

Press release: Defence Secretary shows commitment to Armed Forces mental health with over £220-million funding and new helpline

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson has today (25 February) pledged to increase funding for Armed Forces mental health services to £220-million over the next decade and launched the new 24/7 Military Mental Health Helpline.

The new number – 0800 323 4444 – will be open and ready to take calls from midday today (Sunday). It will be backed up by a major internal communications campaign on mental fitness across the services.

The Armed Forces mental health services will also be boosted by an extra £2million a year, it was announced today.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Every hour of every day our safety, security and way of life are protected by our courageous Armed Forces personnel. They are always there for us – often risking life and limb and making huge personal sacrifices – and we must be there for them in their own time of need.

Mental illnesses caused by life on the battlefield can have a devastating impact on our brave heroes and their families. It is our moral and professional duty to ensure that we do all we can for our world class troops.

That's why we have commissioned the new 24/7 Military Mental Health Helpline and will spend an extra £2-million a year on mental health services for the next decade on top of the £20-million we already spend each year.

I will personally be working with all the service chiefs to make sure there isn't a single person in the forces who doesn't know where to turn in times of trouble.

0800 323 4444 will be targeted at serving personnel and their families – allowing them to access the help, advice and support they need anywhere, anytime.

Surgeon General of the British Armed Forces Major General Martin Bricknell said:

This number will complement the range of mental health services, including our Departments of Community Mental Health, which we provide for our serving personnel. It is important to deliver a holistic service to ensure our Armed Forces have every opportunity to access the help and care they need and deserve. We must do all we can to provide easy access to the support available.

0800 323 4444 will act as a memorable and accessible gateway to mental health services for service personnel and their families.

Combat Stress – the leading veterans mental health charity – has been commissioned to run the new helpline service for serving troops 24 hours a day. The new line will be backed up by a deeper partnership between the MOD and the charity and run by a team of specially-trained professionals. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) will provide additional funds to enhance Combat Stress' existing service – predominantly aimed at veterans – and are working together to develop information sharing processes with the military to ensure any serving service personnel in crisis are provided with the appropriate support tailored for their needs.

Chief Executive of Combat Stress Sue Freeth said:

We welcome the opportunity to work with the MOD to provide mental health support to serving personnel. A significant minority of servicemen and women develop mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. We know they can delay seeking treatment while in the Armed Forces, with some preferring to come forward for help after they have left the military.

Left untreated, mental health problems can become more complex and have a devastating impact on those with the condition, as well as their loved ones. It's vital that people seek help as soon as they notice a change in their mental health.

Combat Stress has delivered a 24-hour Helpline service since 2011. With almost a century's experience of supporting veterans with mental health issues, we have the knowledge, expertise and understanding to assist serving personnel.

The Combat Stress helpline is the only service in the country, tailored towards the Armed Forces community, which talks to callers whilst simultaneously providing practical help by calling the emergency services if needed.

Alongside this announcement, the Defence Secretary has also agreed to spend an extra £2-million a year for the next ten years to improve mental health services in the Armed Forces on top of the £20-million per year that is currently committed. The additional money, which brings the total planned spending to £220-million over the next decade, will be put towards an

increase in mental health specialists and bolstering existing provision.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said:

Wellbeing is not just about physical fitness but mental fitness too. Perhaps as we can't see it, and are less inclined to step forward, mental fitness has not received the attention it deserves. The brain is just another muscle we must look after.

By choosing to work with Combat Stress, we are deliberately choosing to work with the leading organisation in the country for providing this specialist mental health service. We are changing the stigma associated with mental health.

It's a complex science and there is always room for improvement. Therefore we will be building a stronger and deeper partnership with Combat Stress to deliver the best possible service for our people.

The MOD currently has a network of 20 'hub and spoke' mental health centres, comprising of 11 hubs and a further nine teams. Regular visiting clinics are also held at other military centres across the country.

Last year the MOD launched its Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy focusing on preventative measures to protect our personnel. MOD also partnered with the Royal Foundation, a charity setup by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry, to improve training and education alongside the strategy to promote mental fitness.

There are a range of services provided by partners working with MOD and through the Armed Forces Covenant, including the NHS, other Government departments and charities which serving personnel, veterans, and their families can access.

Ends

Notes to editors:

- You can read Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson's OpEd [here](#).
 - Defence images can be found on www.defenceimagery.mod.uk.
 - The UK Armed Forces Mental Health Annual Statistics: Financial Year 2016/2017 can be found [here](#).
 - For more information, please contact the MOD press office on 020 7218 7907.
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News story: Syria resolution: explanation of vote

The United Kingdom welcomes the adoption of Resolution 2401 and in particular we applaud your work, together with Sweden as penholders.

But this is not a moment for self-congratulation. It's taken us far too long to agree this resolution. While we have been arguing over commas, Asad's planes have been killing more civilians in their homes and in their hospitals, imposing unbearable suffering. And despite the amount of time we have spent in this chamber over many years discussing the devastating humanitarian crisis, we have still not been able to achieve the peace and security that the Syrian people so desperately need.

As the conflict enters its eighth year, the situation in Eastern Ghouta and elsewhere in the country is far worse than we ever thought imaginable. The barbarity and depravity of the Asad regime shows no limits.

We must never lose sight of the fact that the pictures we see and the stories we hear from this comfortable chamber are the agonising reality for hundreds of thousands of civilians. For men, women and children who are being forced to eke out an existence underground to avoid being killed by a regime that commits daily atrocities against its own people.

