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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS

WRITTEN STATEMENTS AND WRITTEN ANSWERS

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Lord Agnew of Oulton	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education
Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon	Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Lord Ashton of Hyde	Chief Whip
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Baroness Goldie	Minister of State, Ministry of Defence
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Lord Keen of Elie	Advocate-General for Scotland and Ministry of Justice Spokesperson
Baroness Morgan of Cotes	Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
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Baroness Sugg	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for International Development
Baroness Vere of Norbiton	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport
Baroness Williams of Trafford	Minister of State, Home Office
Viscount Younger of Leckie	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

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Written Statements

Wednesday, 15 January 2020

Foreign Affairs Council: 10 January 2020

[HLWS33]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Right Honourable Friend, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Christopher Pincher), has made the following written Ministerial statement:

On 10 January, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP), Josep Borrell, convened an extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) in Brussels to address recent developments in Iraq and Libya. My Right Honourable Friend the Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa (Dr Andrew Murrison) attended the meeting.

Libya

Ministers exchanged views on recent developments in Libya, including the military escalation around Tripoli and the EU's engagement. HRVP Borrell briefed on his recent diplomatic engagement, including with the E4 (France, Germany, Italy and United Kingdom) and with Libyan Prime Minister Serraj. HRVP Borrell updated Ministers on his plans to engage with all players involved, with the objective of moving towards a political solution within the framework of the Berlin process and UN-led mediated efforts.

The United Nations (UN) Special Representative and Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Ghassan Salamé, briefed Ministers on his work to prepare for the planned Berlin Summit, which will focus on practical initiatives towards long-term stability in Libya.

Dr Murrison expressed full support for German efforts to boost regional cooperation, and underscored the need for international unity, particularly in support of the UN process and of the strict enforcement of the UN arms embargo.

Recent Developments in Iran and Iraq

The Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Jens Stoltenberg, briefed Ministers on the latest developments in Iraq.

Ministers emphasised the need for the de-escalation of tensions in the region and maximum restraint as well as condemning attacks on coalition forces engaged in the fight against Da'esh. They stressed their continued support for Iraq's stability and reconstruction and urged Iran to return to full compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) without delay.

Dr Murrison supported calls for de-escalation and shared our deep concern at Iran's latest announcement of non-compliance with the JCPOA. Dr Murrison also offered the United Kingdom's condolences to those affected by the Ukraine Airlines crash, and called for EU support for a full investigation.

Outcomes of the Foreign Affairs Councils: 11 November and 9 December 2019

[HLWS32]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Right Honourable Friend, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Christopher Pincher), has made the following written Ministerial statement:

The 11 November and 9 December Foreign Affairs Councils (FACs) took place in Brussels whilst Parliament was dissolved. Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP), chaired the November FAC with her replacement Josep Borrell chairing the December FAC. The United Kingdom's Ambassador to the Political and Security Committee, Paul Johnston, represented the United Kingdom at both the November and December FAC.

November FAC

At the November FAC, HRVP Mogherini briefed Ministers on Venezuela, Bolivia, and Lebanon and touched on Turkey's actions in North-East Syria. Ministers also adopted a framework for sanctions in response to Turkey's hydrocarbons explorations activity in the Eastern Mediterranean.

On Hong Kong, the United Kingdom stressed the need for support for the right to peaceful protest; condemnation of the violence; the need for a proportionate response; the importance of China upholding the Joint Declaration; and the need for investigations into the treatment of protestors.

Ministers discussed the EU's approach to Iran and Gulf Regional Security, following Tehran's announcement of further non-compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The United Kingdom highlighted our commitment to the JCPOA whilst noting that Iranian actions were putting the deal under pressure. We stressed the importance of all parties engaging in comprehensive negotiations and of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchange (INSTEX) to avoid the collapse of the deal and to support regional security.

Ministers discussed the political situation in Afghanistan and reviewed the prospects for peace, following the Presidential election. HRVP Mogherini underlined the EU's willingness to contribute both politically and financially to peace talks, and its readiness to support an inclusive Afghan political process. The United Kingdom stressed the importance of reductions in Taliban violence and renewed US-Taliban talks as an important step towards the relaunch of intra-Afghan negotiations.

