

News story: UK announces £2.9m for human rights across the Commonwealth

UK Minister for Human Rights today announces 3 projects to support human rights across the Commonwealth, with particular focus on the South Pacific and small states. This £2.9 million work will support member states, regional organisations and human rights institutions in promoting human rights standards across the Commonwealth, with a focus on equality and adherence to international human rights obligations.

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon announced a new £1.8 million project to help improve the capacity of Pacific Commonwealth countries to deliver human rights.

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

Human rights are the bedrock of successful societies and a fundamental Commonwealth value. The Commonwealth is at its strongest when we share our expertise and experiences through our network.

Smaller countries face significant challenges in establishing and maintaining their human rights institutions. This new funding will offer valuable support to our nine Pacific Commonwealth partners as they strive to strengthen their national institutions.

The funding will support human rights institutions to meet international standards and help improve governance. Women, young people, persons with disabilities, and other minority groups will all benefit. The Pacific Commonwealth Equality Project will run over the 2 years that the UK is Chair in Office of the Commonwealth (2018 to 2020). The South Pacific countries are Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

Lord Ahmad also announced £0.6 million to support the Commonwealth's 31 small states. The Commonwealth small states grouping includes lower income countries and small island developing states (SIDS).

Head of the Commonwealth's Human Rights Unit Karen McKenzie, said:

The UK contribution will give impetus to the Commonwealth's work with small states in Geneva, strengthening their voices in international human rights discourse. Ultimately, it will translate into better understanding and implementation of human rights promotion and protection for all citizens.

Lord Ahmad also announced £0.5 million funding to support the UK's Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) as it takes over the role of the Chair of the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (CFNHRI) for the next 2 years.

[News story: Foreign Secretary announces £1.6m for women in conflict mediation](#)

Championing girls' education to promote global stability will be at the heart of UK foreign policy to positively transform the lives of women and girls in conflict.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by conflict but they are also key to its resolution.

The Network of Women Mediators, will train women from across the Commonwealth with the practical skills to play an active role in resolving conflict worldwide. Today the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson has committed £1.6m UK support to fund this groundbreaking work.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

Conflict affects whole communities, but the fact is women and girls often bear the brunt. Girls are twice as likely to be out of school as boys, and more likely to experience gender-based violence.

This year one of my main focuses will be to ensure that girls in the poorest countries in the world receive at least 12 years of quality education because this is the single most powerful spur to development and progress.

To end wars, build sustainable and lasting peace and create stable societies, women around the world must be able to participate in peace processes. Today's £1.6 million will empower women across the Commonwealth to rightfully take their seat at the negotiating table.

Commonwealth women who take part in the programme will work across the globe to help resolve conflict. They will also support and train up women outside the Commonwealth to enter mediation and peace processes and work with grassroots organisations to empower women mediators amplifying the impact of UK funding.

Despite making up over half of the population, too few women's voices are heard when peace agreements are being drawn up. Between 1992 and 2017 only two per cent of mediators, and five per cent of witnesses and signatories to major peace processes were women. However, evidence shows that when women are a part of peace agreements they are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years.

Further information

[Press release: People urged to have their say on A303 Stonehenge upgrade](#)

Around 1,300 people attended a total of 14 public information events since consultation launched on 8 February, and this is the last chance for people to give their views on proposals to dual the 8-mile section of the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down.

Consultation on the proposals for the Highways England scheme was extended after two information events were curtailed by the severe weather of last month.

The rescheduled events were held at Mere and Salisbury last week, but consultation continues until 23 April, and anyone who would still like to comment can do so by [visiting the scheme consultation page](#). The scheme to improve the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down includes plans for a 1.9-mile long tunnel past Stonehenge, a free-flowing dual carriageway and a much-needed bypass north of Winterbourne Stoke.

During the statutory consultation process, Highways England has exhibited more detailed plans and engaged with local communities, road users, local authorities, stakeholders and heritage groups.

Derek Parody, Project Director for Highways England, said:

We have enjoyed the opportunity to share our more detailed plans, and we are delighted with the response so far.

We would like to remind people that consultation on plans to relieve congestion on the A303 past Stonehenge is still ongoing and the feedback we receive from everyone is really important in helping us to finalise our designs.

The consultation website is still live and we would urge anyone who would like to comment on the proposals to do so before consultation ends on 23 April.

