

Speech: “We must speak with one voice to condemn the use of chemical weapons”

Thank you Mr President, and may I say I am grateful to our briefers for their clear explanation of the facts this afternoon. And I want to thank the Head of the Leadership Panel and, through him, his whole team for their committed, impartial, and expert work over the last five months investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

As we have heard so clearly today, those investigations have reached a clear, unmistakable conclusion. Syria, a member state of the United Nations and a Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, has used chemical weapons against its own people.

The use of these weapons by anyone, anywhere is unacceptable, and we condemn their use by both the Syrian regime and by Daesh. These are weapons that over 190 states have come together to outlaw, weapons that have no place in the world today.

And yet, Mr President, we have been here before. Last year we were told by the Joint Investigative Mechanism that the Syrian regime had carried out three poison gas attacks and that Daesh had used sulphur mustard.

And yet some on this Council doubted the conclusions of that investigation; an investigation that they themselves had set up, the methodology they had approved. In February this year, action in this Council was vetoed.

We now have another report from independent UN experts mandated by this Council. It sets out a clear conclusion. On 4 April, the Syrian regime used sarin against its own people in Khan Sheikhoun, just five weeks after this Council was prevented by Russia from taking action on Syria's use of chemical weapons.

The Joint Investigative Mechanism has done what we, as a Council, asked it to do. It has done so thoroughly, impartially and professionally. And today, presented with its findings, we must speak with one voice to condemn the use of chemical weapons by Daesh and this attack on Khan Sheikhoun by the Syrian regime. We must hold those responsible to account.

But experience to date suggests that we will not be able to do that. Russia continues to deny what happened. Since the attack on that morning in April, Russia has advanced a contradictory series of hypotheses and claims, moving from one to the next, as soon as it is proven untrue, as it seeks to prevent this Council holding the Assad regime to account. Faced with science and fact, Russia has had no answer but fantasy and fiction, and has provided no evidence for its claims.

The investigators have looked at the evidence. In their report, they set out the rigour with which they have approached their task: how they have received information from twelve member states including the Syrian regime itself, how they have scientifically corroborated that information, how they have consulted numerous independent experts and scientists.

The JIM reached its conclusions not on the basis of any one single piece of evidence, rather, it built its case on the totality of evidence available to it, as any professional, rational investigation would do.

And those conclusions are clear. Aircraft of the Syrian Air Force were in the vicinity of Khan Sheikhoun on 4 April between 6:30 and 7:00 am, at the time munitions were dropped on the town. The crater from which the sarin emanated was created by an aerial bomb dropped on 4 April. And most tellingly of all, sarin found at the scene, in samples supplied by the Syrian regime, contained the same unique signature found in the chemicals handed over by the Syrian regime to the OPCW in 2014.

Mr Mulet, the Russian representative suggests sarin can be easily made or homemade. Could you please explain just how complex it would be to recreate that sarin exactly to the unique chemical signature of the Syrian regime?

In 2013, Russia promised the world that Syria would abandon all of its chemical weapons. Today, to the cost of the people of Syria, and to the cost of the international consensus against chemical weapons, that promise remains unfulfilled and Russia continues to protect Assad and his regime.

So I call on the whole Council to renew the JIM's existing mandate, which has delivered the rigorous and conclusive findings we are discussing today. There is more work to be done; the OPCW Fact Finding Mission has now reported evidence of likely sarin use in nearby Ltamenah on 30 March. We need to support the JIM and to enable it to carry out its important work.

The resolution Russia has circulated today is not a serious attempt at renewal. It is a cynical ploy to discredit a professional, independent and impartial body. Russia is trying to shoot the messenger to cover up for the crimes of the Syrian regime.

And to the Syrian government, I say that evidence has been carefully gathered of the inhuman crimes you have committed. Russia is protecting you, for now, but the day will come when you are held accountable for your actions before international law and your victims will get the justice that they deserve.

Mr President, there is no middle ground in the United Nations Security Council when it comes to chemical weapons. We must condemn the use of these weapons in Syria, and support the JIM to identify those responsible. To do otherwise is to effectively condone these appalling attacks, and to undermine the international architecture that we collectively designed to stop them.

News story: Brokenshire – wanton act in North Belfast puts lives at risk

Mr Brokenshire commented:

Yesterday (Monday, 6th November) a pipe bomb left at the side of a busy road in North Belfast was spotted by workmen. As a result of their vigilance and with the support of police and AT0 the pipe bomb was removed. Had it exploded it could have indiscriminately killed anyone nearby. This wanton act put lives at risk and should be condemned in the strongest terms.

Keeping people in communities safe is a shared responsibility. Everyone has a part to play. If you have any information about this pipe bomb please contact police on 101.

Speech: “Let me express the UK’s support for reform, not just as a means of generating prosperity for Bosnia, but also as a means of ensuring security”

Thank you Mr President. And thank you, Dr Inzko, for your report and for your briefing just now. You have the United Kingdom’s full and continuous support.

I want to begin by warmly welcoming the unanimous adoption of resolution 2384 this morning and I pay tribute to you, Mr President and your delegation, for your excellent efforts as penholder.

This adoption is a welcome show of this Council’s continued support for the vital work of Operation Althea and a clear sign of our commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina’s stability, security and territorial integrity.

It’s a commitment that we now look to the Bosnian authorities to match. They must do so in word and deed as they undertake the vital reforms necessary to bring about the social and economic renewal that the country needs and that is so essential for Bosnia’s future within the European Union.

Bosnia made good progress towards this goal in 2016, and the delivery of the EU questionnaire in December was recognition of this. However, the promise and potential of 2016 has not materialised this year. Instead, 2017 has seen the pace of reform slowing markedly and divisive rhetoric and premature electioneering only increasing. It is these negative trends that are now dominating the political landscape, despite the elections being over 10 months away.