Ministers had an exchange of views with the Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. They reaffirmed the EU's strong political commitment to support the civilian transitional government, as well as the EU's readiness to provide financial aid for the transition, including in support of economic and state structure reform. They

highlighted the importance of ensuring that the civilian transition remains an inclusive process, including an appropriate role for youth and women.

December FAC

In December, Ministers expressed their concerns about the Turkey-Libya Memorandum of Understanding on delimitation of maritime jurisdiction and on security and military cooperation. They also reflected on the political situation in Libya and the Berlin process, which aims to find a sustainable solution to the situation in the country.

Ministers exchanged views on Ukraine, in the context of the Normandy Format leaders' summit, which took place in Paris the following week, and the situation in Iran, following the recent meeting of the Joint Commission of the JCPoA, as well as recent protests. HRVP Borrell briefed on the situation in Bolivia, Moldova and Hong Kong. On the latter, the United Kingdom underlined the importance of meaningful government efforts around dialogue to prevent a return to violence.

Ministers discussed EU-Africa relations in preparation for 2020's Ministerial and summit-level meetings between the EU and the African Union (AU). They addressed the political, economic, security and demographic aspects of the relationship as well as important cross-cutting issues such as climate change and digitalisation. Ministers emphasised that the next summit would be an important milestone in modernising and scaling up the EU's partnership with Africa.

Ahead of Human Rights Day on 10 December, Ministers discussed the promotion and protection of human rights in the world. They assessed the EU's work on human rights, the instruments at its disposal and its priorities for the coming months, reaffirming the EU's leadership in the protection and promotion of human rights worldwide. HRVP Borrell announced the launch of preparatory work on a possible sanctions regime to address serious human rights violations.

During the working lunch, Ministers informally discussed the FAC's working methods. The new HRVP set out his priorities, including the Western Balkans, Europe's Neighbourhood and the Middle-East, as well as on how the EU could work together more effectively to deliver operational outcomes.

Conclusions

At the November FAC, the Council extended sanctions on Venezuela for a year due to persistent actions undermining democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. It also adopted a framework for restrictive measures in response to Turkey's hydrocarbons explorations activity in the Eastern Mediterranean.

At the December FAC, the Council agreed a number of measures:

- The Council decided to maintain individual restrictive measures against several personalities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) regarding the obstruction of the electoral process and human rights

violations, and to lift these measures for two other persons.

- The Council also adopted conclusions on the DRC that support the most recent elections as the first peaceful transfer of power in the country's history and state the EU's readiness for a gradual engagement in support to the DRC government's reform agenda, based on reciprocal commitments.

- The Council adopted conclusions on Sudan, recognising the opportunity for democracy, peace and prosperity following the political transition. They highlight Sudan's importance in the region's stability and reaffirm the EU's commitment to accompanying Sudan on its reform path towards democracy. While welcoming the transition government's recent steps, they reiterate the EU's concern for the deteriorating humanitarian situation and call upon the Sudanese authorities to remove remaining bureaucratic obstacles to humanitarian and development actors' work.

- The Council adopted conclusions on the civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Compact, reaffirming its commitment to make civilian CSDP more capable, effective, flexible and responsive. They highlight CSDP missions' significant contribution to international peace and stability as an essential part of the EU's integrated approach to external conflicts and crises. They also emphasise the need to strengthen the EU's role and capacity to act as a security provider through CSDP.

- The Council adopted conclusions on the EU Arctic policy, and noted that the EU should continue to make a significant contribution in both regional and multilateral fora.

- The Council adopted a decision in support of strengthening biological safety and security in Latin America in line with the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004) on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery.

- The Council extended the implementation period of the decision in support of the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons to a total of 48 months. This extension of the implementation period will allow the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which is responsible for the technical implementation of the project, to reach its planned objectives.

- The Council adopted a decision in support of SEESAC disarmament and arms control activities in South East Europe reducing the threat of illicit small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition.

- The Council adopted the EU position within the Ghana-EU Economic Partnership Agreement Committee regarding the definition of the concept of "originating products" and methods of administrative cooperation.

- The Council adopted a decision setting out the EU's position within the administrative committee for the

international convention on the harmonisation of frontier controls of goods, which aims to reduce barriers to international trade and facilitate the movement of goods at the international level, to reduce administrative burdens on Member States.

