

News story: Foreign Secretary launches Platform for Girls' Education

At a launch reception attended by Ms. Meghan Markle and HRH Prince Harry, the Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson made his case to global leaders to sign up to 12 years of quality education for the world's most marginalised girls.

Britain will lead by example and will provide £212 million in UK aid money to help one million vulnerable girls across the Commonwealth receive 12 years of quality education by 2030.

Mr Johnson also launched his Platform for Girls' Education, a group of 12 influential figures from across the Commonwealth to drive forward the political momentum on girls' education. The group will hold countries to account and champion best practice across the Commonwealth. Amina Mohammed, the Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for Education will co-chair.

Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson said:

Girls' education is the Swiss Army knife, the Rosetta Stone, the Black and Decker toolkit that solves a multitude of the world's problems.

Educating girls is in all our interests. If we fail, we store up huge problems for the future and wilfully miss out on boosting economic growth, managing population pressures and creating stable, prosperous societies.

As a Commonwealth we've pulled together to make one of the great problems of our time a global priority. We must keep up the momentum, we must drive forward change and we must do everything to ensure that the world's poorest girls get 12 years of quality education.

Prince Harry and Ms. Markle met and spoke with Commonwealth ministers and individuals who work to promote girls' education worldwide.

Despite global efforts, poverty, cultural taboos, poor teaching and a lack of resources is shutting the world's girls out of the classroom. The recently launched Policy Lab will bring the UK's world-class expertise to help Commonwealth countries deliver for girls – supporting developing countries to ultimately become self-sufficient and provide quality education. This will begin with a pilot of five countries.

All children have the right to learn in safe environments. However, in conflict zones schools are often used as bases for the military and become targets. That's why the UK has this week endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and is lobbying Commonwealth countries and the wider

international community to do the same. This is a real and urgent problem – globally over 130 million girls are not in school, and in conflict areas girls are over twice as likely to be out of school.

Australia, Ghana, Kenya and Sierra Leone are among other Commonwealth countries that have this week confirmed their own commitments to provide 12 years of quality education for all.

Further information

Speech: UK stands with Colombia in support of Peace Agreement

Thank you very much Mr President.

It is an honour to have their Excellencies the Vice-President and Foreign Minister with us today.

I too would like to open by expressing my personal condolences to our Côte d'Ivoire colleagues, to Bernard's family and friends and on behalf of the British government and the British people to our friends in Côte d'Ivoire, the government and the Côte d'Ivoirian people as well. It is a great loss and we send you all our condolences and sympathy.

Turning to Colombia Mr President, it is very good to have the SRSG back here. He and I have known each other for a very long time. I'd like to thank him for his work and also the work of all your team on the ground.

This is a historic peace agreement. I think Colombia is to be congratulated on taking this tremendously important and historic step. It ended 50 years of conflict. This is a huge achievement and it serves global inspiration for others. It shows what can be done for peace when you have bold leadership. The United Kingdom knows from Northern Ireland that implementation of these sorts of agreements is very challenging and I think it has proved to be no less challenging for Colombia. The United Kingdom is proud to stand with Colombia in support of the implementation process – and you can rely on us to do so over the months and years ahead.

I was very interested to hear from the SRSG of some of the remarkable progress that there has been over the past three months. What he had to say about the ruling and about the banks is an important step forward and we welcome also the congressional elections in March that saw FARC participate in Colombia's democratic process for the first time. Mr President, we believe that this is indeed a key point in the FARC's political transformation and a truly remarkable achievement in the short time since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016.

We also welcome the progress there has been in implementing the Peace Agreement, notably the structures for truth, justice and reparations for victims of the conflict and the activation of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, and the Special Unit for the Search for missing persons are two very important steps.

On the resumption of talks with the ELN, we very much welcome the return to dialogue but I would also like to turn to the very real challenges that remain to the implementation of the Peace Agreement. These challenges include continued insecurity in some of the areas affected by the conflict and they include violence and threats against former FARC members. The protection measures, including FARC participation in close protection of their leaders are key steps in helping address this. It is vital that the Government's strategy for security guarantees is properly resourced and coordinated with the police, the Fiscalía (Attorney General's Office) and judicial authorities.