During this consultation period, representatives of Highways England have also met up with a delegation from UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

The aim of the three-day fact-finding mission was to explain how the designs of the proposed tunnel will bring together the World Heritage Site landscape currently split by the A303.

Since the last UNESCO visit early last year and the announcement of the preferred route for the scheme in September, Highways England has continued to work with heritage groups including Historic England, English Heritage, the National Trust, and experts in the field, including the Stonehenge Scientific Committee – a body of leading independent archaeologists – to ensure a new route is built sensitively to the World Heritage Site. The route was carefully chosen to avoid monuments and barrow groups, and Highways England's modified plans also included moving the position of the western entrance to the tunnel to avoid conflicting with the Winter Solstice alignment.

Mr Parody said:

We were grateful to the representatives from UNESCO/ICOMOS who took time to be with us on a three-day visit to understand the scheme we are proposing. It was an excellent opportunity for us to explain how we responded to their previous recommendations and how the scheme is developing.

We look forward to the panel's report in due course, which will help us further refine the scheme, as well as to all the feedback from all interested parties during the current public consultation.

Following consultation, the scheme will then progress through the formal planning process later this year. Subject to statutory approval, construction is planned to start in 2021.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Speech: New Chair of Charity Commission gives first major speech

Good morning

I am delighted to be here with you this morning. It is great to be among so many people involved in such a wide range of charitable endeavours. Thank you for having me here.

This is my first substantial speech as Chair of the Charity Commission. I started in the role at the end of February.

So it is early days for me. And I don't come here this morning pretending to have all the answers. I know I have much to learn from you about the charity and voluntary sector.

But I am clear on what motivated me to take on the role, and on what I want to achieve in the job.

And I'd like to use this opportunity today to set that out.

What drives me, first and foremost, is the importance and immense potential of people's charitable endeavour for our society.

Charity has a meaning and a value that is immeasurable, and lies beyond the sum of what individual charities achieve for their beneficiaries.

It's a value that endures well beyond the reach of any organisational structure.

At its heart, charity is about attitudes, behaviours and qualities that unite us and that we can all sign up to.

Qualities such as purpose, conviction, selflessness, generosity.

Qualities that we admire when we see them in strangers, and that make us feel proud. So much so we look for ways to associate ourselves with people who display them: they are our fellow Brits, our family, friends and neighbours – whatever their race or religion.

And they are qualities that make our communities stronger, and better.

This potential of charity to build meaning and to contribute to a healthy, successful society is profound. So it must be nurtured and promoted. And many of you do that, every day, as do the thousands of people who work alongside you in your organisations.

But we have a problem.

Some organisations that act as the vehicles of that charitable endeavour, namely the charities on the Commission's register, are no longer trusted automatically by the public to foster what it is I've just described.

And that means all charities can no longer expect the public to give them the benefit of the doubt.

That's not just my opinion. It's the conclusion of extensive, independent research, the latest of which is underway right now and will be published later this year.

I have seen some early findings. And they are sobering.

They show that people now trust charities no more than they trust the average stranger they meet on the street.

It is vital, in my view, that we understand why that is the case – and work together to change what's gone wrong so we can put it right.

Sir Stuart suggested earlier that increased public scrutiny of charities is part of a wider trend. And I agree with him.

We need to examine the problem through the same lens that we use to understand the decline in trust in big business and politics.

People clearly are less trusting of institutions and of those in positions of authority than they once were. But that's not because our parents and grandparents were more naïve.

It's because people now have more evidence to prove their suspicions. They are more sceptical of those in powerful roles or in positions that were once associated with respect, because they can see or have experienced directly how those groups really have let them down.

The failings may manifest themselves in different ways. And in the worst cases we've seen people horrifically abuse and show contempt for the respected position that they hold. But whatever the failing, it adds up to people seeing and believing that those in charge of important institutions are running them in their own interests, for their own benefit.

What we can't escape, is that the underlying causes of public distrust are the same in the public, private and our own sector.

Just as some big businesses have failed the reasonable expectations of the public, so have some charities.

And what we need to understand is that, the expectations of you are even higher because you are charities.

In this modern world of swift communication and greater democracy, people have been provided enough proof to realise they can't even rely on those they thought always do better – because they exist for no other reason than to do

good.

I am not holding charities responsible for failings in other sectors. But nor are they innocent bystanders.

The revelations about Oxfam in Haiti and senior staff conduct in other big charities shows that this sector is part of that wider story.

