

[News story: Change of UK Special Envoy to Syria](#)

Dr Martin Longden has been appointed as the UK's Special Envoy to Syria.

[Dr Martin Longden](#) has been appointed as the UK's Special Envoy to Syria in succession to Mr Gareth Bayley who will be transferring to another Diplomatic Service appointment.

Dr Longden will take up his appointment at the end of October 2017 and combine the new role with his current role as Head of Near East Department. Prior to his current role, he was Deputy Ambassador, British Embassy Kabul.

Speaking on the appointment, Dr Longden said:

I look forward to representing the UK to drive forward a holistic approach to Syria and the region, while maintaining strong links with the Syrian opposition.

The only lasting solution is a political transition that can protect the rights of all Syrians, unite the country and end the conflict. The UK will continue to play a key role in the international efforts to bring peace to all Syrians.

Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt said:

The UK is working tirelessly to bring a peaceful solution to the Syria conflict. There can be no military solution to this tragedy, and neither Syria nor the region can be properly stabilised until we see a genuine transition to a new government in Damascus.

Martin's extensive diplomatic experience will ensure he is well prepared to continue our efforts towards a political solution in Syria.

Further information

[News story: HMRC to recruit a Second](#)

Permanent Secretary

Decision made following the announcement of Edward Troup's retirement at the end of 2017

The appointment has Cabinet Office and Treasury approval and will be advertised across the Civil Service shortly.

HMRC Chief Executive, Jon Thompson, said:

Over the course of the department's history, there has always been a partnership at HMRC's helm, with a specific focus on tax as well as on the organisation itself. I propose continuing this tradition with the appointment of a Second Permanent Secretary to lead our work on tax, fiscal events and to be the Tax Assurance Commissioner. They will also lead on Brexit, which will continue to grow in importance over the next few years.

Due to the level of tax policy expertise and knowledge of the UK tax system required, we will be limiting our search to existing civil servants only, and hope to announce the new appointment before the end of this year.

Press release: UK leads international support for Rohingya crisis at landmark conference

The UK has increased its own support for innocent families who have been forced to flee relentless violence in Burma and make the treacherous journey to Bangladesh to find refuge. This is an increase from £35 million to £47 million (US \$63 million) committed since the end of August, including £5 million to match the generous donations of the UK public to the Disaster Emergency Committee appeal.

Ahead of the landmark international pledging conference, which took place in Geneva today (Monday 23 October 2017), the UK had given more than a third of the overall money donated by the international community and the International Development Secretary Priti Patel called on other countries to follow the UK's lead and step up their support.

At the conference today countries including Sweden, Australia, Denmark and the UAE, have in total pledged over \$300 million. This reaches over half of

the total funding required to meet urgent humanitarian needs as set out in the UN appeal. Countries are continuing to pledge.

International Development Secretary Priti Patel said:

The international community has followed the UK's lead and stepped up support which is absolutely vital to save the lives of victims of the world's fastest growing humanitarian crisis.

UK aid is helping hundreds of thousands of people who have lost everything and our further support announced today will relieve the suffering of thousands more.

Ethnic cleansing, sexual violence, starvation and the murder of children have no place in our world. Today's pledges are only just the start, and the world cannot afford to wait as innocent men, women and children continue to lose their lives.

Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Mark Field said:

During my recent visits to Burma and Bangladesh, I saw for myself some of the communities which have been so badly damaged by what is happening in Burma.

I am delighted to be in Geneva to announce the UK's latest contribution of £12 million to the Burma crisis response. Alongside the £30 million we provided to meet the urgent humanitarian need, and the £5 million of public donations that the UK matched pound for pound for the Disasters Emergency Committee Appeal, the total contribution of the UK government is now £47 million.

I hope that the international community will continue to unite with the UK in its efforts, and help bring an end to this terrible humanitarian crisis.

Today's announcement of extra support builds on existing UK aid which is already helping to provide:

- Emergency food to 174,000 people;
- Lifesaving nutritional support to more than 60,000 children under-five and over 21,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women;
- Safe drinking water, emergency latrines and hygiene kits for more than 138,000 people;
- Essential items including soap, cooking utensils and water cans for over 131,000 people;
- Emergency shelter for over 130,000 people and support to make shelters more resilient to rain and heavy winds for 450,000 people as the cyclone season approaches;
- Access to female bathing cubicles and sanitary items for more than

35,000 girls and women;

- Counselling and psychological support for over 10,000 women suffering from the trauma of war and over 2,000 survivors of sexual violence;
- Medical help for over 50,000 pregnant women to give birth safely.

With UK aid support in Bangladesh, malnourished children on the brink of death are now able to eat, families who have been forced to live out in the open after their villages were burned are getting shelter and clean drinking water is helping stop the spread of disease.

Our existing work in the region meant that we were already in position to provide life-saving support when the crisis flared – without this, aid would have taken much longer to arrive.

The UK is also leading the charge to reform the humanitarian system, to ensure the international community responds efficiently and effectively to crises, pooling resources together rather than competing and working in isolation.

