

Foreign Secretary supports the withdrawal of serving UK judges from the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal

- Foreign Secretary reached this conclusion following consultation with the President of the UK Supreme Court and the Deputy Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor.

The Foreign Secretary supports the withdrawal of serving UK judges from the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal. Following discussions with the Deputy Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor and the President of the Supreme Court, it was agreed that it is no longer tenable for serving UK judges to sit on Hong Kong's top court.

British judges have played an important role in supporting the judiciary in Hong Kong for many years. However, since the imposition of the National Security Law in 2020, China has continued to use this legislation to undermine the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong.

These rights and freedoms were set out in the Joint Declaration agreed between the UK and China in 1984. China's actions include restrictions on freedom of expression, the stifling of opposition voices, and the criminalising of dissent.

The National Security Law also violates the high degree of autonomy of executive and legislative powers and independent judicial authority, provided for in the Joint Declaration.

The UK Supreme Court has continued to assess the situation in Hong Kong carefully in consultation with the UK Government. As National Security Law cases proceed through the Courts – and we see the far-reaching chilling effect of the legislation – it has become increasingly untenable for the UK Government to endorse UK serving judges sitting on the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

We have seen a systematic erosion of liberty and democracy in Hong Kong. Since the National Security Law was imposed, authorities have cracked down on free speech, the free press and free association.

The situation has reached a tipping point where it is no longer tenable for British judges to sit on Hong Kong's leading court, and would risk legitimising oppression.

I welcome and wholeheartedly support the decision to withdraw British judges from the court.

Deputy Prime Minister, Justice Secretary and Lord Chancellor, Dominic Raab, said:

Since 2020 and the introduction of the national security law, our assessment of the situation in Hong Kong is that it has shifted too far from the freedoms that we hold dear – making free expression and honest critique of the state a criminal offence.

This flies in the face of the handover agreement we have had with China since 1997 and, having discussed at length with Foreign Secretary and the President of the Supreme Court, we regretfully agree that it is no longer appropriate for serving UK judges to continue sitting in Hong Kong courts.

I thank our judges for being a bastion of international rule of law in Hong Kong over the past 25 years.

Background

- High profile cases proceeding through Hong Kong's Courts include those of key pro-democracy activists such as Jimmy Lai, Andy Li and the NSL 47.

[Eustice: supporting farmers ahead of the coming growing season](#)

The Government has announced steps to assist farmers with the availability of fertilisers for the coming growing season to help address uncertainty amongst growers and keep costs down for farmers.

With agricultural commodities closely linked to global gas prices, farmers are facing rising costs for inputs including manufactured fertiliser, due to the process depending on gas.

Environment Secretary, George Eustice has announced that changes to the use of urea fertiliser will be delayed by at least a year. The delay has been made to help farmers manage their costs and give them more time to adapt in the light of a global rise in gas prices leading to pressures on the supply

of ammonium nitrate fertilisers. A consultation on restrictions was launched a year ago, in order to reduce ammonia pollution in the air. When restrictions are introduced, they will include the use of ammonia inhibitors rather than a complete ban.

In a move to further support farmers, revised and improved statutory guidance has been published on how farmers should limit the use of slurry and other farmyard manure at certain times of year. This will provide clarity to farmers on how they can use slurry and other manures during autumn and winter to meet agronomic needs. This guidance will provide more clarity and has been developed with farmers and farming bodies.

Farmers will be further supported through new slurry storage grants as of this year, helping meet the Farming Rules for Water and reducing dependence on artificial fertilisers by storing organic nutrients until needed or for onward processing.

Alongside these measures, further details of the Sustainable Farming Incentive have also been published today. Given current fertiliser prices, the priority must be to pioneer new technologies to manufacture more organic-based fertiliser products, and rediscover techniques such as using nitrogen fixing legumes and clovers as an alternative to fertiliser.

The Sustainable Farming Incentive will help farmers move towards sustainable farming practices over time, supporting farmers to build the health and fertility of their soil and to reduce soil erosion which are essential for sustainable food production, helping to bolster food security and the longer term resilience of the sector.

The Government will pay farmers to help them with the costs of sowing nitrogen fixing plants and green manures in their crops or in advance of their crops to substitute some of their fertiliser requirements for the coming season and reduce their dependence on manufactured fertilisers linked to the price of gas.

An industry fertiliser roundtable will also be chaired by the Farming Minister, Victoria Prentis to continue to work on these issues, identify solutions and better understand the impact of current pressures on farmers. The group will meet for the first time this week. In addition, Defra is extending the membership of its longstanding Market Monitoring Group, which involves industry expertise to understand trends in markets.

Environment Secretary, George Eustice, said:

The significant rise in the cost of fertiliser is a reminder that we need to reduce our dependence on manufacturing processes dependent on gas. Many of the challenges we face in agriculture will require a fusion of new technology with conventional principles of good farm husbandry. The measures we have announced today are not the whole solution but will help farmers manage their nitrogen needs in the year ahead.