And it's a story that matters more for charities than it does for organisations that measure success by size, or by the bottom line.

For example, the brand of a big supermarket will be damaged when the public see its leaders fail. But people will still buy their groceries. The supermarket's fundamental purpose is not fatally undermined as a result.

But all a charity has is its purpose. So when a charity's purpose is undermined, whether through misconduct or other failures, your very reason for existence comes into question.

That's why people are so appalled when charity workers in a devastated country exploit the vulnerable they were sent to help.

That's why people feel betrayed when charities seem to respond to misconduct among senior staff by protecting the charity's reputation, rather than by rooting out and stopping the bad practice.

And that's what leads them to question very high pay in charities and doubt whether money that's raised and donated makes it to the end cause.

It's therefore no surprise that the research I've already mentioned... also tells us that people want transparency from charities.

But again, we need to really understand why they are asking for this.

After all, most of us lead busy lives. Few of us are prepared to spend our free time working out which energy tariff is most cost effective for us, never mind want to spend time looking at detailed financial information about charities.

So why the focus on information about and from charities? It is a proxy for something far more profound. They want proof that you are who you say you are.

The phrase Sir Stuart has used is 'living your values'. It's a useful form of words, because it is evocative. But I want to add to it. What I propose we're talking about here are standards; standards of conduct and behaviour, and standards of competence.

I really welcome the NCV0's decision to ask Dame Mary Marsh to develop a code of conduct for safeguarding in charities. But we must keep in mind that Dame Mary's important work will be a means to an end, and not an end in itself. People want us to show, not tell.

The public want to be able to trust that, no matter how you slice a charity, what you'll find is a relentless focus on its charitable purpose. And that means demonstrating that the way charities prioritise, behave and conduct themselves is focussed solely on delivering the right results.

I had the pleasure, a few weeks ago, of visiting a charity in Nottingham, my home town.

The charity is called ThinkForward, and it works in deprived areas helping young people make the difficult transition from education to employment. It focuses on those young people most at risk of dropping out.

I met Sally, an impressive, driven young woman who is a beneficiary of ThinkForward.

She told me, in terms, that one of the reasons the charity has made such a difference to her – to her perspective and outlook – is that she believes those running it are genuine, and really care about helping people like her. In other words, that they are walking their talk.

Sally was an inspiration for lots of reasons. And listening to her brought home to me the immense responsibility charities have.

Imagine what might happen in the heart and mind of a young person like Sally if she had a bad experience with a charity claiming to help her. If she had reason to believe those running it were in one sense or another exploiting her.

That charity would not just have failed to make an impact for Sally. It wouldn't just be a case of one less point on the impact measurement scale. It would have done active harm.

That's why it matters so much that charities are relentlessly focused on their mission for the public benefit and on achieving that mission with earnest diligence and while working to the highest standards of conduct and decency.

I've spent a long time setting out the problem of public trust. So let me give you my early thoughts on what we need to do about it.

And this is where the Commission as regulator comes in.

We're currently reviewing our strategy; our current strategic plan ends this year. But what is already clear to me, is the fundamental aim of the Commission.

To help increase – I would say rebuild – trust in charities as vehicles for charitable endeavour.

And the way we will do that is by understanding and articulating the public interest in charity.

This is about more than careful and faithful application of charity law. It's about setting the bar that we believe charities can be expected to reach based on what we know about the factors that drive trust.

Because the Commission's job is not to represent charities to the public, but to represent the public interest to you.

To help you understand what the public expect, and to help you respond.

Not to undermine the independence of individual charities. But to help the sector respond to the reasons the public cherish what it is you do. And to hold the sector as a whole, and its leadership, to account against that bar. I am clear, this is the single most useful and supportive thing we as the regulator can do for charities, and the sector.

We also have our own challenges at the Commission.

First, we are under intense resource pressure. We have seen significant increases in volumes of case work – including most recently around safeguarding concerns. And like other public bodies, we have seen our funding cut drastically – by 50% in real terms over the past 8 years.

I am grateful to my predecessor William Shawcross for all of his work for the organisation.

During his time as Chair, William led a transformation of the Commission. As a result, the Commission has become more proactive, more robust, more effective at holding charities to account on behalf of the public. And most recently, William was successful in securing additional short term funding for the organisation, which will go some way to helping us manage the increased work load.

But we need to do more.

