced imposition of Russian legislation and citizenship on the peninsula. Therefore, the United Kingdom urgently calls on Russia immediately to release the 89 or more political prisoners currently detained in Russia and in Crimea.

We welcome President Zelensky's commitment to finding a diplomatic solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Ukraine's recent delivery of confidence building measures led to the December Normandy Format Summit in Paris and the further prisoner exchange. We look to Russia to abide by the Minsk agreement commitments it signed up to and to use their influence to ensure the separatists did the same. We call on Russia also to play its part to enable further disengagement and full access by the International Committee of the Red Cross to Non-Government Controlled Areas.

Mr President, Russia needs to fully respect Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity, withdraw its forces from all of Ukraine, and end its illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. Crimea and the Donbas are part of Ukraine. What Russia has done and continues to do there breaches her obligations under international law and presents a serious challenge the international rules-based order.

Prime Minister, we welcome your chairmanship's prioritisation of conflict resolution, including the work of the Special Monitoring Mission and the Trilateral Contact Group, as well as the resolution of the other protracted conflicts in the OSCE. And, like others, we attach great importance to the work of the OSCE field presences across the region. United Kingdom has the honour to support your chairmanship by chairing the Security Committeeship of the OSCE. We are very grateful for your determination to tackle organised crime and underline the importance of ensuring this action is taken in compliance with international human rights standards.

The OSCE's cooperation with the UN on countering terrorism and violent extremism is particularly strong, and we welcome the OSCE partnership with the Security Council's counter-terrorism bodies, and look forward to the OSCE joint forthcoming conference with UNOCT in Switzerland on foreign terrorist fighters.

Mr President, the unique value of the OSCE lies in the consensus approach to principles and verifiable commitments, allowing for mutual benefits and the prevention of miscalculation or escalation. In particular, the United Kingdom would like to see the preservation and enhanced delivery of existing confidence and security building mechanisms in 2020, including the Open Skies Treaty and the Vienna document.

Prime Minister, we commend your focus on the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and the promotion of the role of women in peace and security. Preventing sexual violence in conflict also remains a top priority for my government. We are very proud, Prime Minister to give you our full support for your chairmanship of the OSCE.

Thank you, Mr President.

£1.5 billion to deliver Government commitment for 50 million more general practice appointments

The Government and NHS England have committed at least an additional £1.5 billion in total for general practice over the next four years for additional staff, a key step towards delivering 50 million more appointments in general practice by 2024.

In addition to the Government's commitment to invest in general practice under the Long Term Plan, this funding is for the recruitment of 6,000 more primary care professionals as well as for initiatives to support the recruitment and retention of doctors in general practice.

In agreement with the profession, the General Practice Contract for 2020 will also offer more check-ups for new mums as part of a major deal with England's family doctors.

The contract includes a roadmap for delivering the numbers of doctors in general practice by 6,000 and bring in 26,000 new staff to bolster surgeries. This will include pharmacists, physiotherapists, dieticians and occupational therapists, who will become a core part of local primary care teams, reducing pressure on general practice and ensure patients can see or speak to the right clinician.

Also included in the agreement are regular visits for care home residents, assessing medication and new incentives to increase uptake of vaccinations and learning disability health checks, expand social prescribing referrals, and improve prescription safety checks.

Expanding the new workforce will allow GPs to focus on the sickest patients and will in time allow them to provide longer appointments to people who need one.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

I want the NHS to be there for everyone when they need it, and to take pressure off hospitals by expanding primary care.

This new contract is the first step to delivering our manifesto commitment to make it easier to get a GP appointment when you need it by delivering 50 million more appointments a year in general practice.

The significant additional investment means GP surgeries can recruit more pharmacists, physiotherapists and other health professionals so patients get the right care for them when they need it. It's all part of our commitment to ensure the NHS is always there for everyone.

Sir Simon Stevens, NHS Chief Executive, said:

This agreement funds a major increase in general practice staff – including GPs, therapists and pharmacists – so that patients can get quicker appointments with a wide range of skilled health professionals at their local doctors' surgery.

These extra staff will in turn be offering expanded services, including regular health checks for people living in care homes, action to boost vaccination uptake, earlier cancer detection, and better support for people with learning disabilities.

Coming on the heels of the highest ever number of young doctors now choosing to train as GPs, this is a vote of confidence in general practice that goes with the grain both of what patients need and what GPs themselves want to provide.

Dr Nikita Kanani, NHS medical director for primary care and London GP, said:

This agreement means better care for patients, and will help relieve pressure in general practice. This contract is good news for practicing GPs, and supports our practices in the new Primary Care Networks to bring in extra skilled staff, and recruit and retain our GPs.

Ian Dodge, NHS national director of strategy, said:

Today's deal is another important moment, when general practice is given the practical support it needs to expand patient care. And with a much bigger team, and more GPs, it becomes possible to provide new services and improve access for patients.

[Final local government finance settlement 2020 to 2021: written statement](#)

Today I laid before the House the 'Local Government Finance Report (England) 2020-21', the 'Referendums Relating to Council Tax Increases (Principles) (England) Report 2020-21' and the 'Referendums Relating to Council Tax Increases (Alternative Notional Amounts) (England) Report 2020-21', which represent the [final local government finance settlement for 2020-21](#).