Notes to Editors:

1. Prior to the conference the UN appeal for the Rohingya crisis was just 24% funded, with over a third of the \$106 million pledged coming from the UK. A total of \$434 million is needed overall.
2. The UK is appalled by the inhumane violence that has taken place in Rakhine State, which has forced nearly 600,000 people to leave everything behind in Burma and make the perilous journey to Bangladesh.
3. The events in Rakhine look like ethnic cleansing. The Burmese authorities need to stop the violence and ensure immediate access into northern Rakhine so that UK aid can provide a lifeline to those still suffering in Rakhine State. Unacceptable intimidation and restrictions on the movement of humanitarian workers must be ended. Burma must work with international partners to put in place the conditions that will allow people to return to their homes safely, with dignity and hope for the future.
4. Recognising the unprecedented scale of the crisis in Bangladesh and Burma, the UK has been a leader in responding – in speed and size – providing an additional £47 million since August to help meet the urgent humanitarian needs of innocent men, women and children who have been forced to flee the relentless violence and atrocities in Burma, and make the treacherous journey to Bangladesh to seek refuge. We are working with international partners including UNICEF, IOM, UNHCR and World Food Programme to deliver this on the ground. The UK is also providing £1m to the Red Cross in Burma, the only organisation that currently has access to Northern Rakhine.

5. Alongside this, the UK Government is matching pound for pound £5 million raised by the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) Appeal for people fleeing the violence and destruction in Burma, doubling the impact of the public's own donations and ensuring that charities working on the ground can reach even more people in need.

[News story: Defence Secretary announces exceptional gift to Canada](#)

The journey to locate these vessels has taken 172 years. Rear-Admiral Sir John Franklin set sail from England in 1845 on an expedition to chart the Northwest Passage through the Canadian Arctic with HMS Erebus and HMS Terror. The ships and all crew were lost after the ships became stuck in ice off King William Island and the crew abandoned them to trek overland to the South. None of the crew survived.

Many attempts were made over the years but only artefacts were found. In 1992, the wrecks were designated as a national historic site, despite neither shipwreck having been found at that time. In 1997, UK and Canadian Governments signed an agreement giving custody and control of the wrecks and their contents to the Canadian Government, whilst still remaining the property of the UK.

With a combination of traditional Inuit knowledge and state-of-the-art technology, the wrecks of HMS Erebus and HMS Terror were finally located under relatively shallow Arctic Waters to the south of King William Island in 2014 and 2016 respectively. Acknowledging the importance of this momentous discovery, the UK Government is proposing to update the 1997 agreement, transferring ownership of the wrecks to Parks Canada, whilst retaining a small sample of artefacts. Items from the wreckages will be displayed for future generations in both Canadian and UK museums.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

“During her recent visit to Canada, the Prime Minister emphasised the importance of recognising our shared past with Canada as we seek to reinvigorate our already strong bilateral relationship.

“This exceptional arrangement will recognise the historical significance of the Franklin expedition to the people of Canada, and will ensure that these wrecks and artefacts are conserved for future generations.”

The transfer of ownership is expected to be undertaken over the coming weeks.

Press release: Playground reinstated after ground collapse

Pupils at an infant school in Derbyshire are 'back on the right lines' after the final touches have been made to their playground, which had been affected by historical coal mining.

On Friday 13 October 2017 new game markings were drawn onto the playground of Elmsleigh Infant and Nursery School in Swadlincote, Derbyshire.



One of the children using the playground

Over 200 pupils at the school were left without a playground in May 2017 when a seemingly small dip on the surface of the tarmac turned into a small ground collapse.

The Coal Authority, which deals with the legacy of Britain's coal mining, confirmed that the hole was the result of past coal mining and quickly began repairs. The collapse was initially infilled with stone before drilling was undertaken to ascertain the extent of the problem in an area where coal was known to occur within a shallow coal seam or outcrop.

Drilling revealed the extent of the collapse and it was designated as being a

shallow unrecorded shaft – a possible bell pit. Shallow workings were also found under the remainder of the playground and so the Coal Authority capped the shaft with a reinforced concrete slab and also filled the old workings with concrete grout.

The initial work was completed during the first week of the summer holidays, but the pupils were still without the final repairs – the markings geared for outdoor play on the ground. At all times the pupils safety was of utmost concern and alternative provisions were made to ensure all children had access to outdoor play.

Specialist contractors working on behalf of the Coal Authority reinstated the markings, including a rainbow and number squares that have been designed by the youngsters themselves.



A playground decoration

Alan Hines, Project Manager for the Coal Authority, said the markings will bring an end to the repair work.

He said:

It will be good to see the playground finished with new markings that have been designed by both children and parents. This will bring a very nice end to an incident, which saw both the playground and the markings ruined.

Charlotte Hancock, the school's Business Assistant, said the work will be the

final part of the repair programme. She said:

The event was quite surprising.

A small dip in the playground on a Friday had turned into a hole by Monday. Fortunately, no one was hurt during the incident but it left the children without their large playground.

The playground was reinstated over the summer holidays and all the children then needed were some new markings that would let them play their games during break times.



A butterfly playground decoration