Regional Connectivity

[HLWS34]

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: My Right Honourable friend, the Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps), has made the following Ministerial Statement.

The Department for Transport, the Treasury and the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy have been in discussions with Europe's largest regional airline, Flybe, which plays an important role in the UK's connectivity by flying regional routes.

In a sign of the Prime Minister's commitment to levelling up all regions of the UK, the Government has announced additional measures to support regional connectivity across the UK, to ensure all corners of the country drive the economy, and fully benefit from prosperity in years to come.

A review of regional connectivity will ensure all nations and regions of the UK have the domestic transport connections local communities rely on – including regional services from local airports. This review, led by DfT, will consider all options to ensure we continue to have good regional connectivity. The DfT will work closely with the aviation industry, local regions and devolved nations to identify how we can support connectivity.

As part of this work and ahead of the March Budget, the Treasury will also be reviewing Air Passenger Duty (APD) to ensure regional connectivity is supported while meeting the UK's climate change commitments to meet net zero by 2050.

The outcomes of these reviews will benefit the entire industry, passengers, communities, regions and nations across the UK.

These measures featured in discussions between the Department for Transport, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and HM Treasury and Europe's largest regional airline, Flybe, which plays an important role in the UK's connectivity.

HMG was notified about the difficulties of Flybe on 11 January, and since then we have worked intensively with the company to understand their financial position and explore options. In the light of these discussions the management and shareholders on 14 January took action to set Flybe on a recovery path.

UK Space Agency

[HLWS35]

Lord Duncan of Springbank: My Rt hon friend the Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Chris Skidmore) has today made the following statement:

The UK Space Agency is offering young people expert advice and the chance to connect with space industry representatives, potential investors and commercial partners, as well as a share of £50,000 for their ideas of how satellites could improve life on Earth.

Satellite services such as navigation, communications and Earth observation support industrial sectors worth £300 billion to the UK economy. This competition gives young people the chance to test new ideas with space experts and perhaps one day become part of the UK space sector, which already supports 42,000 jobs and could create thousands more this decade.

By supporting the UK's next generation of scientists and engineers, the competition will help turn young people's ideas into real-world proposals that could eventually transform our lives – from saving our planet from climate change, to improving healthcare services.

Anyone aged between 11 and 22 years old has until 3 March 2020 to enter the competition through the UK Space Agency's website. The winners will go on to pitch their ideas to a panel of industry experts, with the opportunity to gain further advice and support.

The government is committed to establishing a National Space Council and developing a UK Space Strategy, while establishing commercial spaceflight from UK spaceports for the first time, to help the UK lead the way in this fast-growing, high-technology sector. It is my own personal ambition to ensure the sector has a bright future, and I would encourage all young people who are fascinated by space to enter the SatelLife competition and to play a key part in the second space age.

Written Answers

Wednesday, 15 January 2020

Australia: Fires

Asked by **Baroness Crawley**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assistance, if any, they have offered to the government of Australia to deal with the bushfire crises. [\[HL117\]](#)

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and I have been in contact with our Australian counterparts to offer our condolences and stress our readiness to help in whatever way they need. I also met with FM Payne on the 3 January in Sydney and offered our full support.

As set out by FCO Minister Heather Wheeler in her Oral Statement of 9 January, we have deployed a team of UK experts to Australia.

The team includes a senior member of UK Fire and Rescue Service, a medical specialist in trauma and mental health, and a military liaison officer specialising in crisis response.

They will work with Australian counterparts to establish what further UK support will be of most use to Australian emergency responders, and ensure that such contributions are fully integrated with Australian efforts.

Children: Disadvantaged

Asked by **Lord Bird**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to prevent any increase in childhood deprivation. [\[HL103\]](#)

Baroness Stedman-Scott: The Government is committed to delivering a sustainable, long-term solution to poverty in all its forms. This requires an approach that goes beyond a focus on income and tackles the root causes of poverty and disadvantage, to improve long-term outcomes for families and children.

The evidence is clear about the importance of work, in particular full time work, in tackling child poverty and improving children's educational outcomes. The absolute poverty rate (BHC) of a child, where both parents work full-time is only 4%, compared to 44% where one or more parents are in part-time work. Universal Credit helps by incentivising entry into work, offering smooth incentives to increase hours. We will therefore continue with our reforms to the welfare system so that it works with the tax system and the labour market to support employment and higher pay.

