

Press release: Penny Mordaunt launches new funds to tackle period poverty globally

- Penny Mordaunt leads new government campaign to end period poverty globally by 2030
- New UK aid support for projects tackling period poverty and stigma globally
- New expert joint taskforce of government, business and charities, supported by £250,000 to develop new ideas to tackle period poverty in the UK

Ahead of International Women's Day, Minister for Women and Equalities and Secretary of State for International Development, Penny Mordaunt, will today (4 March) announce a new UK government campaign to break the silence and end period poverty globally by 2030.

In many developing countries, it is estimated that half of all women and girls are forced to use rags, grass and paper to manage their periods. A lack of access to products, and the stigma and taboo that still surrounds periods, can force them to miss school or work, or even to live in isolated huts during their periods each month. In the UK, Girl Guiding UK found that 26% of girls aged 11-21 feel embarrassed talking to people about their period, and 21% had been made to feel ashamed or embarrassed about their period.

In a speech at Church House today, Ms Mordaunt will announce a new campaign to end period poverty globally by 2030 which includes:

- £2 million in UK aid support, through the Department of International Development (DFID), to help organisations which are already working to stamp out period poverty around the world;
- A new advisory taskforce of government departments (including the Department of Health, Department for Education and Department for Work and Pensions), manufacturers, retailers, social enterprises and charities. A pot of £250,000 funding will kickstart this work, which will also lever funding and expertise from the private sector to develop a sustainable solution to period poverty in the UK; and
- AmplifyChange has committed £1.5 million to support 54 projects working across 27 countries to help girls to manage their periods with dignity. This is part of UK aid's ongoing support to the multi-donor fund AmplifyChange

Minister for Women and Equalities Penny Mordaunt said:

“Empowerment starts when you are young. Girls should be able to focus on their education and their future without being worried about or embarrassed by their periods.

“There are British entrepreneurs and businesses already doing fantastic work to tackle period poverty and I want us to partner and support them to really make a change to the lives of those who need it most.

“This is a global issue. Without education, women and girls around the world won’t be able to take the steps to reach their true potential.”

This focus on vulnerable women and girls, at home and around the world, is part of Ms Mordaunt’s new mission. A new strategy, to be published in spring, will set out how government will strive to economically empower all women – particularly those who are financially vulnerable, in low paid jobs or who currently don’t work.

In her speech Ms Mordaunt will set out some of the life moments that prevent women from being able to achieve their goals:

- By the time their first child is aged 20, women have, on average, been in paid work for four years less than men
- 20% of women aged 55-64 are informal carers
- Lower earning women taking short breaks to care for children and returning to work part-time accumulate less than a third of the private pensions income of a man working full-time

As part of the GEO’s work to support all women, in February Ms Mordaunt also announced £500,000 to support vulnerable women – including victims of domestic abuse, homelessness or substance abuse – to return to work.

To ensure the GEO is at the heart of the government’s work on equalities, it will join Cabinet Office from 1 April. GEO will work across government and with business and civil society to tackle persistent inequalities that limit economic empowerment at every stage of life.

Notes to editors:

Hey Girls – <https://www.heygirls.co.uk/>

Hey Girls founder Celia Hodson said: ‘‘ I very much welcome the statement from Secretary of State Penny Mordaunt MP regarding her commitment to set up a Task Force to focus on finding a sustainable model to eradicate Period Poverty in the UK.

“I’m confident that given recent reports highlighting Period Poverty has significantly increased and the high percentage of women and girls currently struggling to access menstrual products this initiative will receive cross-sector support and should be widely supported by cross-party members.”

WUKA – a company which creates eco-friendly period wear.

Ruby Raut, CEO and Co-Founder of WUKA said: ‘We are very pleased to hear and show our support to GEO who are raising voice to tackling financial fragility that affects some girls and women, period poverty. Period poverty is a huge issue for those girls and women from low-income families or who are homeless. Girls and women are left with very little choices and end up using dirty

items of clothing, inserting plastic or overusing a pad or tampon is which is unhygienic and a huge health problem for women.

“Period poverty is real and is happening all around the world including here in the UK and it needs to be addressed.

“We believe that one way to tackle it is via open and honest conversations instigated by government and subsequently backed up by manufacturers, retailers, social enterprises, charities, organisations, business, health care professionals and the third sector. However there is only one way to resolve this issue, being smart and investing in sustainable solution to end the period poverty permanently.”

Government membership of the taskforce will be decided We’re pursuing global goal 5 – gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls In her Bright Blue speech last year, Minister for Women and Equalities, Penny Mordaunt, acknowledged that more needed to be done to help those women beyond the boardroom, beyond London and beyond big business to fulfil their ambitions. Following on from the speech, the government is now developing a new strategy which will seek to economically empower women of all backgrounds. This will be released in spring. DFID’s £2million comes from UK Aid Direct – DFID’s main centrally managed programme for small and medium charities. Every single project the Department for International Development is supporting through the Girls Education Challenge fund already includes menstruation.

International statistics on period poverty:

- In India, a quarter of girls miss school because of menstruation, and only 12% of girls and women have access to sanitary pads
- In South Sudan a survey of school girls found that 83% of them use old cloths, goat skin or nothing at all to manage their periods
- In Senegal, a study found that 30% of girls who had undergone FGM had an infection and additional menstrual problems related to their excision
- In some parts of the world, 2/3 of girls had no idea what was happening to them when they got their first period.
- Up to 82% of girls in Malawi don’t know about menstruation when they get their first period; in rural Gambia, 1/3 of girls thought menstruation was a disease
- In many parts of the world a girl’s first period still marks her readiness for marriage and childbearing, driving child marriage, teenage pregnancy and educational drop-out