

UK - OVERSEAS TERRITORIES JOINT MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

2017 COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The Minister for the Overseas Territories, Lord Ahmad, and elected leaders and representatives of the Overseas Territories¹ met as the Joint Ministerial Council (JMC)² at Lancaster House in London on 28 and 29 November. We welcomed the attendance of Ministers from the Department for International Development, Her Majesty's Treasury, the Department of Health and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy demonstrating the UK Government's commitment to a whole of government approach to supporting the Territories. We welcomed the newly elected Premiers of the Turks and Caicos Islands and Bermuda and the representative of the newly elected Falkland Islands Legislative Assembly to their first Council and congratulated the Premier of Cayman on his re-election.

Self determination

2. The principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, as enshrined in the UN Charter, applies to the peoples of the Overseas Territories. We reaffirmed the importance of promoting the right of the peoples of the Territories to self-determination, a collective responsibility of all parts of the UK Government. We committed to explore ways in which the Overseas Territories can maintain international support in countering hostile sovereignty claims. For those Territories with permanent populations who wish it, the UK will continue to support requests for the removal of the Territory from the United Nations list of non-self-governing territories.

Constitutional relationship

3. The UK and the Overseas Territories have a unique constitutional relationship, built on a shared history, common values and a spirit of collaboration and partnership. We agreed that the fundamental structure of our constitutional relationships was the right one - powers are devolved to the elected governments of the Territories to the maximum extent possible consistent with the UK retaining those powers necessary to discharge its sovereign responsibilities. We agreed the need to continue our engagement on these issues to ensure that constitutional arrangements work and develop effectively to promote the best interests of the Territories and of the UK.

Disaster recovery

4. The UK and the Overseas Territories reiterated a message of support and solidarity with the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla and the Turks and Caicos Islands in the wake

1 Anguilla, Ascension, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Pitcairn, St. Helena, the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia, Tristan da Cunha and Turks & Caicos Islands.

² The JMC is the highest forum for political dialogue and consultation between UK and elected Leaders and Representatives of the Overseas Territories for the purposes of providing leadership and promoting cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the strongest ever seen in the Caribbean. We applauded the courage and resilience of the people of the affected Territories. We acknowledged the important UK contribution to the response effort, through the effective deployment of Royal Fleet Auxiliary Mounts Bay to BVI and Anguilla and deployment of military personnel, aid experts and Rapid Deployment Teams across the Territories, representing a total investment of £62m in relief. We also applauded the important support offered by Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar, through provision of personnel, supplies, equipment and funds for recovery, underlining the close cooperation and mutual affection that exists between the Territories. We acknowledged the important role played by neighbouring Caribbean states and regional organisations in the relief effort.

5. The UK reiterated its commitment to work in partnership with governments of the affected Territories to put in place plans and structures for longer term reconstruction and sustainable economic recovery. The UK committed to assisting the Overseas Territories in their recovery and to increase their future economic resilience. We underlined that the commitment to developing resilience applied in all Territories. We welcomed the recent announcement of a further £15m of UK support for early recovery after the hurricane, which is delivering accelerated power reconnection, support to prisons, repairs to airports and assistance for policing, and the Prime Minister's announcement of a further £70m in grants and up to £300m in loan guarantees to support long-term reconstruction in the Territories worst affected. We discussed the important role played by the private sector in driving economic recovery, including in supporting training and development and making available appropriate insurance. We further reiterated the importance of all Overseas Territories ensuring they have comprehensive national risk assessments, disaster preparedness policies and processes in place and that these are regularly exercised, reviewed and modified where needed to ensure they remain fit for purpose. The UK reiterated its continued commitment to providing technical expertise and support for capacity building.

Environment and climate change

6. The destruction wrought by Hurricanes Irma and Maria has served as a reminder of the vulnerability of the Overseas Territories to climate change events and the devastating effect these can have on the lives and livelihoods of those who live there. We committed to continue mutual engagement ahead of international forums on Climate Change, to ensure the Overseas Territories' views and priorities are fully reflected in negotiations. We further agreed that a representative from the Territories would attend COP24 as part of the UK delegation, highlighting the value in their presence to help amplify our shared message on the need for high ambition on climate change targets. The UK reiterated its commitment to work with the Overseas Territories on the issue of application to the Territories of climate change treaties, including taking forward work to extend the UK's ratification of the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto protocol to those Territories who have indicated their readiness for extension and through initial consultation with Territories who have an interest in participation in the Paris Global Climate Change Agreement in the first half of 2018. We emphasised the importance of work in the Territories on climate

change adaptation and mitigation and collaboration between the Territories to share best practice on environmental management and climate change issues, including through the annual meetings of Territory environment ministers.

7. We welcomed the significant progress towards creating a 'Blue Belt' of protected ocean around the Territories and the specific commitments made in St Helena, Tristan da Cunha, Ascension, British Indian Ocean Territory, Pitcairn, British Antarctic Territory and South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. We reaffirmed that this work must be science and evidence-based and, in populated Territories, taken forward with local support. We welcomed the UK's support for this work and agreed that Blue Belt objectives would be aligned with Territory priorities, including development of long-term capacity in the Territories for the management of the marine environment.