Colombia: Armed Conflict

Asked by **Baroness Coussins**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the threat to the security of Afro-

Colombian and indigenous communities, especially the Embera-Wounaan, on the Pacific coast of Colombia, following reports of armed skirmishes between paramilitaries, the Army of National Liberation and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia for control of the land. [\[HL112\]](#)

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are aware of reports of violence on Colombia's Pacific coast. The presence of organised armed groups, fighting for control of illicit economies, disproportionately affects a number of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities. Our Embassy regularly raises concerns about specific communities with the relevant state actors in Colombia. We support the Colombian government's deployment of further security forces to attempt to guarantee security. More widely, long-term security depends on socioeconomic development of the region and vice versa, key reasons why Her Majesty's Government remains steadfast in its support for the 2016 peace process and why the United Kingdom maintains significant development programming in Colombia.

Asked by **Baroness Coussins**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports of collusion between the Colombian security forces and illegal armed groups. [\[HL113\]](#)

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are aware that organised armed groups operate in parts of Colombia, and of occasional reports that some members of the security forces are complicit in these groups' activities. We support the Colombian government's efforts to root out any such collaboration, including via our specific programme work to foster good governance and tackle corruption in security forces.

Colombia has made significant progress in its efforts to end the influence of paramilitary groups. We have seen little recent evidence of any widespread collusion between security forces and organised armed groups.

Asked by **Baroness Coussins**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact on the UK's investment of funding to support the biodiversity hotspot on the Pacific coast of Colombia, of the (1) activities of paramilitary groups in the region, and (2) threat of displacement to the indigenous communities. [\[HL114\]](#)

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The United Kingdom recognises the unique biodiversity of Colombia's Pacific coast and is committed to helping Colombia safeguard its environmental assets. Although this region is not the focus of our programming, the United Kingdom has implemented some climate change-related projects in the region, as well as some Newton Fund research projects on biodiversity and sustainability.

We are aware of reports of violence affecting certain areas in this region, and of the continuing presence of

organised armed groups competing for control of illicit economies.

The British Government takes into careful consideration such factors when designing projects and deciding which to fund, and we continually monitor the effect of such risks on our programme work in consultation with colleagues working in Colombia. We also make a thorough assessment of the impact of all of our projects, including on the human rights of local communities.

We are steadfast in our support of the Colombian peace process, and UK-funded programmes across a range of issues from biodiversity to climate change help to improve the socio-economic conditions in rural areas and tackle the root causes of insecurity, building towards a sustainable peace.

Education: Travellers

Asked by Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth

To ask Her Majesty's Government what progress they have made in improving education outcomes for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities. [HL108]

Lord Agnew of Oulton: The latest published data, including breakdowns for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) pupils, relates to 2019 at key stage 2 and 2018 at key stage 4. At both stages, the data showed a small improvement in headline attainment measures for this group compared to the previous year. At key stage 2, the percentage of GRT pupils attaining the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics rose from 19% in 2018 to 20% in 2019. At key stage 4, the percentage achieving grades 9-4 in English and mathematics rose from 11.8% in 2017 to 13.1% in 2018.

The government is taking significant steps forward to support attainment and progression for all pupils, including GRT pupils. Our education reforms, including those aimed at improving teaching; encouraging good attendance and behaviour; and strengthening the curriculum and examination system, are designed to improve opportunity and standards for all pupils. These reforms are underpinned by school accountability measures, which are intended to encourage schools to focus more closely on the attainment of all their pupils.

Through the pupil premium; we are addressing low economic circumstances. This is a key factor that predicts future educational outcomes, and affects a high proportion of GRT children. Since 2011, we have provided over £15 billion of this additional funding, with a further £2.4 billion being distributed in this financial year.

Eritrea: Refugees

Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent assessment they have made of the risk to Eritrean refugees of being forcibly returned to Eritrea by the

government of Sudan contrary to the principle of non-refoulement. [HL97]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We do not currently assess that Eritrean refugees are at risk of being forcibly returned to Eritrea by the Government of Sudan. The Government of Sudan hosts more than one million registered refugees, including almost 125,000 Eritreans. We continue to support efforts to improve conditions for refugees in Sudan of all nationalities. However, we are aware of recent reports of Eritrean and other migrants being apprehended by police in Khartoum and we appeal to the Government of Sudan to ensure that the fundamental rights of all migrants and refugees in Sudan are respected. We will raise this issue as part of bilateral discussions with the Government of Sudan.