This year's settlement delivers an increase in Core Spending Power from £46.2 billion in 2019-20 to £49.2 billion in 2020-21. In real terms this is a 4.4% increase and the largest year on year real terms increase in a decade.

The local government finance settlement relies on collaboration. My ministers and I have engaged extensively with the sector, holding meetings with representative groups, with councils, and with MPs.

During this process, we received over 200 representations from organisations or individuals, and these have been carefully considered before finalising the settlement.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all colleagues in the House, and council leaders and officers, who have contributed to the consultation process.

This year's settlement is a strong and well-balanced package, that delivers significant extra resources to the priority areas of adult and children's social care, whilst protecting other vital service areas.

This government is serious about protecting the millions of people that rely upon adult and children's social care in their daily lives. To do this, this settlement will allow local authorities to access an additional £1.5 billion for social care.

This comprises £1 billion of additional grant – for both adult and children's social care – and a proposed 2% council tax precept for adult social care, which will enable councils to access a further £500 million.

£150 million of the additional grant will be used to equalise the distributional impact of the adult social care council tax precept.

These additional resources sit on top of the existing social care package, which will continue at 2019-20 levels, and mean that local authorities will have access to almost £6 billion of dedicated funding across adult and children's social care in 2020-21.

Core settlement resources

The local government finance settlement for 2020-21 will also protect other key services by providing a uniform percentage uplift in core settlement resources, in line with the change in the small business rates multiplier. Vital services are also protected by continuing other key grants from 2019-20.

Council tax

Local authorities will continue to be able to increase council tax in 2020-21 by a core principle of up to 2%, without holding a local referendum, with a bespoke council tax referendum principle of 2% or £5, whichever is higher, for shire district councils, and a £10 Band D council tax referendum principle for all police authorities.

Authorities with adult social care responsibilities will be able to increase their council tax by a further 2% on top of the core principle, without holding a local referendum, to be spent exclusively on adult social care.

The proposed referendum principles strike a balance between giving local authorities the flexibility to address service pressures, and not overburdening council tax payers with excessive increases which do not have local support.

The 2020-21 final local government finance settlement will mean that the expected average council tax increase for 2020-21 will be the lowest since 2016.

New Homes Bonus

The government will be making a new round of allocations of the New Homes Bonus for 2020-21, amounting to £907 million.

As part of this, I am committing an additional £7 million to maintain the growth baseline for payments at 0.4%. We will make no legacy payments on these new allocations, but the government will make legacy payments on allocations made in earlier years which are due to be paid in 2020-21.

In order to ensure that the New Homes Bonus is focussed on incentivising homes where they are needed most, I am announcing that the government will consult on the future of the housing incentive in the Spring. This will include moving to a new, more targeted approach that rewards local

authorities where they are ambitious in delivering the homes we need.

Rural Services Delivery Grant

We will continue to recognise the extra costs of delivering services in rural areas and propose to maintain last year's Rural Services Delivery Grant of £81 million, which is the joint-highest paid to date.

It will be distributed using the same methodology as in 2019-20, which allocated funding to the top quartile of local authorities on the 'super-sparsity' indicator.

Conclusion

This settlement acts as the foundation for a robust and resilient future for local government finance, delivering on calls for certainty and stability from local government.

For those who deliver key front-line services, it provides significant extra resources where they are needed most.

I look forward to debating this topic with all MPs next week.

[Companies House launches pledge to support vulnerable customers](#)

 Companies House



At Companies House, we aim to deliver a seamless customer experience to all our users.

All customers must comply with statutory obligations, such as filing their accounts on time – and this can be difficult when they find themselves in vulnerable situations.

We recognise that periods of vulnerability can be long or short-term and can also be recurring. Some will experience vulnerability during particularly

difficult periods, while for others it may be from longer term challenges.

There are a wide range of factors that contribute to vulnerability, including but not limited to:

- physical or mental health problems
- financial circumstances
- changes in life circumstances – such as bereavement or becoming a carer

To support our customers to complete their statutory obligations, we will:

- regularly review our policies
- deliver professional services to all customers
- train our colleagues to better support vulnerable customers
- use case conferencing and make sure best practice is shared
- use external expertise to challenge us to improve our services
- understand our customers and make sure our communication is effective

We pledge to work with our customers during these difficult periods to make sure they can access our information and services in a way that suits their needs.

Training

Our customer-facing teams are key to making sure we identify and help our vulnerable customers. We'll make sure our people receive suitable training to identify and support customers who may be vulnerable, and also to guide them to additional support.

Regularly reviewing performance

To make sure we're constantly improving our business practices for customer care, we'll regularly review our policies. We'll use external expertise to challenge and suggest improvements when necessary.

Providing a professional service

We'll try to understand our customers, to make sure our communication is effective at all times. We seek to always provide a professional service to our customers, and to be flexible in our approach – within the limits set by legislation.

Our pledge comes alongside [our new and improved customer charter](#). The aim of the charter is to set out what level of customer service customers can expect from us, and what we're committed to providing our customers.

We recognise the importance of identifying, supporting and offering solutions for vulnerable customers. We hope that this pledge shows our commitment to supporting customers through difficult times.

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