

# [Africa and the UK: Priorities for engagement in 2022 – Minister for Africa speech at Chatham House](#)

It was very good to be here last week when the Foreign Secretary spoke. She gave a rallying call to friends and allies of the UK to build a network of liberty together.

For like-minded democracies to work together, from a position of collective strength, to forge closer ties on economic, security issues and technology issues. And lead the world into a new age of ideas, influence and inspiration.

By 2050, it is predicted that 1 in 4 people on this planet will live in the continent of Africa – so Africa really matters. To achieve our aims, the UK needs to invest and build long-term partnerships in Africa.

I want those partnerships to go far beyond African governments, so that we are working with citizens, businesses, civil society – and all those who share our goals and values.

And I want our African partnerships to have global support. We should be working together, on the greatest global challenges. Our partners should include the African Union, but also the UN, Commonwealth, World Bank and IMF.

I want to work together in support of African nations. And for our partnerships to deliver for British business and for British people as well.

I know there is a road to travel. I want to pause for a moment, to reflect on the challenges of the past year.

The impact of COVID has been felt across every nation, and in all walks of life. African nations have suffered dreadfully.

The continent experienced its largest recession on record last year. It pushed around around 32 million more people into extreme poverty. Over 11 million girls may not go back to school, because of the disruption caused by school closures.

Unfortunately, the discovery of the Omicron variant highlights that COVID will continue to be a shared threat in 2022 as well.

South Africa and Southern African scientists deserve our deep gratitude for their leadership in the swift identification and reporting of this variant.

I am pleased that today we have been able to take eleven African countries off the UK travel red-list following the advice of our scientists. I know that the initial decision to restrict international travel hurt individuals, businesses and the local economy in each country.

The decision to red list was not one we wanted to ever have to make. I am truly sorry that we had to take this decision – but it was not done lightly.

Both decisions were based on the objective advice of our Health Security Agency experts, which were using clear evidence and data, and done to protect the health of the British public and the hard-won gains of our vaccination programme. Now that there are high levels of community transmission in the UK, it is right to remove the red list.

On COVID we know that we are not safe until everyone is safe.

The UK has been playing a key role to get more vaccinations into arms across Africa. We are one of the largest donors to Covax, having committed £548m, and that is helping to deliver more than 214 million doses to 44 African countries.

We have also provided £20m to the African Union's COVID-19 Response Fund, which supports the excellent work of Dr John Nkengasong [and the Africa Centres for Diseases Control.

Last month when I was in Senegal I visited the Institut Pasteur which with the support of the UK government and private sector, is producing excellent rapid diagnostic tests. Our support from the UK for vaccine manufacturing in Senegal, South Africa and Morocco has catalysed investment, which means we will see COVID vaccines produced on the African continent in 2022.

But we know that the long term COVID recovery needs more than vaccines and support to health services. It also needs greater economic support. So I am also very pleased that, under the UK's presidency, the G7 pledged \$80bn of finance for Africa over five years to help unlock investment in fragile economies and support economic recovery from COVID.

I want to see as much progress as possible to strengthen ties between Britain and African countries.

These are encompassed within my five major priorities for 2022.

The first priority, is to strengthen freedom and democracy because we know that free, democratic countries are more peaceful and they are more prosperous.

The peaceful democratic transition of power in Zambia, Cape Verde and Niger provide encouraging evidence that freedom and democracy are flourishing in many African countries.

My recent visit to Sudan I saw just how bumpy the road to liberty can be. We should not take for granted that progress is irreversible and we must nurture and protect the gains that are made.

I want to maintain the UK's strong track record of supporting African partners and collaborating with the AU to shore-up democracy and good governance. That includes encouraging the development of inclusive political institutions, a free media and an active civil society.

I have been following the work of the UK's first independent election observation mission. Led by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the mission deployed to observe the election in The Gambia this month. I fully expect that more will follow in their footsteps.

There is a long list of elections taking place in Africa in 2022, including in Kenya, Lesotho and South Sudan, they are a key test of a functioning democracy.

It is important that each one demonstrates to those watching across the globe that the light of liberty burns brightly in Africa.

