

# Bringing coordinated relief to the people of Syria

Thank you very much, Madam President. May I join the others in welcoming His Excellency to the Council. Kuwait has made an outstanding contribution, if I may say so, as a donor and as a Security Council member. It has been an honour to work with you and your delegation, Minister, and you have always, your delegation has always focussed on the heart of the issue, whether it's international peace and suffering or today, the relief of human suffering. So thank you very much for everything Kuwait has done for the Security Council.

Madam President, we share the concerns that have been expressed around the table, and I think they follow a common theme. For various reasons, the international community has not served the Syrian people as well as we might since 2012, despite some specific heroic efforts involving OCHA and the UN and volunteers like the White Helmets. And I'd like to, through the Assistant Secretary-General, once again salute the work that OCHA and the other humanitarian agencies do to help the Syrian people.

And now, as others have noted, after seven long and terrible years, the political process may finally have an opportunity to turn the corner. And of course, we support that and we will do what we can to help Mr Pedersen deliver that.

But very sad to relate, other areas on the ground have not made such progress. And this is not due to the international community. This is due to the Syrian authorities and the countries who give them the most support. In particular – I'll come on to the worsened humanitarian situation in a minute – but I think we need to look at Idlib and Rukhban, the added upcoming pressure of winter, as others have said, the targeting of civilian objects around Idlib and the need for IHL to be upheld. Terrorism is no justification for violating the Geneva Conventions. We say it every time we meet in this chamber but it remains as true today as it did when the Geneva Conventions were first drawn up.

But the situation that's worst of all, I think, is the one that the Assistant Secretary-General outlined. The situation is getting worse, and people – 4 million people – are at very grave risk. And this is why exceptionally cross-border assistance remains needed and it has been needed since 2014; this is set out clearly in the letter that the Emergency Relief Coordinator sent the Security Council and it's been set out by others and other correspondents in the last few days. And we should be, no doubt, I think, having heard this briefing, that fewer than four crossings and less than 12 months means that we save fewer of the 4 million lives at stake and it leads to more suffering for the Syrian people.

Now, as others have mentioned the impending resolution, Madam President, let me turn to that as well. The German representative set out in his statement why they have drafted the resolution in the way they have, and we respect

that. The penholders are trying to find a way through on this very important issue so that as many of those 4 million lives as possible can be saved and their suffering relieved.

It's not clear to us, Madam President, what has changed since last year when the cross-border resolution was passed. What has changed to justify such a dramatic reduction in cross-border assistance, as has been proposed by other members of the Council, down to two crossings for only six months? In 2014, the cross-border resolution passed unanimously. It passed unanimously in 2015 and 2016. In 2017, it passed with 12 votes in favour and three abstentions. And in 2018, last year, it passed with 14 votes in favour and two abstentions. So I repeat, it is not at all clear why the situation should be deemed by some to be so drastically different today.

I would make a real appeal – joining others, Madam President – for us to take the penholder text and do the very best we can to protect the Syrian people. This is a humanitarian briefing, some very important humanitarians are around the table today. The most important thing we can do, as Ursula said, is to pass a resolution that brings genuine relief over a serious period of time based on end state, not on end date, and with all the crossings that the UN believes it needs.

OCHA is the part of the international system that UN Member States, all of us, have charged with coordinating humanitarian efforts. We may not always agree with OCHA or the UN on every individual point or every individual issue, but they are discharging their responsibility to the membership and to the Syrian people to get the assistance to reach those communities in direst need. If the UN does not help these communities, there is no evidence, no evidence at all to believe that the Syrian government either wants to or can or will provide that assistance. So I hope we can find a way forward on the resolution so that the Assistant Secretary-General and her teams can do the job we have bestowed upon them to do.

Thank you, Madam President.

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## **New pledges for the Armed Forces announced in Queen's Speech**

The Government has reaffirmed its solid commitment to protecting and supporting the Armed Forces in the Queen's Speech today.

The Queen's Speech, which outlines legislative priorities for the next Parliamentary session, prioritises both veterans and serving personnel with a promise to further incorporate the Armed Forces Covenant in law, and bring forward proposals to tackle vexatious claims. The Government will also maintain its commitment to spend at least 2 per cent of GDP on defence every

year of this Parliament.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

The interests of the men and women of our armed forces are at the heart of this government. That is why we are continuing to invest above inflation every year to meet our NATO commitments.

Beyond this unwavering commitment, I'm pleased we will be bringing forward vital legislation that will put an end to the dogged pursuit of personnel and veterans from repeated investigations resulting from vexatious claims.

We'll also further incorporate the Armed Forces Covenant into law. This will be essential to ensure we minimise any disadvantage faced by the military community because of the sacrifices they make for this country.

The Government is strongly opposed to our service personnel and veterans being subject to the threat of vexatious litigation in the form of repeated investigations and potential prosecution arising from historical military operations many years after the events in question. Following a consultation earlier in the year on proposed legal protections, work is happening at pace to respond.

The Armed Forces Covenant has provided everyday benefits to our armed forces and their families since its introduction. It is this government's aim to build upon this great work, as such it will progress proposals to further incorporate the Covenant into law to minimise any disadvantage faced by the armed forces community due to the unique nature of military service.