In the context of rebuilding public trust, we must be able to do two things:

The first is to step in and investigate where there are serious concerns about a charity.

It won't have escaped you that we recently placed several well-known charities under formal inquiry – Oxfam, RNIB, The Save the Children Fund.

I am absolutely confident that investigating these charities is merited on the basis of the evidence the Commission holds.

In each case we have different but very serious concerns that we must examine within the confines of a formal investigation.

But as the regulator that promotes the public interest in charities, we have to do more than just investigate when things go wrong.

The second thing we need to do, is help make sure things stay right.

Promoting trust also requires us to be effective in setting out what the public expect from charities. So that charities can help prevent bad things from happening in the first place, and respond in a way that promotes trust when, sadly, human failings do occur.

And so the very same principle I set out earlier applies to the Commission. We too must be crystal clear about our purposes and aims. And we must be able to demonstrate that everything we do – from registering charities, to providing guidance, to investigating – and how we conduct ourselves, is in single-minded pursuit of our purpose.

To help rebuild public trust in charities, so that they continue to inspire charitable endeavour, for the benefit of our society.

The Commission's strategy review continues. We plan to publish our new strategic plan in the summer. Between now and then, I intend to do a lot of listening. First, to the public whose interest we exist to represent. And, not least of all, to charities. To you.

Because I believe we can and must work together to ensure that the public – whom we all serve – has well-founded confidence in charities.

I hope what I've said today hasn't sounded too dour. I don't mean to be downbeat. Because I am optimistic.

Yes, we have a problem. But I am confident that we also have the solution.

I am confident in charities' ability to rebuild public trust in their organisations, if they set their minds to it.

And I believe that you have the power, to begin reversing the trend of declining public trust and social cohesion in society more generally.

If you can't lead this change – when you don't have to worry about the sometimes conflicting demands of shareholders – then nobody can.

As I said at the start, I believe charity – what you in this room here and the other 167,000 charities on our register do – is at the very heart of our society.

Collectively, you have a crucial collective importance and amazing potential.

That's why I joined the Commission and that's why I am looking forward to working with you in the months and years ahead.

Not as an adversary, nor as a cosy friend, but as your partner. Your partner in a shared, vital mission to rebuild public trust in what charity does and has the real potential to help our society achieve.

Thank you

Speech: PM speaks at the Commonwealth Business Forum: 16 April 2018

Good morning everyone.

I would like to start by thanking the Lord Mayor for hosting us here today at the beautiful Guildhall, the home of the City of London's administrators for almost 600 years.

As we have just heard, the building has witnessed its fair share of history over the centuries. And today it is a privilege to add to the rollcall of great events with the 11th Commonwealth Business Forum.

We are here today to discuss how best to make this a more prosperous Commonwealth for all, with contributions from leading figures in some of the world's top businesses.

And this is just one of four such fora running this week ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, giving a voice to hundreds of people who, in so many different ways, do so much to make our Commonwealth the amazing institution it is.

There is the People's Forum, providing a platform for the Commonwealth's incredible Civil Society groups. The Women's Forum will look at ways of overcoming the challenges still faced by a great many women and girls. And, perhaps most important of all, there is the Commonwealth Youth Forum.

It is so important because, while the Commonwealth itself is a venerable institution, its citizens are much younger: almost two thirds are under the age of 30.

The young people of today are the Commonwealth of tomorrow, its business leaders, its innovators, its heads of government.

They have incredible potential, and we as a Commonwealth have a duty to help them reach it. That is why I have put youth at the heart of this week's agenda, and why I began this morning by meeting with some of the Youth Forum's delegates.

As we talked about their ideas and aspirations, about their vision for the future of the Commonwealth, I was struck by the vital role that businesses like yours have in tackling their concerns and giving substance to their ambitions.

They called for cleaner oceans and greater sustainability.

You can help deliver that by changing business practices and creating innovative new products and solutions. They called for action on youth

unemployment.

You, as entrepreneurs and business leaders, create the jobs and opportunities our young people need and, by driving our economies, you fund the schools and colleges that equip them with the skills they need.

And the members of the Youth Forum called for an inclusive Commonwealth where greater prosperity is enjoyed by everyone.

That is something that simply cannot be achieved without strong, successful businesses. Because the best way to raise living standards for all is through economic growth based on free enterprise operating in inclusive, fair and open rules-based markets.

