27th Anniversary of the NATO Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Kosovo: UK statement to the OSCE, March 2026

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UK Chargé d'Affaires, Deputy Ambassador James Ford, speaks on the anniversary of NATO's response to the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo and underlines the UK's focus on building modern, forward-looking partnerships with countries across the Western Balkans region.

Thank you, Mr Chair.

As we have noted on previous occasions, the conflicts that followed the break-up of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s represented one of the darkest periods in Europe's recent history. Tens of thousands of people lost their lives, and many more were forced from their homes and suffered loss or injury.

The NATO Secretary General has been clear that the NATO-led campaign in 1999 was never against the Serbian people. It was to bring to an end the large-scale human rights abuses carried out by the Milosevic regime in Kosovo, which posed direct risks to regional and European security. The campaign followed more than a year of intense efforts by the UN and the Contact Group, and was a last resort in response to mass killings and a humanitarian crisis. The OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission, established by this Council in October 1998, played a key role in establishing, objectively, the situation on the ground.

After years of conflict and violence, the intervention brought hostilities to an end and reopened the prospect for communities to work towards a shared and more positive future. The Kosovo of 2026 is unrecognisable from that of 1999, and the United Kingdom is proud of its contribution to supporting that progress.

We should not forget the past, or misuse it. The lessons of history should inform us, not constrain us. Our focus today, like that of other NATO partners, is on building modern, forward-looking partnerships with Serbia, Kosovo and countries across the Western Balkans. We welcome that NATO and Serbian military personnel will train together in May for international missions, including UN peacekeeping operations. The declarations and conclusions of the Berlin Process Summit hosted in London last year – and particularly the Hillsborough Castle Declaration on Good Neighbourly Relations – reaffirm our collective commitment to furthering regional cooperation for the benefit of all citizens of the Western Balkans.

We call on the leaders of Serbia and Kosovo to implement the agreements reached through the EU-facilitated Dialogue, to advance the normalisation of relations, and to deliver the peaceful, stable and prosperous future their citizens deserve.

Thank you, Mr Chair.

https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/27th-anniversary-of-the-nato-response-to-the-humanitarian-crisis-in-kosovo-uk-statement-to-the-osce-march-2026