

# News story: Priti Patel: taxpayers' money is making the difference between life and death in East Africa but Britain cannot act alone

This year the world is facing humanitarian crises in greater number and scale than ever before. Extreme hunger is stalking East Africa, pushing millions of families to the brink of starvation.

My readers will be rightly shocked and saddened by the harrowing stories of Somali children and their families. Babies whose bodies are shutting down because they are so starved, mothers who are fighting to keep their children alive.

These people are many miles away and their lives, wracked by conflict and drought, are totally unimaginable from our own. But they are our fellow human beings and they desperately need our help.

The UN suggests that half the population of Somalia is without reliable access to food, and 1.4 million children are acutely malnourished. Of those, 275,000 children are so severely undernourished they could soon die without urgent treatment.

The British Government has acted without hesitation. Earlier this year, I visited Somalia and saw first-hand that all the signs were pointing to famine. In response, the UK quickly stepped up support and right now, food is urgently being shipped into Somalia and distributed across the country – including to Somaliland.

We are giving one million people access to safe drinking water, food and emergency healthcare. This is the difference between a child having something to eat and having nothing; it is the difference between life and death.

The British public have also shown typical generosity; £60 million has been raised by the Disasters Emergency Committee's East Africa crisis appeal, including £10 million of matching funds from the British Government.

British people are helping to alleviate the suffering but the UK cannot act alone on this. The swift action we have taken to save lives must be matched by others. That is why I have called on the whole international community to play their part to avert tragedy. UN organisations are now on the ground in Somalia developing response plans and scaling up efforts. The World Bank has pledged \$50 million to Somalia to help people in drought affected areas access food assistance, water and health services.

To date, over \$948 million has been raised for Somalia and this is more than was pledged for the whole of 2016. Over a fifth of this is from the British

government alone – totalling £170 million – but more than a third of the humanitarian appeal for 2017 still remains unfunded.

Together, we have so far managed to avert a repeat of the famine which killed 260,000 people in 2011. But the job is far from done. The risk of famine still looms over Somalia; millions of people remain in dire need and hundreds of thousands of lives are at risk. Unquestionably, more people will die if we do not continue our collective efforts.

To maximise our impact, we must focus on the most urgent actions, collaborate properly and improve transparency. Funds must go where the need is greatest.

This is ultimately in all our interests. Somalia is one of the world's most fragile countries and the humanitarian crisis threatens to undermine recent political and economic progress at a vital time. Meanwhile, extreme hunger is forcing people from their homes and threatens to swell the refugee crisis in Africa and Europe.

The British Government's support for Somalia is enduring. We hosted a landmark London Somalia Conference in May this year, where we convened global leaders, the UN and key players from Somali government to end this desperate situation and help build a more prosperous, stable and peaceful Somalia for the future.

My message to the rest of the international community is clear: we must all step up our efforts before it is too late to stop innocent people starving to death. International leaders cannot and must not turn their backs or shut their eyes. That would be a stain on our collective conscience.

**This article was [originally published on the i newspaper](#).**