

PM call with world leaders: 28 February 2022

Press release

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The leaders agreed that the valiant resistance to the Russian invasion we are seeing in Ukraine is truly inspirational. The Prime Minister stressed the need for countries to continue supporting the Ukrainian Government, including with the provision of defensive weapons. He also underlined the need for an international response to the emerging humanitarian crisis, including through supporting Ukraine's neighbours to deal with large numbers of Ukrainians escaping violence in the country.

The Prime Minister welcomed the unity of message and action between countries in recent days in response to Russia's invasion. He stressed the need to continue applying pressure on Putin's regime, including on SWIFT, with sanctions and with trade restrictions. The Prime Minister commended the progress over the weekend with all G7 countries agreeing to remove Russian banks from SWIFT.

The Prime Minister also paid tribute to his fellow leaders' renewed commitments to bolster the NATO alliance, including Chancellor Scholz's pledge to massively increase Germany's spending on defence.

The leaders agreed to pursue every avenue to ensure that Putin fails in his ambitions.

Published 28 February 2022

Ensuring the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria are held to account

Thank you. Let me thank the Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu for her briefing, and Director-General Arias for his continued thorough reporting.

Within the last month, the OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission has issued two reports, finding there are reasonable grounds to believe chemical weapons were used in Marea in September 2015 and in Kafr Zeita in October 2016.

Both incidents are cause for concern, indicating further use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict. We welcome the OPCW Technical Secretariat's professionalism and impartiality in compiling the reports, in which we have full confidence.

The United Kingdom opposes the use of chemical weapons in all circumstances, by all actors. There can be no impunity for those who use chemical weapons. We will continue to work with the international community to hold perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks to account.

Syria continues to fail to engage with efforts to resolve the many serious gaps and omissions in its chemical weapons declaration. Its defiant attitude shows its contempt for its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118.

Disinformation about chemical weapons is worryingly familiar, coming not only from the Asad regime but from its backers on this Council. We have recently seen fake claims by the Russian Federation about impending chemical weapons attacks in Ukraine. Claims of imminent attacks by groups labelled as 'terrorists' or 'saboteurs' are put forward without any credible evidence, no doubt as part of the pretext for an invasion that the Russian Federation told us in this Council would never happen.

Russia has repeatedly alleged that the West supports 'false flag' attacks to frame Syria, charges that are never backed by evidence. Russia also claims the OPCW Technical Secretariat is biased, again presenting no plausible evidence.

Russia's tactics are designed to deflect attention from those who actually use chemical weapons. So far, eight separate attacks in Syria have been attributed to the Asad regime by independent, expert investigations run by the OPCW and UN. Further attacks remain under investigation.

Let me conclude by reminding you, and this Council, that any use of chemical weapons, by anyone, is abhorrent and cannot be tolerated.

Thank you.

Home Secretary's topical statement on Ukraine

Mr Speaker, Putin's war on Ukraine is monstrous and unjustified. I am in regular contact with the Ukrainian Minister of the Interior and the Ambassador to London.

The United Kingdom stands firmly with the people of Ukraine and as this House would expect, Britain is stepping up its role and playing its part in responding to the terrible situation on the ground in Ukraine.

Mr Speaker, the government has already announced the first phase of a bespoke humanitarian route for the people of Ukraine and the new Ukrainian humanitarian route responds directly to the needs and asks of the Ukrainian government.

Every conflict and threat situation is unique and requires a tailored response.

Our new route will continue to keep pace with the developing situation on the ground and so far has already:

- supported hundreds of British nationals and their families resident in Ukraine to leave – UK Visas and Immigration staff continue to work around the clock to assist them
- enabled dependants of British nationals resident in Ukraine who need a UK visa to apply through the temporary location in Lviv or through visa application centres in Poland, Moldova, Romania, and Hungary

Teams have over recent weeks been surged to these areas and applications have been completed within hours. We are in direct contact with individuals and we have also lowered language requirements and salary thresholds so that people can be supported.

Where family members of British nationals do not meet the usual eligibility criteria – but pass security checks – UK Visas and Immigration will give them permission to enter the UK outside the rules for 12 months and is prioritising all applications.

We are giving British nationals and any person settled in the UK the ability to bring over their immediate Ukrainian family members. Through this extension alone, I can confirm that an additional 100,000 Ukrainians will be able to seek sanctuary in the UK with access to work and public services.

We are enabling Ukrainian nationals already in the UK the ability to switch, free of charge, into a points-based immigration route or a family visa route.