I've heard some say that the information about the situation in Eastern Ghouta is propaganda. A doctor in Eastern Ghouta, having heard these comments, said this morning: "amid the chaos and the bombs, it is the not being believed that almost hurts the most. We are dying here every day and when people say that they do not believe us, that is pain upon pain."

This isn't propaganda; it is a living hell for hundreds of thousands of residents of Eastern Ghouta.

As we have repeated many times, the intentional and systematic targeting of civilians and civilian objects not only violates international humanitarian law, it is a war crime. And the UK will be unrelenting in our campaign to ensure accountability.

By voting in favour of this resolution today, we are standing up and saying that we will not stand by and let this happen. In the face of escalating violence, devastation and suffering, we must all now take practical steps to improve the situation for those living and dying in a hell of one man's making. This resolution demonstrates our resolve to put a stop to the brutal violence. It demands all parties cease hostilities without delay. That means right now; immediately.

The role and responsibility of this Council does not end with the passage of this resolution. Quite the opposite. All UN Member States, but particularly Council Members, must now take responsibility for ensuring that this resolution is implemented in full, without delay.

The resolution calls for the Council to review implementation within 15 days, but we must all be active in supporting and monitoring implementation from the moment we step out of this room.

If we see any of the parties violate the terms of this resolution, we must bring it back to the Council immediately.

Those with any influence over the Syrian regime – Russia, Iran – have a particular responsibility to ensure that this ceasefire is respected in full and without delay, that all sieges are ended and that humanitarian aid is delivered. This is the absolute minimum that the people of Syria deserve.

As much as we welcome the passing of this resolution today, it is only a small step.

Just as one aid convoy in three months to a besieged area cannot even begin to address the humanitarian crisis, one resolution alone cannot solve the situation in Syria. We must do everything in our collective power to ensure that this resolution is effective in delivering for those whom we have failed to date. And we must all send a clear message to the Asad regime: abandon your attempt to pursue a military strategy; stop fighting and engage seriously in UN-led political talks in Geneva.

In conclusion, let me reiterate the words of my Foreign Secretary. The entire world is looking at the Asad regime, Russia and Iran: you hold the keys not only to the end of this obscene conflict, but to the safety, humanitarian aid and basic medical treatment that is being denied to millions of people right now in Syria. For the mother giving birth underground in Eastern Ghouta, for the child unable to learn as schools are closed for yet another day, for the doctor battling airstrikes to treat patients in Idlib, all of us sitting here today owe it to the people of Syria to work together, with renewed and unyielding energy, to achieve a political solution that will bring peace to the Syrian people.

Labour Department highly concerned about fatal work accident that happened today

The Labour Department (LD) is highly concerned about the work accident that happened at On Yam Estate, Kwai Chung this afternoon (February 24), in which a male worker, while carrying out lift maintenance work, was suspected to have been trapped to death by the lift, and another worker was injured. The LD is saddened by the death and injury of the workers in the accident and expresses its deepest sympathy to the victim's family and the injured worker.

The LD's spokesman said, "We commenced immediate on-site investigation as soon as we were notified of the accident and issued suspension notice to the contractor involved to suspend the maintenance work of the lift involved. The contractor cannot resume the lift maintenance work until the LD is satisfied that measures to abate the relevant risks have been taken."

The spokesman added, "We will complete investigation as soon as possible to identify the cause of the accident, ascertain the liability of the duty holders and recommend improvement measures. We will take actions pursuant to the law if there is any violation of the work safety legislation."

The general duty provisions of the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance require employers to provide safe working environments, safe plant and safe systems of work for their employees. Those who contravene the above provisions are liable to a maximum fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for six months.

In regard to today's accident, the LD will issue a Work Safety Alert through its website and email, giving a brief account of the accident concerned to duty holders, workers' unions, professional bodies of safety practitioners and others, and reminding the industry of the importance of following safety precautionary measures to prevent recurrence of similar accidents.

The LD will also remind the employer concerned of the liability for employees' compensation under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, assist family members of the deceased to claim employees' compensation and closely follow up on the case. For those with financial difficulties, the LD will assist them to apply for appropriate emergency funds. Subject to the needs and wishes of family members of the deceased, the LD will also liaise with the Social Welfare Department for financial or other assistance.

For the sake of securing the safety and health of employees at work, the LD appeals to employers to provide plant and systems of work that are safe and without risks to health. Employees should co-operate with their employers, adopt all safety measures and use personal protective equipment provided properly to avoid endangering their own work safety and that of other workers.

Fatal traffic accident in Western District

Police are investigating a fatal traffic accident in Western District in the small hours today (February 24) in which a 52-year-old man died.

At about 5.03am, a private car driven by the 52-year-old man was travelling along Connaught Road West Flyover westbound. When approaching near

Sutherland Street, it reportedly rammed into barriers.

The man was trapped inside the car and was rescued by fireman. He was rushed to Queen Mary Hospital in unconscious state and was certified dead at 3.43pm.

Investigation by the Special Investigation Team of Traffic, Hong Kong Island is underway.

Anyone who witnessed the accident or has any information to offer is urged to contact the investigating officers on 3660 6849.

Missing woman in Tsing Yi located

A woman who went missing in Tsing Yi has been located.

Tong Sun-yuk, aged 24, went missing after she was last seen on Nga Ying Chau Street on February 21 afternoon. Her family made a report to Police on February 22.

The woman was located on Cheung Chau today (February 24) afternoon. She sustained no injuries and no suspicious circumstances were detected.