Over the course of the agricultural transition, legacy EU subsidies on land ownership or tenure are being phased out and replaced with a system that helps farmers invest in their businesses. The Farming Equipment and Technology Fund has recently been almost trebled to over £48 million, and last October the Government launched the Farming Innovation Programme to help farmers and growers boost R&D. A further £20.5 million of these R&D grants has been announced today which will help fund projects aimed at increasing productivity. Projects could include tackling a crop pest or disease that is affecting productivity or a business may work in partnership with researchers to breed new crop species which are more resilient to a changing climate.

Mark Tufnell, President of the Country Land and Business Association said:

Whilst we welcome today's announcements, it is important to recognise the sheer scale of the challenges ahead in the UK's food production.

The exceptionally high price of fertiliser can be mitigated only to a degree by high commodity prices. Some farmers may choose not to spread fertiliser at all this year. But if prices continued to stay at this all-time-high then government will need to urgently consider ways of increasing and diversifying domestic fertiliser production. We hope this will be a central focus of the round table DEFRA has rightly called.

We welcome the news that DEFRA has accepted the industry's advice to allow the continued use of urea within an accreditation scheme, audited by Red Tractor. This gives farmers a greater degree of choice when purchasing fertiliser.

The announcement of payment rates for the Sustainable Farming Incentive, and additional guidance on the compatibility of the scheme with Countryside Stewardship, goes some way to explaining to farmers the impact of the agricultural transition on their own businesses.

Soil Association Farming Director Liz Bowles said:

We welcome the commitment from ministers to accelerate the reduction in our reliance on artificial nitrogen fertiliser and invest in soil health.

It's vital that we act differently to our post war response in the

1940s by prioritising climate and nature alongside food security. The ongoing damage being done to soils, wildlife, and climate poses the biggest threat to food security and nature-friendly, agroecological farming provides the best path to ensuring long-term resilience.

The transition needed cannot happen overnight, and a step-change in funding for farmer-led research and peer-to-peer learning will be essential. This will help farmers gain the confidence needed to recycle nutrients from livestock or nitrogen-fixing crops like clover in more complex rotations.

We must build on and accelerate the plans to help farmers work with nature that have been set out in the Environmental Land Management schemes – and we look forward to hearing more detail on the upcoming organic standard and the higher level payments for improving soil health.

[UK pledges £286 million of lifesaving aid for Afghanistan](#)

- UK pledges an additional £286 million of emergency aid for vital lifesaving assistance in Afghanistan.
- Funding comes as the UK co-hosts an international pledging conference tomorrow (31 March) to support the UN's largest ever humanitarian appeal.
- UN estimates around 10 million children across Afghanistan urgently need humanitarian assistance to survive.

The UK is set to commit a further £286 million of emergency UK aid to the Afghan people to provide life-saving food and emergency health support.

The new money is announced ahead of the UN Afghanistan Conference tomorrow (31 March), which will bring together international allies to raise vital funds for humanitarian aid, as well as protect women and girls and support stability in the region.

The UN is seeking to raise more than \$4bn – its largest ever appeal for a single country. The UN estimates that around 10 million children across Afghanistan urgently need humanitarian assistance to survive.

Alongside emergency humanitarian aid, the new UK funds will support basic services such as improving access to health care, and helping farmers overcome the impact of drought.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

The UK is rallying countries in support of the Afghan people and helping lead the way in providing life-sustaining food, shelter and medical supplies. Together with allies and partners, we can do more and will do more to help Afghanistan.

The new UK funding will be channelled through UN partners and trusted NGOs. No funding will go directly to the Taliban. Since October, UK aid to Afghanistan is already supporting more than 60 hospitals, providing health services for more than 300,000 people, ensuring 4.47 million people get emergency food assistance through the World Food Programme, and providing 6.1 million people with emergency health, water, protection, shelter, food, and education support through the UN Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund.

During the conference, the Foreign Secretary will also commit to putting women and girls at the heart of the UK's response, stressing the Taliban must engage constructively to protect their rights and urgently reverse the decision to prevent girls attending secondary school.

FCDO Minister of State, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

The people of Afghanistan deserve the right not only to survive, but to thrive and live in freedom. Our humanitarian aid supports the most vulnerable, including girls and women as well as marginalised religious minorities.

I'm proud the UK is co-hosting this conference with the United Nations, Qatar and Germany, to strengthen the international response which has already saved lives this winter.

The UK doubled its aid to Afghanistan in the 2021-22 financial year to £286 million. We are matching the 2021-22 commitment this financial year by pledging £286 million again.

The UK continues to work with international partners to ensure aid agencies can deliver desperately needed aid to those most in need.

Expressing our hopes for a more stable and peaceful environment for the people of the DRC: UK at the UN Security Council

Thank you very much, Madam President, and I begin by joining others in thanking SRSK Keita for her characteristically thorough and clear briefing, and we look forward to reading Ms Inyobondaye's contribution, in due course.

I also wanted to share the concerned express by others around the Council table at the news that a helicopter has gone down today in Rutshuru, North Kivu. We hope that the rescue mission underway today is successful, but we are also reminded of the risks taken daily by peacekeepers across the world to implement our mandates.

