

Thank you, Chair, for giving me the floor. I am very grateful to have the opportunity to contribute to discussions on this important – and very relevant – challenge we are all facing to varying degrees.

The UK is fully committed to tackling the problem of organised immigration crime, including migrant smuggling. The National Crime Agency is currently leading more than 90 investigations into organised immigration crime – and the Prime Minister is absolutely focused on driving forward international solutions to tackling this problem. Accordingly I would like to note that the UK would very much welcome further opportunities to collaborate and cooperate on solutions with other countries – and I'm pleased to be here today with this group of international experts to discuss ways to solve our common goal of tackling smuggling of migrants and organised crime.

Our success is entirely dependent on collaboration – this is an international issue. In terms of existing operational collaboration, the UK works closely with near neighbours. Since July 2020, the UK-France Joint Intelligence Cell (JIC) that we set up with French law enforcement partners has dismantled 76 organised crime groups linked to small boats – and we continue to work more broadly with international partners to identify opportunities to disrupt crime upstream. This is a shared challenge and we are committed to working together to tackle it.

We also do policy-focused joint work, an example of which can be found in Turkiye, where we have developed in collaboration with the Turkish Coastguard and ICMPD the human rights curriculum for Turkiye's coastguard academy, which is the first of its kind. I would like to thank Murat bey and his colleagues in particular for their support in this endeavour.

Considering cooperation and coordination between coastal and non-coastal states, the UK's main priority is to disrupt the supply chain of small boats. With the help of European partners, we are interdicting and seeking to seize consignments of small boats as they travel towards the Channel region. We have excellent cooperation with our law enforcement partners but we need to rapidly scale up disruption and work more closely to effect prosecutions – not only on grounds of criminality for use in migrant smuggling but also on the basis that they are dangerous and unseaworthy. We are also working farther upstream with UNODC through Glo.Act to ensure implementation of crucial anti-migrant smuggling legislation to enable prosecution of gangs.

Finally, the UK is fully committed to upholding our international obligations including the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol. We have extensive legislation under section 25 of the Immigration Act 1971 designed to ensure that the offence of facilitation of illegal migration does not apply to those carrying out search and rescue activities – in particular the Royal National Lifeboat Institute.

Overall, we see prosecutorial and regulatory action, underpinned by close international cooperation and information sharing, as critical to tackle the criminal conspiracies facilitating the smuggling of migrants by sea via dangerous small boat crossings.