I was reassured by what the SRSJ had to say about the arrest of the FARC leader and we would like to echo those calls for calm and for ensuring that the provisions of the peace agreement continue to be followed. One of our other concerns Mr President, is also the levels of violence against community leaders and also human rights defenders. It is very good that the Special Investigative Unit in the Fiscalía will be able to investigate these attacks. The launch of Plan Horus represents is a bold and comprehensive response to security challenges in vulnerable areas and we look forward to seeing an ongoing and coordinated stabilisation approach with police and civilian agencies. I think this will be vital for long-term stability.

Turning to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, we would like to thank those staff and Mr Todd Howland in particular for his leadership of the office and we welcome the appointment of his successor, Mr Alberto Brunori. This office has played a key role in supporting the peace process and we will continue to watch its work very closely.

In the next weeks and months, it is vital that reintegration projects are active in all 26 Areas for Training and Reintegration and this will help prevent further former FARC members from joining dissident groups. We look forward to seeing resources unlocked, and timelines accelerated, for crop substitution, rural development and reintegration of former combatants.

The United Kingdom encourages further progress in the implementation of the Peace Agreement over the coming months to support continued progress towards a sustained peace in Colombia. Colombia can definitely count on the United Kingdom's continued and deep support.

Press release: PM meeting with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong: 19 April 2018

This afternoon the Prime Minister held bilateral talks with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong of Singapore at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

The leaders agreed that the Commonwealth was a unique and diverse institution, capable of delivering real change through practical action. They both noted the importance of the Commonwealth's youth to its future success.

They agreed that the UK-Singapore trade and investment relationship was strong and would continue to grow, noting the potential for an even stronger future bilateral trade and investment partnership between our two countries as we leave the European Union. They welcomed the approach agreed at the March European Council to provide continuity during the implementation period for international agreements, which could be swiftly transitioned into new bilateral agreements once the implementation period ends.

They agreed the attack in Salisbury had been an outrageous act, and agreed on the importance of upholding the global norm against chemical weapons use, including in the context of Syria. They discussed the importance of tackling Russian disinformation and of preserving the rules-based international system.

They also discussed evolving challenges on cyber security and noted increasing UK-Singapore co-operation in this area. The leaders agreed that they were looking forward to working together more closely in this area after the two governments signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on the matter earlier this week.

News story: Defence Secretary launches £132m Scots sub-hunting aircraft home

'Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson cut the first turf on a £132m facility for the UK's new fleet of submarine hunting Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) at RAF Lossiemouth today. Crown copyright.'

The site will be the future home to the country's nine-strong, new P-8A Poseidon MPA fleet. The aircraft's key role will be to protect the UK's submarine-deployed nuclear deterrent and its two new aircraft carriers,

whilst it can also deploy missiles capable of destroying enemy submarines beneath the sea.

The aircraft will work alongside eight cutting-edge new Type 26 warfare frigates – which also have their roots firmly in Scotland, where they are being built at BAE Systems' yard in Govan. Later today the Defence Secretary will visit the shipyard to view the first completed unit of the new anti-submarine warship, HMS Glasgow, in the shipbuilding hall where it is being connected to the second unit and will be joined by others as the ship takes shape.

The MOD is investing £3 billion over the next decade in its Maritime Patrol Aircraft capability, and last year confirmed £3.7bn to start building the first three of eight Royal Navy Type 26 frigates on the Clyde as it continues to boost its capabilities.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

These submarine hunters will play a vital role in keeping the UK safe from the increasing threats and aggression we face in the skies, on the sea and below the waves.

This massive investment demonstrates the huge contribution Scotland makes to protecting Britain and how defence generates prosperity and opportunity.

Moray is benefitting from 200 local construction jobs during this building phase, with the number of personnel employed at RAF Lossiemouth growing by 470 to 2,200 people when this is complete.

The news comes at a time when the Defence Secretary has warned that Russian submarine activity has increased 'ten-fold' in the North Atlantic sea.