When this sort of narrow-minded, divisive electioneering takes hold, nobody gains. All Bosnians lose out. We need only look to the tens of millions of dollars in IMF funding currently on hold. Bosnia has failed to fulfil its responsibilities which would release this funding.

This money could be used to make considerable progress on the reform path. This is money that would transform Bosnia for the better, building roads and other vital infrastructure that would benefit all.

So let us all encourage the Bosnian authorities to re-focus on the reform agenda, to deliver socio-economic reforms which will improve the lives of their citizens. Divisive, backwards looking rhetoric only distracts from this essential work and will only slow the country's progress.

As a longstanding friend of Bosnia, the UK calls on all the parties to stop looking to the past and instead look forward to a shared future. If they do so, they will have the UK's support and we stand ready to work with the authorities to make progress on these critically important issues.

As the High Representative said just now, a crucial element of this effort must be promoting and upholding the rule of law including through a well-functioning, independent judiciary.

We call on all political and judicial leaders to avoid actions which undermine the standards of judicial impartiality and integrity.

Ahead of next year's elections we also urge all parties to approach the issue of electoral reform through dialogue, and to show willingness to reach a compromise. The authorities must work towards the implementation of the European Court of Human Rights judgements; no one should be excluded from political office at any level of government based on their ethnicity or residence.

And let me reiterate today the need for the Bosnian authorities to find a resolution to the longstanding impasse around local elections in Mostar. It is absolutely extraordinary that the citizens of Mostar have now been denied their democratic rights for nearly a decade. This cannot continue and Mostar must remain a single, coherent, multi-ethnic unit of local self-government.

Mr President,

Before I give up the floor, let me express the UK's support for reform, not just as a means of generating prosperity for Bosnia, but also as a means of ensuring security for the country through Euro-Atlantic integration. In order to make progress towards that goal, it is vital that Bosnia undertakes

further efforts on registering defence property, needed for the activation of the NATO Membership Action Plan, and for progress on the 5+2 agenda.

But until that agenda is completed, we remain committed to the continuing role of the High Representative and his office. The OHR remains the final authority in theatre regarding the civilian implementation of the Peace Agreement. This includes supporting the use of Bonn Powers if the situation requires.

So both Operation Althea and the High Representative have a vital role to play in Bosnia and Herzegovina until stability and security are firmly entrenched. That day is not yet here. So it is essential that this Council continues our support for both until that moment arrives.

Thank you.

Press release: Bright future for Forestry Commission in England

New changes to strengthen the role of the [Forestry Commission](#) and protect England's forests for future generations have been announced today by Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey.

From April 2019 Scottish Ministers will take on full responsibility for their national forests – meaning the Forestry Commission will remain in England, continuing to protect, improve and expand some of the country's best-known landscapes, from the Forest of Dean to Northumberland's Kielder Forest.

The Commission will continue to manage more than 250,000 hectares of England's Public Forest Estate, with a new board of Commissioners established to oversee this.

The world-renowned Forest Research will remain as an agency of the Forestry Commission, working closely with partners across the UK.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

Our forests and woodlands are vital for providing timber, protecting wildlife, and helping us improve our environment for the next generation.

Public forests in particular are one of our greatest national assets, and the Forestry Commission's work to enhance woodlands across England remains at the heart of our environmental ambitions.

These arrangements provide certainty for the Commission and its

staff, helping some of our most precious landscapes thrive into the future.

The Forestry Commission will maintain its specialist forestry expertise, continuing to offer support, advice and guidance to land owners and managers responsible for England's woodlands.

The new Board of Commissioners will bring strong experience in commercial, community and environmental backgrounds that will complement the work of the new organisation.

The changes will coincide with the Forestry Commission's Centenary year in 2019.

Sir Harry Studholme, Chair of the Forestry Commission, said:

This is an exciting moment for the Forestry Commission. After nearly a century of creating and managing Britain's forests, the transfer of formal responsibility for Scotland's forests to the Scottish Government will allow the Forestry Commission in England to increase its focus on the needs of English users.

This will strengthen the Commission in its role of safeguarding and protecting the Public Forest Estate now and for the next 100 years.

The English, Scottish and Welsh Governments will continue to work together to commission forest research, sustain high standards for forestry in the UK, and protect trees against pests and diseases.

Ends

Press release: David Davis: 'Our determination to face shared threats will not diminish'

Ahead of the negotiations later this week, David Davis paid a visit to Rome today to reiterate the UK's commitment to deepening its bilateral relationships with countries across Europe, after its departure from the EU.

Existing cooperation between both the UK and Italy was a key focus of the trip, which encompassed a visit to Operation Sophia HQ – the EU's joint operation to clamp down on people smuggling in the Mediterranean.

Operation Sophia has rescued over 35,000 people to date, with over 10,000 of these rescued using UK assets. The Royal Navy's HMS ECHO is currently supporting the operation.

The Secretary of State also met Under-Secretary for European Affairs, Sandro Gozi for discussions about the progress that is being made in the exit negotiations. With hundreds of thousands of Italian nationals living in the UK, the issue of citizens' rights is expected to be high up on the agenda.

Speaking after his visit, the Secretary of State, David Davis said:

As we leave the EU, we will not be retreating from our responsibilities as an outward facing nation: our ties to our friends and allies across Europe will continue to be close, effective and strong.

We have fond ties of friendship with Italy, both of which pre-date our membership of the European Union, and we are committed to seeing them go from strength to strength long after our exit.

That is why I've come back to Rome, to convey the important message that our determination to face shared threats together will not diminish and that we are determined to get an exit deal that works for British and Italian citizens alike.

The trip marks the third time that the Secretary of State has visited Italy since last year's referendum.