

Foreign Office charity marathon spans the globe in 24 hours

British Diplomats are completing a unique 24 hour global marathon relay that will help the NHS and charities right across the globe.

On Saturday 9 May, diplomats and their families from 155 British Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates – from Vancouver in the west to Samoa in the east; from Wellington in the south to Reykjavik in the north – will take part to raise money for NHS Charities Together and UNICEF.

Ambassadors to Moscow, Riyadh, Tel Aviv and Nairobi are all taking part, as well as the Foreign Office's most senior diplomat, Permanent Under Secretary Sir Simon McDonald, who will join the effort at his home in Hampshire.

Runners at each post will each run a mile, before video-conferencing with the next mission to pass the virtual baton on – sending it through the 24 time-zones.

The global marathon is the brainchild of Dr Ian Collard, acting Ambassador to Afghanistan, and his wife Tamara. With global flight restrictions, Ian's 3,500-mile separation from Tamara and their children has forced them to find creative ways to stay united as a family during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The pair knew their situation was not unique in the department and decided the marathon would be a good way to unite the department, and its families, and improve mental and physical wellbeing. It would also allow staff to virtually connect with their colleagues while social distancing measures were in place.

Dr Collard was inspired by the soaring use of video conferencing by diplomats forced to work from home as they contribute to the largest repatriation exercise in Foreign Office history.

Acting Ambassador to Kabul Dr Ian Collard said:

The Covid-19 outbreak has meant an almost overnight change in the way diplomats are operating. As a keen sports fan it became obvious to me that we could use that same technology to bring staff and families together, to boost their wellbeing, and to raise money to support those struggling in the pandemic.

Embassies across the world are raising funds for local charities, and Ian and Tamara have set up a Virgin Money Giving page that will share donations between NHS charities and UNICEF's contribution to the global fight against Covid-19.

Ian added: "Diplomacy is about serving your country through the relationships

you build abroad, and working with allies towards shared goals. So diplomacy has a big part to play in overcoming Covid-19. Rarely have countries been so united by a single cause.”

Further information