Together the aircraft and ships will protect the UK's submarine-deployed nuclear deterrent and its two new aircraft carriers. In addition to boosting the UK's surveillance capabilities, they are both designed to conduct anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare, search and rescue and to conduct intelligence gathering.

The new Lossiemouth facility will be completed in 2020, to coincide with initial operating capability of the Poseidon aircraft being available in the UK. Built by Elgin-based Robertson Northern, it will comprise a tactical operations centre, an operational conversion unit, squadron accommodation, training and simulation facilities and a three-bay aircraft hangar.

At the peak of construction, the project will support 200 local jobs. When the fleet is fully operational, some 470 additional personnel will be based at RAF Lossiemouth, taking the total number of people employed there to 2,200. Further roles are also expected when the training and support services are established at the new facility.

In addition to that, the Type 26 frigate programme will sustain 1,700 BAE Systems jobs in Scotland, safeguarding a total of 4,000 jobs across the wider UK supply chain until 2035. The next generation highly capable and versatile multi-mission warship designed to support anti-submarine warfare, air defence and general purpose operations anywhere on the world.

Speech: The UK and Nigeria will continue to be long term partners

Introduction

Your Excellency, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning. I'm delighted to be with you here today at the London Stock Exchange in the heart of the City of London.

I'm honoured to be alongside His Excellency President Buhari and many thanks to Yewande Sadiku, Atam Sandhu and their respective teams for organising what promises to be a really engaging day.

As you know, the LSE has a great track record of supporting the development of African capital markets and supporting investment in African companies. Indeed, in parallel to today's programme, the UK's Development Secretary is speaking at another event at the LSE, celebrating the role of London's capital markets in financing growth across the Commonwealth, and showcasing the UK's commitment to driving mutual prosperity across the Commonwealth through investment, trade and jobs.

The huge success of Nigeria's recent bond listings is further testament to this and reinforces the City of London's position as a leading partner for raising finance – laying strong foundations on which to build our economic and financial relationship.

I'm delighted that the Lord Mayor will be speaking at this event this morning and spearheading a mission to deepen our relationship on financial and insurance services on his visit to Nigeria in a few months.

Nigeria, economy and reform

As many of you will know, 2017 was a difficult year for the Nigerian economy. The slump in the price of oil in particular led to significant challenges in the economy, not least around the foreign exchange.

But with each crisis comes an opportunity. And the Government of Nigeria has worked hard to turn back the tide and put in place measures to promote diversification and greater ease of doing business and to make further progress on key sector reforms.

The Government has set up a new Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council (PEBEC) designed to improve the ease of doing business. And this year, Nigeria rose by 24 places in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business rankings. It was one of the world's top 10 performers.

Consumer-facing industries such as telecommunications, banking, healthcare and real estate have experienced rapid expansion and can fuel the new engine of growth that Nigeria needs to take it to the next level.

The Nigerian Government is committed to addressing the scourge that is corruption. His Excellency President Buhari is personally committed to this and we have seen notable achievements in the last few years, particularly through its active engagement in the Open Government Partnership. We know more needs to be done and the UK Government is working closely with the Government of Nigeria to make progress on this – both in Nigeria and internationally, for example through the Global Forum for Asset Recovery and through our own UK Unexplained Wealth Order.

Firms often cite lack of infrastructure, red tape and high-entry costs as further obstacles to entering the market, but these are not insurmountable and the opportunities and rewards available to those who persevere are immense.

Nigeria needs an investment of US\$127bn in infrastructure over the next five years. We know the scale of this challenge can sometimes be difficult to determine when based in the UK or other European countries.

Activating fresh sources of capital, both from within and outside Nigeria will be critical to help close this funding gap and the UK government is here to help.

We all know of Nigeria's great potential: the largest economy in Africa; set to be 3rd most populous nation in the world by 2050; fertile land; abundant natural resources; and a young, energetic upwardly mobile population, with a deserved reputation for creativity and entrepreneurial spirit.

UK success stories and HMG role

UK businesses have thrived in Nigeria. Don't take my word for it, speak to companies like BA, Shell and Unilever – who all have strong and long-established operations in Nigeria. Indeed, Unilever's most successful global country operation is in Nigeria.

