

Press release: Top British official visits South Sudan

Matthew Rycroft, Permanent Secretary of the UK Department for International Development (DFID), visited South Sudan on 5-6 April to see how UKAid is saving lives in one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises. This was the first time that Mr. Rycroft, formerly the British Permanent Representative to the United Nations, has visited the country.

The ongoing conflict in South Sudan has led to a man-made humanitarian catastrophe, with 4m people having fled their homes and half of the population severely food insecure. The UK is the forefront of the international response to the crisis. Last year, the UK reached over 500,000 people with food assistance, over 300,000 people with safe drinking water, and supported around 5 million health consultations to children under 5. The UK is also leading the effort to promote girls' education, supporting 3,600 schools across the country and helping to keep a quarter of a million girls in class. But the ultimate solution to the crisis is peace, and the UK strongly supports the regionally-led peace process, the High Level Revitalisation Forum (HLRF), and is putting pressure on all sides to constructively engage.

Mr. Rycroft met with senior South Sudanese Ministers including Minister for Education, Deng Deng Hok Yai, and Dr. Riek Gai Kok, Minister of Health. In each of these meetings, he emphasised the need for the government to engage meaningfully in the peace process and underlined the vital and urgent importance of ensuring complete and unhindered access for humanitarian and development assistance. In a radio interview following his visit, he said:

UKAid is saving lives in South Sudan. But it is the Government of South Sudan that has the responsibility to stop the suffering of its people. They and other parties to the conflict must engage constructively with the next round of peace talks, which represent a crucial opportunity for peace, and end the appalling human rights abuses we have seen. They must also permit free and unhindered humanitarian access.

During his 2 day visit, Mr Rycroft met with a range of organisations that work with DFID to deliver UKAid, and some of those South Sudanese people directly benefitting. He visited El Sabah children's hospital in the country's capital, Juba, which is supported by UKAid in providing essential health, nutrition and vaccination services. Mr Rycroft also visited Juba Day Secondary School, supported by DFID's girls' education programme supported by UKAid, where he heard directly from girls who have been helped to stay in education. He met Akuja de Garang, MBE, who leads a team of 300 national and international professionals working nationwide to tackle barriers to girls' education and to help brighten the future of a generation of children in

South Sudan. During his visit, Matthew said:

It is vitally important that girls are able to remain in school and complete their education. Not only will this empower them to reach their full potential, by enhancing their economic and social opportunities, but it also lays the foundation for a peaceful and prosperous future for South Sudan. I have been inspired by the girls, women and educators that I have met today and commend their efforts to ensure that education is not lost to an entire generation.

Mr Rycroft also met with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, David Shearer. The UK fully supports the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and has deployed nearly 400 peacekeepers to provide vital engineering and medical assistance. Matthew welcomed the close relationship between the UK and UNMISS, and re-iterated the UK's full support for the UN Secretary-General's 'zero tolerance' policy on sexual exploitation and abuse.