There are some other key events in 2022 that I hope will continue to build on this positive change. Events that will encourage greater freedom and a better understanding and a respect for human rights.

The UK is looking forward to the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting which is going to take place in Kigali.

It will be an important opportunity for the Commonwealth family – which includes 19 African countries – which will be able to recommit themselves to the shared core values of the Commonwealth Charter and build on our priorities for prosperity, security, sustainability and fairness.

Next June, the UK will be hosting the Safe to Be Me Global Equality conference on LGBT rights. The conference which will be held in London aims to be a catalyst for change, creating a platform to share best practice on tackling violence and discrimination, and to showcase leadership from countries like Angola, Botswana and South Africa.

We also look forward to engaging with African partners in the run-up to the Freedom of Religion or Belief conference that the UK will host in July.

Supporting freedom and democracy pays dividends for the UK too. Because that prosperity and stability abroad makes for improved security and prosperity at home.

And that brings me to my second priority – strengthening economic partnerships.

The Foreign Secretary is a strong believer in the transformative power of trade – it creates positive bonds between countries, can stimulate growth, jobs, opportunity and even freedom.

The Prime Minister has said that he wants the UK to be Africa's investor of choice.

We know that delivering economic growth needs investment – investment in business, investment in infrastructure and investment in people – particularly in education and health.

We want to be the honest and reliable investment partner that African countries want. By promoting a liberal free trade approach, we will help

create conditions that support businesses in all parts of the UK and across the African continent – and that includes our work to tackle corruption and illicit finance.

Investing in African markets has the potential to bear fruit. By 2040, African countries will have the largest youth population in the world. With the right investments, young people can be Africa's greatest resource and drive economic growth across the continent.

That is why we recently launched British International Investment, to establish values-driven, high standard finance for clean, green infrastructure, and aims to leverage our world-class asset in the City of London as we support democratic countries to grow.

I saw the results of this for myself when I visited Senegal last month. In Dakar, British International Investment is partnering with DP World to develop and build a new world-class container port. This is part of a £1.7bn investment to modernise and expand three African ports – Dakar, Sokhna and Berbera that will create 5 million new jobs and increase trade for 35 million people.

This is also why we have welcomed the creation of the AU's African Continental Free Trade Area, the world's largest trade bloc. When fully implemented, a common African market will have a combined GDP of \$2.6 trillion, which will bring greater opportunities for African and British businesses alike.

I believe deals are out there for UK businesses and the government is working to help find them. At the UK-Africa Investment Summit last year, we secured £15bn in commercial commitments.

I would encourage those of you here who are from the business world to register for the Africa Investment Conference that will be happening in January. The conference will showcase emerging opportunities across African countries, especially in clean growth.

It will highlight UK expertise and the Growth Gateway business service which supports two-way trade between African countries and the UK.

My third priority is that that growth should be clean, green and sustainable.

This is part of our commitment to deliver for the planet, and deliver on the agreements made at COP26.

It was a great honour and a huge responsibility for the UK to host COP26. We made significant headway, but Glasgow is only the start.

There are still 11 months of UK presidency to run before we hand the baton to Egypt in November next year. Between now and then, my focus will be on finding ways to assist African countries to turn those COP26 promises into tangible actions.

We want to make the most of our £200m contribution to the \$1.5bn Congo Basin

forest initiative.

We want to support countries to adapt to extreme weather and the changing climate, building on our £140m commitment and working with other donors.

We want to work closely with South Africa as well as with the US, France and Germany to ensure the \$8.5 billion Just Energy Transition Partnership gets off to a flying start, and becomes a template for similar schemes elsewhere.

We also want to see the COP15 Biodiversity Conference in China deliver meaningful outcomes to support biodiversity in Africa.

And finally, we want to develop our support for the African Union Green Recovery Action Plan, which brings a shift to cleaner, greener development.

So I've said a lot of what we want, but most crucially the UK will work with our African partners, through 2022 and beyond, to conserve and restore nature; to support adaptation and resilience to climate change; to increase access to climate finance; and to accelerate the transition to more climate-resilient, low carbon, and environmentally sustainable economies.