The United Kingdom is extremely concerned, as we've heard today around the Council table, by the violence facing civilians in eastern DRC, including the persistent attacks by armed groups. In addition to armed groups such as the ADF and CODECO, we are increasingly concerned about the resurgent M-23 group.

We welcome MONUSCO's efforts to enhance protection in the Djugu area of Ituri, but note that insecurity around IDP camps continues. Also of concern is the number of recent kidnappings in North Kivu, which have made a large proportion of the province inaccessible to humanitarian actors.

Whilst we take note of the Government of the DRC's efforts to address the security in eastern DRC, we call upon them to intensify those efforts in order to improve security, humanitarian access and lessen the suffering of the Congolese population.

Almost a year after the declaration of the State of Siege, the United Kingdom welcomes the reinstatement of civilian judicial processes. We urge the Government of DRC to continue to mitigate the negative impacts of the State of Siege. This includes setting clear objectives and an exit plan, and addressing the recommendations of the National Defence and Security Committee.

Regarding joint DRC-Ugandan military operations, we welcome efforts to de-conflict operations. However, we remain concerned that joint operations in the Beni area of North Kivu have not yet been successful in improving the security situation or decisively tackling the threat of the ADF.

We urge the Governments of DRC and Uganda to increase their coordination with MONUSCO. Not only is this essential to ensuring protection of civilians and the safety and security of UN personnel and humanitarian workers, but could also support efforts to hold cleared areas and to prevent the ADF from spreading into new territory where they can re-establish their footholds.

Regarding the safety and security of UN personnel, the firing at a MONUSCO patrol by FARDC soldiers in North Kivu is also deeply concerning, and we echo the Secretary-General's call for those responsible to be held to account.

Madam President, the United Kingdom welcomes progress made to develop and operationalise the DRC's new DDR community recovery and stabilisation program, the PDDRCS. It's essential to learn from previous DDR efforts, including by adopting a decentralised and community-based approach. We welcome the technical support provided by the UN in this regard. As the operational phase begins, the establishment of inclusive coordinated structures between the UN, the international community and the PDDRCS, will be critical.

Turning to MONUSCO's transition, we share the Secretary-General's view that the transition plan, and its associated benchmarks, offer a comprehensive framework for mobilising the collective efforts of the government, the UN and international partners. Establishing baselines and tracking progress against transition indicators, collectively, by the UN and the government of DRC, will be particularly important as the Council looks to assess progress in implementation of that transition plan. We look forward to future updates on the transition as part of the regular reporting cycle.

To conclude, Madam President, let me commend the work of SRSK Keita, and her team, in extremely challenging circumstances. It is our sincere hope that the collective efforts of MONUSCO and the government of DRC can soon create a more stable and peaceful environment for the people of the DRC.

Thank you.

[Russia's appetite for war is taking food off the world's table: UK and the UN Security Council](#)

Thank you, Madam President, and I join others in thanking ASG Msuya and Executive Director David Beasley for their briefings.

So, we've heard once again today, the appalling impact on the Ukrainian people of President Putin's senseless war of choice.

10.3 million people are displaced.

73 confirmed attacks on hospitals and medical centres.

659 schools and kindergartens damaged.

The devastation in Mariupol is almost beyond description.

Civilians remain without food, water, electricity – people are reportedly resorting to drinking not just snow, but sewage water to survive.

There are credible reports of mass graves, forced deportations of residents to the Russian Federation, as well as incidents of sexual violence and use of land mines. There will be accountability for these crimes.

So there is an urgent need to alleviate humanitarian suffering in Ukraine.

We note the Secretary-General's announcement, yesterday, about Martin Griffiths' role in pursuing a humanitarian ceasefire. And we're grateful for the latest data from OCHA, the World Food Programme, and in the Secretary-General's statement yesterday about those they've been able to reach.

We encourage all efforts to help the people of Ukraine, in agreement with the Ukrainian government.

The UK will continue to play its part. We have provided £400 million to support Ukraine, including £220 million in humanitarian aid.

And we call for close cooperation between the UN agencies and other donors to ensure this assistance reaches and protects the most vulnerable.

But let us be without a shred of doubt, as the Secretary General set out yesterday, the only way to end the suffering is for Russia to end the war.

Global commodity prices were already on the rise before the invasion, as economies recovered from the COVID19 pandemic.

We now see spiralling energy prices, and global food insecurity, hitting the most vulnerable the hardest.

Almost every UN Member State is now suffering because of Russia's war.

As David Beasley said, we now risk famine destabilisation, and we risk having to take food from hungry children, for starving children.

Russia's appetite for war is taking food off the world's table.

Madam President,

The UK welcomes the General Assembly resolution adopted last week.

UN member states sent an overwhelming message that Russia alone is to blame for the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, and for the shocks being felt globally.

For the suffering to end, Russian bullets and bombs must stop, and Russian tanks and troops must go home.

I thank you, Madam President.