A key part of that, one that has become more important in the years since the Commonwealth was founded, is international trade – and it is an area in which the Commonwealth is flourishing.

The 2018 Commonwealth Trade Review predicted that trade between member states will be worth \$700 billion by 2020. Here in the UK, for example, the value of our exports to fellow members is roughly double what it was 20 years ago.

Yet risks remain. Global growth is fragile. The challenges posed by protectionism are all too clear. And the world economy is changing, as new technology creates new jobs in some industries while supplanting them in others.

If Commonwealth businesses are to flourish in such times, if we are to deliver and secure the prosperous future our young people want and deserve, then the Commonwealth and national governments must not be afraid to act.

Because although the system of international commerce has done much good for the world, it can always be improved. Playing fields can be levelled, barriers removed, the benefits opened up to all.

So while we should be unapologetic in our support for free and inclusive trade, we should also work hand in hand with businesses to make it more efficient and effective, for example by supporting the use of international standards.

Shared standards have huge potential to stimulate trade.

They create a common language for trading partners across the globe, enhance trust in supply chains and stimulate innovation.

Greater use of these international standards across the Commonwealth will reduce the costs of trade between members, as well as with partners beyond the Commonwealth, for greater global benefit.

That is why the UK will be funding an all-new Commonwealth Standards Network, which will support developing countries in particular to better meet existing international standards.

The network will provide a significant opportunity for national standards experts to collaborate and share best practice.

And it will empower developing countries to have a stronger voice in the international standards community – something that has benefits on a global scale.

We will also be funding a Trade Facilitation Programme, supporting and providing technical assistance to selected Commonwealth countries in implementing the World Trade Organisation's Trade Facilitation Agreement. Full implementation of the WTO agreement is estimated to reduce trade costs by up to 16 per cent for the less-developed countries.

It will cut the average time needed to import goods by 47 per cent, and the time taken to export by as much as 91 per cent, a huge boost for businesses across the Commonwealth.

But no amount of action on these fronts will truly be successful if half the Commonwealth's citizens continue to face significant barriers to participation in the economy.

If our family of nations is to realise its full potential, then we must take action to boost women's access to economic opportunity, and empower them to create and build their own businesses.

Many members have already signed up to the Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment, which seeks to remove barriers to, and support, the participation of women in trade.

It is an impressive start, but I believe we can go further.

So, over the next two years, the UK will work with the International Trade Centre to deliver a new programme: SheTrades Commonwealth.

SheTrades will offer Commonwealth-wide support to help countries break down gender barriers in international trade.

It will provide a forum for member states to work collectively and share best practice.

And will compile the data needed to identify what works and track progress over time.

The programme will also deliver targeted interventions in a number of countries, providing training for women entrepreneurs, connecting them to market and investment opportunities, and helping firms overcome barriers to engaging with women-owned businesses.

Boosting women's participation is the right thing to do, but business equality is not just about doing what is right – there are real economic benefits.

It has been estimated that if women played the same role as men in labour

markets, as much as \$28 trillion could be added to global GDP by 2025.

If Commonwealth members are not giving women an equal opportunity to succeed in business and in trade, they are trying to take on some of the biggest economies in the world with one hand tied behind their backs.

That will not change overnight. But SheTrades represents an important step in the right direction – one that, like the other initiatives I have talked about today, will deliver benefits across the Commonwealth and beyond.

When we all work to the same standards, when we break down barriers to trade and when we empower women to take their rightful place in the economy, the benefits are felt not just by countries and individuals involved.

Freer, easier trade means stronger economies, more jobs, more choice and lower prices – and that is true here in the UK, across the Commonwealth and around the world.

With its unique scope and global voice, such a Commonwealth can set a powerful example to the world, one that demonstrates and underlines the importance of protecting free trade and the rules-based international order.

Today's initiatives are an example of what can be done to make that happen, of how governments can lay the groundwork for growth. But you in business also have a vital role to play.

The discussions here will feed into the full summit, so I hope you take the chance to share ideas and insights, to identify new challenges and new opportunities, to highlight where Commonwealth governments can step up and do more and even where, perhaps, we should step back and do a little less.

The Commonwealth has never just been about heads of state and government.

It has always been an organisation in which people and businesses from around the world can come together and work together to improve all our lives.

This is your forum, and this is your Commonwealth.

So let us make it an organisation that works for all of us, and shape a future of which we can all be proud.