My fourth priority is how to make the world and the UK safer by helping African countries to become safer.

Conflict and insecurity is causing misery for millions of people. It undermines liberty and hampers development. It creates regional instability and it creates permissive environments for organised criminals, terrorists and hostile activity.

Some direct threats to the UK and UK interests can be traced directly back to conflicts in some African countries.

And To tackle them, the UK needs to support African efforts to improve security, and resolve conflicts.

For example, we work closely with the African Union and the Federal Government of Somalia, where their peace enforcement mission, AMISOM, works in partnership with Somali security forces to bolster stability.

We also work with the AU in Ethiopia where the AU's high representative for the Horn of Africa is leading mediation efforts; and we are supporting the Union's stance on Mali, Sudan and Chad.

We have expanded our diplomatic presence across the Sahel and are contributing 300 UK troops to MINUSMA, which is the UN's Peacekeeping Mission in Mali.

We also have around £10 million invested in building stability and bolstering conflict resolution in Mali and the wider Sahel.

In Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, where the conflict with terrorist groups has caused immense suffering to local communities for over a decade, the UK Government is supporting regional stabilisation efforts.

But we want to work with African partners to help them increase their own peace-keeping capabilities.

Another issue of security, last month we saw tragic deaths in the English Channel. Illegal migration is a priority for the whole of our government. We will continue to address global migration challenges and protect the most vulnerable. We must reduce these dangerous and unnecessary journeys and break the criminal business model of people smugglers.

My final priority is perhaps the one that will make the biggest difference – Empowering Women and Girls.

As a ministerial team with a majority of women, we share the Foreign Secretary's passion for women to be able to have greater control over their own lives, and her commitment to put women and girls at the heart of our foreign policy

We want to see girls receiving 12 years of quality education, all over the world, because when you open the door to education you open up doorways to opportunity.

We want to end female genital mutilation, and the appalling use of sexual violence, including in wars.

We are also calling out human rights abusers, including Wagner mercenaries in Central African Republic, at the UN Security Council and we're shining a spotlight on the sexual abuse and exploitation that has taken place during UN Missions.

Women and children have been at the sharp end of the pandemic everywhere, including in many African countries.

In South Africa, I listened to descriptions of domestic violence becoming a "second pandemic". They are not alone. This is an issue we have been working to tackle right here in the UK too.

I took great inspiration, however, from the spirit and fight shown by the female activists I spoke to in Khartoum, who refuse to be silenced or intimidated.

In Lesotho, I saw how UKAID has helped girls go to school and access clean water. In Sudan, I met the most wonderful resolute grandmother who has eradicated FGM from her island community with the help of UKAID.

In Senegal, I heard from women – and from men – how the family planning clinic we set up is giving them choice, and with that choice it is also giving them confidence and giving them control.

I hope to make progress on girl's education issues with African Education Ministers at the Education World Forum, being held here in the UK. And in March, I'll work to strengthen women's rights at the Commission for the Status of Women in New York.

Next year the UK will also host a global summit to unite the world around action to prevent sexual violence in conflict and to strengthen commitment to the women, peace and security agenda.

I've listed five priorities today, running through all of them are two more.

One is our unwavering commitment to humanitarian aid and crisis response. In the hardest of times, the UK stands by people in need.

Secondly, the UK is a world leader in science and technology. We will develop science and technology partnerships in Africa in order to help advance prosperity, security and liberty.

I know this agenda is ambitious, and in order to deliver it I want to tap into the knowledge and expertise of our African diaspora communities and make more of that human bridge that exemplifies so many of the rich and positive links we have with African countries.

Building stable and prosperous partnerships with African nations helps build prosperity and stability in the UK. But I think we could and should be doing more to explain to and discuss with the British public the great things we do across the world and why it makes a difference to them.

I know that Dakar and Dar-es-Salaam can seem far away if you're sitting in Doncaster or Dundee. But I hope, starting from this speech, to reduce that distance.

Our mission is to build long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships with African countries that support a freer, safer, greener, and more prosperous continent.

It will help make the UK more competitive, and will help to make African nations more resilient as we face the future: together.