And we have seen newcomers enter the market too. Just last year Prudential entered Nigeria in recognition of the huge opportunities for life insurance with a market of this size. We expect to see more partnerships as companies seek to work with and invest in what is Africa's largest economy and as they better appreciate the opportunities, along with the risks of working in this market. Indeed, we are working hard to increase trade ties for long-term, sustainable and mutually beneficial growth.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Trade

are working work with British businesses and investors to support the further strengthening and deepening of the commercial ties between the UK and Nigeria.

Our teams in the UK and in Lagos can support British companies as they are confronted by information asymmetries: our teams can help you understand where the opportunities and risks are, help you identify local partners and support your efforts in due diligence to make your entry to market a successful one. We can help you with an honest assessment of the risks and opportunities.

The UK is committed to doing even more to support the economic development of Nigeria, now and in the long term. Our Department for International Development has an annual bilateral programme of £275m this year. Much of this is dedicated to supporting economic development and driving inclusive growth. DFID is providing support in a range of areas to reinvigorate the agricultural sector and domestic manufacturing base; boost employment opportunities and tax collection; increase transparency and remove constraints on the ease of doing business; attract quality investment and improve competitiveness.

We also have a wide range of programmes under way through the UK's Prosperity Fund, designed to support increased investment in to Nigeria, encourage economic diversification and ease the business environment by mapping the challenges at federal and state level.

From a trade perspective, our export credit agency UKEF has an outstanding finance offer for Nigerian businesses wishing to buy British products. UKEF currently has up to £750million cover for Nigeria. Nigerian businesses can get loans or guarantees when they buy British products – and the share of UK content required is only 20%. And the tenure for such loans or guarantees can be up to 18 years. We think this offer is second to none. And recently UKEF has also announced that it will provide Naira-backed guarantees for Nigerian companies buying British products in Naira. So, these companies can buy British and pay local. We are committed to ensuring that no opportunity for increased trade is thwarted for want of export finance.

As you can see, the UK government is serious about Nigeria. We are, and we will continue to be, long term partners. Ministers from all three international departments: FCO, DIT and DFID are keenly interested in Nigeria and committed to ensuring that in Africa we continue to move from aid to trade and to contribute to job creation and wealth creation in the UK and in Africa.

Commonwealth

This event is happening in the margins of CHOGM. One of the key issues that will be discussed is free trade. This is a key issue for the UK and for Nigeria. Global trade between Commonwealth states is expected to surpass 13 trillion US dollars by 2020. These numbers reflect the sheer scale and ambition of what is happening within the Commonwealth today in terms of trade, investment and job creation.

There are huge untapped trading opportunities within the Commonwealth.

With the UK/Nigeria trading relationship currently worth more than £3 billion and more than £5 billion invested in Nigeria by UK companies, Nigeria is a much-valued Commonwealth partner. Yet it's no secret that these figures can be improved upon greatly.

And speaking here earlier today, the UK's Development Secretary spoke about the work SheTrades Commonwealth is doing in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Bangladesh to support women-owned businesses to participate in international trade, connecting female entrepreneurs to markets and helping them to export.

This is a fantastic initiative and looking around the room I am convinced that UK firms can and will build even stronger partnerships with their Nigerian counterparts by harnessing the energy and dynamism that characterises Nigeria today.

Future

As we exit the EU, I want to make clear that the UK remains open for business and is the same outward-looking, globally-minded, big-thinking country we have always been. Rest assured our strong economy will continue. The UK has been, and always will be a trading nation, keen on entrepreneurship and innovation – values I know both our countries hold dear.

The UK is wholeheartedly committed to supporting Nigeria's continued ascent because a stable, secure and prosperous Nigeria means economic opportunities for British business; a safer, more secure UK, and a stable influence in Africa.

I hope that we can all work together to strengthen our political, commercial and cultural relationship for the good of our mutual prosperity.

All of us here today have a role to play in realising the wealth of opportunity and potential that Nigeria possesses, creating new markets for trade, investment and inclusive growth that will lead to a more prosperous world for us all.

Thank you.