We are extending visas for Ukrainian temporary workers in some sectors who can now stay until at least December 2022, primarily because people cannot return to Ukraine.

Anyone in Ukraine intending to apply under the family migration route should call the dedicated 24-hour Home Office helpline for assistance before making an application.

Mr Speaker, Britain continues to lead and is doing its fair share in every aspect of this Ukraine conflict. I would urge colleagues not to attempt casework themselves, but directly refer people to the helpline number. Duplication of effort would waste precious time and cause confusion. This is the best and most efficient way to help people.

Mr Speaker, over the weekend I have seen members of this House calling for full visa waivers for all Ukrainians.

Security and biometrics checks are a fundamental part of our visa approval process worldwide and will continue, as they did for the evacuation of Afghanistan.

That is vital to keep British citizens safe and to ensure that we are helping those in genuine need, particularly as Russian troops are now infiltrating Ukraine and merging into Ukrainian forces. Intelligence reports also state the presence of extremist groups and organisations who threaten the region, but also our domestic homeland.

We know all too well what Putin's Russia is willing to do, even on our soil as we saw through the Salisbury attack and the use of a nerve agent used on the streets of the UK. The approach we are taking is based on the strongest security advice, Mr Speaker.

The Prime Minister has set out the myriad of other ways we are supporting Ukraine. There will be other statements in the House today.

But Mr Speaker, there are 2 other points I would like to add. The Nationality and Borders Bill is currently at report stage in the other place.

The bill contains provisions to allow visa penalties to be applied to specific countries that don't cooperate with the return of their nationals.

I am now seeking to extend these provisions so that a country can be specified if it has taken significant steps which:

- threaten international peace and security
- have led, or are likely to lead, to armed conflict, or
- breach international humanitarian law

This extension would draw on precedent from the Sanctions and Money Laundering Act 2018.

These powers would be available as soon as the bill receives royal assent. The sooner that happens, the sooner this House and all members can collectively act.

Mr Speaker, we are ever-mindful of cyberattacks and disinformation emanating from Russia.

These would be met with very robust responses indeed. And we have stepped up our international coordination on this.

Mr Speaker, what is happening in Ukraine is utterly heartbreaking and profoundly wrong. But together with our international partners, we stand with the heroic Ukrainian people.

With that, Mr Speaker, there is further work taking place on diplomatic channels and also the Ukrainian government has today requested that the Russian government be suspended from its membership of Interpol and we will be leading all international efforts to that effect.

Statement on corporate transparency and economic crime measures

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on reforms the government will be bringing forward to improve transparency over the ownership of companies and property in the UK and to strengthen the enforcement of financial sanctions. These are key elements of our strategy to tackle dirty money from Russia and elsewhere.

Mr Speaker, the openness of our economy to investment from all parts of the world is one of our greatest strengths.

However, we are equally determined that we want to attract the right type of investment. As many in this House will know, oligarchs and kleptocrats from Russia and elsewhere have used the veneer of legitimacy provided by UK-registered companies and partnerships. They have also used high-end property to help launder proceeds of corruption.

At present, Companies House has very limited powers to prevent this abuse. In light of Russia's outrageous actions in recent days, it is necessary that we put these criminals on notice, and send a message that the UK will not tolerate their corruption here.

So to that end I am announcing 2 immediate steps.

Firstly, today my department is publishing a [white paper on corporate transparency and register reform](#). And this white paper sets out a

comprehensive package of reforms to Companies House.

The agency will be transformed into a custodian of accurate and detailed information – ensuring that we can clamp down on those who seek to abuse UK corporate structures to launder money.

Anyone setting up, running, owning or controlling a company in the UK will need to verify their identity with Companies House, who will then be able to challenge dubious information and inform the security agencies.

Company agents from overseas will no longer be able to create companies in the UK on behalf of foreign criminals or secretive oligarchs.

These reforms will not only tackle illicit finance but will directly support the millions of legitimate enterprises which transact with Companies House every day.

Alongside this white paper we shall also be legislating for other measures, including reform of limited partnerships law, new powers to seize crypto assets and reforms to help businesses share information on suspected money laundering.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, we will be introducing legislation to Parliament tomorrow, to accelerate other measures which will make an immediate dissuasive effect on dirty money from Russia and elsewhere.

The Bill we will introduce tomorrow will create a Register of Overseas Entities to crack down on foreign criminals using UK property to launder their money. The new register will require anonymous foreign owners to reveal their real identity to ensure that criminals can't hold property behind secretive chains of shell companies. By legislating now, we will send a clear warning to those who have, or who are thinking about using the UK property market to launder ill-gotten gains – particularly those linked to the Putin regime.