Next year will see publication of the government's strategy action plan following last year's consultation on the Strategy for our Veterans at its foundation. This will provide a comprehensive approach to maximising the potential of our veterans while also supporting those who need it.

Other key commitments include:

- The introduction of a Veteran's railcard
  - A guaranteed job interview for veterans for any public sector role they apply for where they possess the minimum job requirements
  - Reducing the Employer's NICs contribution for those employing veterans
  - Providing additional childcare support to those currently serving
  - Protecting Armed Forces personnel from tax rises in Scotland, where income tax is devolved to Holyrood
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# Letters to the Devolved Administrations on the Withdrawal Agreement Bill

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, Steve Barclay, has written to the Scottish and Welsh Governments to ask for legislative consent for parts of the Withdrawal Agreement Bill. This follows over a year of extensive engagement with the Devolved Administrations.

The UK Government is not seeking consent for the Withdrawal Agreement. The approval of the Withdrawal Agreement is a matter for the UK Parliament which has MPs representing constituencies across the whole of the UK.

Instead, in line with the Sewel convention and associated practices, the UK Government is seeking consent for the relevant provisions of the Bill: i.e. where there are specific provisions which legislate in areas of devolved competence or modify the competence of the devolved institutions. We look forward to the Scottish and Welsh Governments considering the Bill on the basis of these provisions and will continue to engage with the devolved administrations as the Bill continues its passage through the UK Parliament.

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## Government confirms commitment to preventing public institutions setting up their own international boycotts

- Public institutions, including local councils, will be prevented from setting up boycotts against countries such as Israel
- Government is clear that it will make foreign policy decisions, not local authorities
- Minister tells institutions to focus on their day job instead of boycotts which sow division and hatred

The move will prevent organisations, including local councils, from boycotting countries such as Israel.

It will make sure there is a coherent approach to foreign relations from all public institutions, guaranteeing they do not go beyond the Government's official foreign policy by implementing policies which undermine community cohesion.

Such policies have led to concerns about anti-Semitism being legitimised

through actions such as Jewish films being censored and Jewish university societies being threatened with bans.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office, Oliver Dowden said:

Our public institutions should focus on their day job, not try to set foreign policy by making rules on which countries they will and won't do business with.

By stopping this unsanctioned activity we can get better value for taxpayers and put an end to boycotts that divide communities and sow hatred.

The commitment will prevent public institutions from creating independent sanctions and boycotts against:

- Foreign countries or those linked to them
- The sale of goods and services from foreign countries
- UK firms which trade with such countries

Both the Cabinet Office and Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government have previously published guidance against such boycotts. The new policy will provide for a firmer approach.

It is also a long-standing principle that there may be restrictions on taxpayer-funded public institutions that do not apply to private bodies. For example, public bodies cannot engage in party political campaigning.

The Government will examine the appropriate mix of legislative and other measures to give effect to this policy over the coming Parliament.

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## [Flood risk: Drier conditions expected but river levels stay high](#)



Environment Agency teams operating high volume pumps on Currymoor in the south west over the past few days to help reduce water levels.

While the weather outlook is looking drier over the next few days, the Environment Agency is urging people to [check their flood risk](#), [sign up for flood warnings](#) and to stay safe as [ground water](#) and river levels remain high following the recent heavy rain.

Craig Woolhouse, Flood Duty Manager at the Environment Agency, said:

We are expecting conditions to be drier across England today and throughout the week, meaning that the risk of flooding is continuing to subside. There is potential for some rain on Thursday but the overall flood risk remains low.

Groundwater levels remain high in parts of Dorset, Wiltshire, Hampshire and West Sussex. Local communities in these areas are asked to remain vigilant to the risks of flooding.

While river levels are falling, they remain high – we will continue to monitor river levels closely and to operate our flood defences to help keep communities safe.

We advise people to sign up for flood warnings, stay away from swollen rivers and not drive through flood water – just 30cm of flowing water is enough to float your car.

Steve Ramsdale, Met Office Chief Forecaster, said:

On New Year's Eve, some light rain will affect parts of the South West. New Year's Day will be largely dry but a front will bring some light rain into north-west Scotland, followed by a band of rain, some heavy, moving south-east across the UK during Thursday and Friday.

You can check your flood risk, sign up for free flood warnings and keep up to date with the latest situation at <https://www.gov.uk/check-flood-risk>, call Floodline on 0345 988 1188 or follow [@EnvAgency](#) on Twitter for the latest flood updates.

ENDS

For enquiries please contact [newsdesk@defra.gov.uk](mailto:newsdesk@defra.gov.uk)

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Last updated 31 December 2019 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 31 December 2019 The name Andy Page has been changed to Steve Ramsdale. In the caption the word "high" has been included to better describe high

volume pumps.

2. 30 December 2019 We have updated this page to reflect the current flood risk.
3. 27 December 2019 Updated to reflect improving weather outlook
4. 24 December 2019 Updated to reflect latest situation on 24 December
5. 23 December 2019 Updated to reflect latest situation on 23 December
6. 22 December 2019 update on numbers of properties flooded and also protected
7. 22 December 2019 Updated weekend flood risk
8. 21 December 2019 Update of weekend flood risk
9. 20 December 2019 We have updated this press release to reflect the current outlook and operational activity
10. 19 December 2019 First published.