Exit from the European Union (EU)

8. We continued our dialogue on the implications for the Overseas Territories of the UK's decision to exit the EU. The position on UK sovereignty of the Overseas Territories is not changed by EU exit. The UK reiterated its assurance that it will never enter arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes, nor enter into a process of sovereignty negotiations with which Gibraltar is not content.
9. The UK is responsible for representing the Overseas Territories' priorities in exit negotiations. A clear objective of the negotiations is to achieve a deal that works for all parts of the UK family. We will seek to ensure the security and economic sustainability of the Overseas Territories is preserved and, where possible, strengthened post Brexit. The UK will also take all steps to ensure continuity and legal certainty in arrangements between the UK and the Overseas Territories.
10. We underlined our aspiration for a close partnership between the Overseas Territories and the Overseas Countries and Territories and Outermost Regions of the EU after Brexit and supported the Territories' participation, where appropriate, in regional forums and initiatives promoting dialogue and cooperation. The UK acknowledged the importance of EU funding for sustainable economic development in some Overseas Territories and committed to ensuring that these interests were fully reflected in the UK's negotiating position. As the Prime Minister said in her Florence speech, the UK will honour the commitments it has made during its membership of the EU.

Developing Tangible Change for the Overseas Territories and their citizens

11. We reaffirmed our commitment to a shared vision for the Territories as vibrant and flourishing communities that strive to achieve and maintain self-sufficient economies generating opportunities for their people. We welcomed UK Government programme support available for the Overseas Territories through the Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF) and noted the investment in people and capital projects achieved so far.

12. We noted the challenges faced in some Territories of rising levels of gang related crime, and illegal migration and welcomed UK support to build capacity in these areas. We reaffirmed our shared interest in combating these threats to the Territories' security and prosperity.

Beneficial Ownership and Tax Transparency

13. We welcomed progress made by the Overseas Territories with financial services centres in implementing the arrangements set out in the Exchange of Notes for law enforcement exchange of Beneficial Ownership information, including establishing new and secure systems for the collection, exchange and use of beneficial ownership data, where these did not already exist. We committed, where not already achieved, to expedite work to ensure that the new systems were fully operational and populated. We also committed to review the effectiveness of the new arrangements six months from the implementation deadline, to ensure we meet our agreed objectives.

14. We welcomed the Overseas Territories' cooperation in international efforts to promote tax transparency and tackle financial crime, including through upcoming Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF) reviews in the Cayman Islands and Bermuda. We further welcomed the Territories' constructive engagement with the EU Code of Conduct Group (COCG) as well the first meeting of the Global Forum for Asset Recovery. We recognised the need for dialogue with the EU COCG to demonstrate the value the Overseas Territories provide to the global economy within a framework of transparency.

Anti-Corruption

15. We reiterated our commitment to show leadership in tackling corruption. We committed to prioritise further work to enable timely extension to the Territories of the UN Convention Against Corruption, particularly where Territories have made a request for extension, and to set a clear pathway for this process building on the recent meeting of States' Parties.

Governance, Human Rights and Child Safeguarding

16. We reiterated our commitment to high standards in public life supporting and developing open and transparent institutions for democracy, including Codes of Conduct, human rights institutions, sound public financial management, and a strong, effective and diverse public service. We reiterated our commitment to progress the development and implementation of clear Codes of Conduct for Ministers, elected officials and civil servants, where these do not already exist.

17. The UK and the Overseas Territories commit to ensure the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the people of the Territories and their just treatment and protection from abuses. We discussed our shared resolve to continue to promote respect for human rights and compliance with international obligations in the Territories and welcomed the constructive engagement of the Territories in

preparations for the UN Periodic Review in this regard. We further welcomed the extension in 2017 to Bermuda, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha and Ascension Island of the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the recent application for extension by the Government of Montserrat.

18. The leaders of the Territories reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring the highest possible standards for protection of children and promotion of children's welfare in the Territories. We discussed progress in promoting interagency cooperation in the Territories and the development of national response plans to define policy priorities. We noted the particular challenges for those Territories affected by the recent hurricanes and agreed that children's welfare should remain a central priority for recovery plans, including through reconstruction of schools. We also welcomed progress made under the initiative led by the Falkland Islands for more effective collaboration between the Territories on the safeguarding of children.

Health

19. We welcomed the continued support and commitment from the UK Department of Health in partnership with Public Health England (PHE) and the Territories to raise awareness of International Health Regulations and develop relevant capacity to respond to major public health incidents (including outbreaks). We welcomed the contribution of the UK Department of Health and PHE to the emergency response to Hurricane Irma through the swift deployment of technical public health experts to support Territory governments. We committed to further engagement on public health as the affected Territories continue their recovery efforts.
20. We discussed the importance of building awareness, capacity and expertise in the Territories in tackling non-communicable diseases, such as obesity and mental health problems, and the impact of these challenges within all our populations. We committed to work together on these important issues, to share best practice and resources on preventative approaches and how these can be adapted to local needs.