Hong Kong: Demonstrations

Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government, following the arrest of medics treating protestors injured in the recent demonstrations in Hong Kong, what assessment they have made of the implications for international (1) humanitarian norms, and (2) human rights law, of any such detentions. [HL194]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We take any allegations relating to the arrest of medics treating protestors at demonstrations in Hong Kong extremely seriously. We expect the Hong Kong authorities to abide by international humanitarian norms and laws. We continue to be concerned about the situation in Hong Kong and have called consistently for a robust, independent inquiry into recent events as a step towards resolution of the situation. The only way to resolve this impasse is through meaningful and effective political dialogue. We will continue to raise our concerns with the Hong Kong SAR Government and the authorities in Beijing.

Persecution of Christians across the Globe Independent Review

Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 7 January (HL6) about implementation of the Truro Review that "some of the recommendations will take longer to implement and many will require an ongoing effort to embed into the working practices of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other departments", which recommendations they have in mind; and how long they expect the implementation of those to take. [HL196]

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The Government remains committed to implementing the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's Review in full and in a way that will bring real improvements to the lives of those persecuted because of their faith or belief. Some recommendations will take longer to implement than

others, including developing religious literacy training, which will need to go out to tender, and agreeing a consistent international approach to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) across Government. In addition, developing and delivering tailored responses to FoRB violations at Post level will always be an ongoing process.

Sahel: Armed Conflict

*Asked by **The Marquess of Lothian***

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the current situation in Mali and the wider Sahel region; what discussions they have had with the government of the United States about the number of US troops in West Africa further to reports that that government is considering a full or partial withdrawal; and what assessment they have made of the impact of any such withdrawal on the operational ability of UK military personnel in that region. [\[HL144\]](#)

Baroness Goldie: Her Majesty's Government is concerned about the security situation in Mali and the spread of insecurity across the region. We remain in close contact with our key partners, including the US and France, to share assessments and coordinate activity. No decisions on the status of US forces in West Africa have been formally communicated by the US Government to HMG. We assess that any possible withdrawal of US forces will have a minimal impact on our deployed forces, but we will keep this under close review.

Sri Lanka: Politics and Government

*Asked by **Lord Naseby***

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have, or seek, a two-state solution for Sri-Lanka. [\[HL150\]](#)

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The British Government does absolutely not have or seek a two-state solution for Sri Lanka.

Wang Yi

*Asked by **Lord Alton of Liverpool***

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the nine-year prison sentence given

in China to Pastor Wang Yi of the Early Rain Covenant Church, the removal of his political rights for three years, and the confiscation of his personal assets. [\[HL197\]](#)

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have raised our concerns about the closure of churches in China, including the Early Rain Covenant Church which Pastor Wang Yi founded, directly with the Chinese authorities. On 2 January, I issued a tweet expressing serious concerns about the recent sentencing of Pastor Wang Yi to nine years in prison following a secret trial and called on China to uphold the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by China's constitution and international law. More broadly, we remain deeply concerned about the persecution of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners and others on the grounds of their religion or belief in China. The freedom to practise, change or share one's faith or belief without discrimination or violent opposition is a human right that all people should enjoy.

*Asked by **Lord Alton of Liverpool***

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made as to whether the trial of Pastor Wang Yi met standards of impartiality for a fair trial; whether they intend to raise his case with the government of China; and what assessment they have made of the suppression of the open practice of religious beliefs. [\[HL198\]](#)

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have raised our concerns about the closure of churches in China, including the Early Rain Covenant Church which Pastor Wang Yi founded, directly with the Chinese authorities. On 2 January, I issued a tweet expressing serious concerns about the recent sentencing of Pastor Wang Yi to nine years in prison following a secret trial and called on China to uphold the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by China's constitution and international law. More broadly, we remain deeply concerned about the persecution of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners and others on the grounds of their religion or belief in China. The freedom to practise, change or share one's faith or belief without discrimination or violent opposition is a human right that all people should enjoy.

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