Tomorrow's Bill will also reform Unexplained Wealth Orders, it will remove key barriers to their use by law enforcement. And it will include amendments to financial sanctions legislation, helping to deter and prevent breaches of sanctions.

The new property register, and the reforms to Companies House, will once more see the UK take innovative and world-leading steps to tackle anonymous shell companies. We have been leading on this agenda since being the first major economy to put in place, Mr Speaker, a public register of beneficial ownership for all domestic companies in 2016.

We can not only pay tribute to the heroic efforts of the people of Ukraine to defend their democracy and their freedom. These measures in a small but significant way will put pressure on kleptocrats and oligarchs who have abused our hospitality for their own nefarious purposes.

Minister of State's speech to British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly

Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the invitation to be with you this morning and also for your kindness in inviting me to join you for the pre-plenary dinner last night. That felt for me in many ways like a homecoming for I had several very enjoyable years as a member of this body and have experienced personally the massive contribution this body makes to understand these islands.

Work of BIPA

This isn't just the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. This assembly comprises all the elected assemblies of these islands, our counterparts in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man.

In the years since your inception in 1990, you have done incredible work bringing people together, facilitating a forum for discussion and understanding. A forum where, both privately and formally, differences can be addressed and ideas can be floated. We have differences in these islands and in recent years, those differences have come to the fore at least in the aftermath of the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union. But organisations like BIPA I think are underpinned in a sense by the guiding philosophy that Lord Denning, the late Master of the Rolls outlined when he said two reasonable people can perfectly reasonably reach opposite conclusions based on the same set of facts without each surrendering their right to be considered a reasonable person.

Those are words I often bring to mind as I visit people of different traditions from the divided communities in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister and Taoiseach speak regularly on a whole range of issues and despite what you might read and hear, I would contend that the relationship closely echoes those between Thatcher and Fitzgerald, Major and Reynolds, Blair and Ahern and Cameron and Kenny.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and myself have close relationships with our Irish counterparts and Michael Gove, the minister responsible for the UK government for the devolved administrations, who has regular weekly calls with our counterparts in those areas. But my friends, the work of BIPA is central to that work of understanding through your biennial plenary meetings, your committee work, your events and debate. You help to build the bonds of trust and understanding that lay the foundations of the strong working relationship with the UK and Ireland that we enjoy. For that, my friends, I thank you.

I returned to my hometown of Belfast in September last year and I visited my old primary school, Park Lodge on the Antrim Road in North Belfast. One of the young people there asked me what was different about Belfast today and different from when I was there in the 1970s and very early 1980s.

I answered that obviously one major difference was that half of the school audience were female. There were all boys in my day, as it was a Brothers school. I said the substantive difference that I would when I walked to school along the Antrim Road, the police would be in armoured Land Rovers, there would be British Army presence on the street. Bombs were a regular occurrence, there was a gate into Royal Avenue into the centre of Belfast. A man got onto a bus to check people's bags as they travelled to shops in Belfast city centre during the day. That is not the case now.

Belfast 'Good Friday' Agreement

Northern Ireland lives in a completely different environment which was made possible by the Belfast 'Good Friday' Agreement which next year we will mark the 25th anniversary of. The Agreement was a great landmark in the history not just of Northern Ireland but of these islands as a whole. It enshrined the principle of consent, settling Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom for as long as its people wish to be part of the Union.

It established political institutions to give expression to all communities in Northern Ireland. It created new bodies to foster greater North-South and East-West Co-operation.

It reaffirmed the birth right of the people of Northern Ireland to their identity and citizenship, and ensured their rights are protected by law. And in so doing, the Belfast Agreement created a more peaceful, stable and prosperous Northern Ireland.

But my friends, we should not live under the illusion that the work is complete. When you visit parts of Northern Ireland today, communities still live in the shadow of peace walls. In a very real sense, Northern Ireland lives in a text based absence of violence and there remains so much to do to build genuine, cross community understanding and respect. When you visit communities in Derry, Strabane, Castlederg and both sides of the divide in Belfast, you see the urgency of that work that still needs to take place.

Earlier this year I was in Belfast for the Four Corners festival, a cross community coming together, driven by two clergy, Fr Martin Magill of St John's on the Falls Road and the Reverend Tracey McRoberts, a Protestant clergywoman on the Shankill. A ground-breaking event, opened with a message from the Holy Father Pope Francis and closed by an in person speech by the Archbishop of Canterbury. This would have been unprecedented and inconceivable 25 years ago.

