

Press release: Foreign Secretary comments on chemical weapons use in Syria

Speaking following the release of the report by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and United Nations' Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

This independent report from expert investigators reaches a clear conclusion: the Asad regime used sarin nerve gas against the people of Khan Sheikhoun in Syria on 4 April with tragic consequences for hundreds of victims.

Britain condemns this appalling breach of the rules of war and calls on the international community to unite to hold Asad's regime accountable.

In 2013, Russia promised to ensure Syria would abandon all of its chemical weapons. Since then, the investigators have found the Asad regime guilty of using poison gas in four separate attacks. Russia has repeatedly attempted to disrupt efforts to get to the truth of the Khan Sheikhoun attack, denying sarin was even used and then this Tuesday vetoing a UN Resolution that would have extended the mandate of the investigative team. Russia has consistently chosen to cover up for Asad. This was the ninth veto it has used to protect Asad and the third it has cast to prevent the Asad regime from being held accountable for its poison gas attacks.

This behaviour can only undermine the global consensus against the use of chemical weapons. I call on Russia to stop covering up for its abhorrent ally and keep its own commitment to ensure that chemical weapons are never used again.

The report also found that Daesh was responsible for a sulphur mustard attack on the town of Um Housh in September 2016. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

This appalling attack by Daesh is yet another example of Daesh's desperate methods. Any use of chemical weapons is abhorrent – whoever is responsible – and it must stop once and for all.

Further information

Press release: PM call with Prime Minister Erna Solberg: 26 October 2017

This evening the Prime Minister called Prime Minister Erna Solberg of Norway to congratulate her on being re-confirmed as her country's Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister said she looked forward to deepening the already strong ties between the UK and Norway on a range of issues including trade and defence.

The leaders noted the UK and Norway's continuing co-operation both bilaterally and through NATO and said they would look to enhance this relationship.

The Prime Minister also took the opportunity to update Prime Minister Solberg on the progress of the Brexit negotiations following her speech in Florence last month and the PM confirmed that she wants to make the same offer on Norwegian citizens as she made in Florence on EU citizens.

News story: Minister for Africa meets African diplomats and leading figures

UK-Africa relations were celebrated at an event at Lancaster House this week when Minister for Africa Rory Stewart met with African diplomats and leading diaspora figures.

This was the first meeting between the Minister and many of the London-based African diplomats since his appointment as Minister for Africa for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development in June.

Countries from across the continent were represented, along with members of African diaspora in the UK, marking the start of regular dialogues between the Minister and African representatives.

Africa Minister Rory Stewart said:

The UK has an extraordinary and unique partnership with Africa and we want to build on this partnership over the years ahead. All my recent trips to Africa have shown me how exciting the continent is

today – how much potential it has in the future.

Brexit should be our moment to rebuild and invest in these partnerships in Africa. Africa will be at the heart of the greatest challenges and opportunities of the next half century. And I look forward to us working more closely together and learning ever more from each other.

Since his appointment in June the Minister has visited nine countries in Africa, including: Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Malawi and plans several more trips before the end of 2017.

[News story: Education Secretary revisits her former secondary school](#)

Education Secretary Justine Greening today (Thursday 26 October) visited Oakwood High School in Rotherham, the comprehensive secondary school she attended as a pupil in the 1980s, for the official opening of its new, state-of-the-art buildings.

The school has undergone a £12.2 million refurbishment as part of the government's Priority School Building Programme, which is focused on rebuilding and revamping school premises. The new facilities at Oakwood High include specialist science, art and music rooms, a large gymnasium, and a separate dining hall – all under one roof.

The Education Secretary was given a tour of the school by current pupils and by former teachers Richard Townsend and John Bingham, who taught at Oakwood High during her time as a pupil at the school.

Education Secretary Justine Greening said:

Returning to Oakwood High School was incredibly special to me. I had amazing teachers here who inspired me.

I want every young person to be able to reach their full potential and great teachers are at the heart of that. It's great to be back in Rotherham and to see Oakwood High helping raise the aspirations of new generations of young people from the area, making sure they have the skills and knowledge to achieve their goals.

Oakwood High School Headteacher David Naisbitt said:

We understand that children and young people need positive role models. Here in Rotherham, our young people need to see that opportunity does not lie beyond their grasp – it rests firmly within the realm of their possibilities.

There is no better example of what can be achieved than the Secretary of State; a local girl, educated in her local community.

The new school building will act as a beacon and stands as a clear statement to this community of the value of education.

Press release: FCO Minister welcomes release of Ilmi Umerov and Akhtem Chiygoz

Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan has welcomed the release of the Crimean Tatar leaders and drawn attention to the considerable number of Ukrainian political prisoners who continue to be detained by Russia.

I welcome the fact that the Crimean Tatar leaders Ilmi Umerov and Akhtem Chiygoz were freed yesterday, 25 October. They were both arrested and sentenced by Russia for their opposition to the illegal annexation of Crimea. The UK had previously called for their release, and appreciates the efforts of all those who worked for this outcome.

Nevertheless we must not lose sight of the many others, including other Crimean Tatars, who have been detained by the de-facto Russian authorities for their opposition to the illegal annexation of Crimea. I call once again for the immediate release of all Ukrainian political prisoners on the Crimean Peninsula and in Russia. The UK remains clear that Crimea is part of Ukraine, and that its annexation by Russia is a breach of international law.