Need for Devolved Government

My friends, behind the agreement that is making so much of that possible, lies the fundamental principle of devolved power sharing, of shared

government. The last two years have given us a very clear sign that when the Northern Ireland parties work together, much can be achieved. We must not allow ourselves by accident or design, to return to a state of political deadlock in which the only people that will suffer will be the people of Northern Ireland themselves.

That is why the Government is absolutely committed to a return to power sharing and urges all the parties to commit themselves to power sharing in the run up to the election on 5th May. That will be the opportunity of the people of Northern Ireland to elect a new assembly. We passionately believe that decisions taken in Northern Ireland, should be taken by people elected in Northern Ireland and accountable to the people of Northern Ireland at the ballot box. A restored Executive will be fundamental in driving economic recovery.

Economic Recovery

Last year, the whole of the UK economy returned to growth. It grew by 4.6% in Northern Ireland in the third quarter of 2021. Levelling up, the mission of the Government of which I serve, is vital to all areas of this country that I serve but especially Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has so many of the ingredients required for economic success, exceptional talent, creativity and innovation. This together with the scenery, tourism and the rich cultural and artistic heritage, make NI a great place to live, work and do business and my friends to invest. We are expanding into industries with enormous future growth potential, such as cyber security, where there are now 2,300 cyber professionals working in over 100 companies in Northern Ireland.

Belfast is ranked in the Top 25 Tech Cities in the UK, second only to London. We have a vibrant fintech, health and life sciences and advanced engineering sector in NI. It is our task as Government to showcase that.

In September, the Secretary of State led the Northern Ireland Business and Innovation Showcase in London as part of our centenary programme. In November the Secretary of State and Trade Secretary hosted the Board of Trade in Derry, highlighting the fantastic ecosystem of Northern Irish businesses involved in digital trade.

Only a few weeks ago, I visited Dubai and Abu Dhabi, where I supported the first ever Northern Ireland Day at the Dubai World Expo, supporting Northern Ireland businesses such as White's Oats, Kiverco and Greenfields, and promoted the fantastic opportunities available in Northern Ireland to key investors. I also met significant sovereign wealth funds who accepted my invitation to come and look at investment opportunities in Northern Ireland.

But the fact remains that Northern Ireland continues to punch below its weight economically. Despite its strength, many communities are still in serious deprivation. We have the highest proportion of adults without qualifications in the United Kingdom, the highest proportion of economically inactive adults and too high a proportion of Northern Ireland's brightest and

best leave Ireland and do not return.

Levelling Up

That is why the agenda for levelling up and delivering policies and investments that will grow Northern Ireland's economy are absolutely vital. Let me spell out the scale of both the task and the opportunity. Northern Ireland's economic output stands at around £42 billion. If we could close its productivity gap with the UK in a decade, Northern Ireland could be generating £16 billion more, each year, in today's prices. This would amount to around £8,500 per person.

That is why we are putting money into the Community Renewal Fund, the Levelling Up Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund which are having real impacts on real communities on the ground in Northern Ireland.

For example, the £300,000 to develop a brand new digital hub on the site of the old police station in Cushendall, County Antrim that I visited just a few weeks ago. £2 billion New Decade, New Approach financial package, over £600m to the City and Growth Deal programme and £400m in the New Deal for Northern Ireland in addition to £355m in support for firms in Northern Ireland to adapt to the post EU Brexit trading environment.

My friends, those are figures but they represent opportunities for real people in Northern Ireland. They represent the opportunities for people to have the dignity of earning their living by work and see people coming off welfare and into dignity.

Next Steps

I want to close by saying this to you. The relationship between the United Kingdom and Ireland is a unique and special one.

We can debate who are closest friends and allies around the world but the reality is, our economies, our cultures, our histories and our futures, are inextricably intertwined and will always be so for the reality of the geographically. BIPA has helped over the years to build that understanding and respect and that work continues today.

I was delighted last night at dinner to meet and talk with Minister Byrne and to accept his invitation to visit Dublin and indeed his own constituency. I accept that invitation warmly and wholeheartedly because it is by building relationships and understanding that we advance the interests of all our people in these islands. I thank you earlier for all that you do to support that agenda. I always remember one of my favourite lines of Yes Minister, when Sir Humphrey explained to Bernard that in politics gratitude is merely a lively expectation of favours to come.

Can I close by thanking you for all you have done and thank you for all you will do in the decades ahead. Thank you very much.

ENDS