

Rampling from Tripoli: national interest is key to saving Lebanon

In his first official visit outside Beirut post COVID-19 pandemic, British Ambassador Chris Rampling visited Lebanon's second largest city. He held a series of meetings in which he relayed the UK's ongoing support to the people of Tripoli and urged Lebanese leaders to work for the country's national interest to get Lebanon to join a path towards recovery. Ambassador Rampling also announced that the UK's Lebanon Enterprise and Employment Programme (LEEP) programme would work with businesses in Tripoli to support the hiring of ex-convicts and at-risk youth, thereby reducing the risk of reoffending whilst creating jobs and growth for the city.

Ambassador Rampling met Mohammad Abed El Rahman Sabra, owner of Sabra for General Trading and Contracting whose business – supported by the UK funded LEEP initiative – has allowed him to expand and create new jobs. Mohammad's company has been subsidised by the Ministry of Energy and Water and the Lebanese Centre for Energy Conservation because of its high-end energy saving solar panels and water filters which abide by their regulations. The programme is providing up to \$20 million between 2017-2020 to support SMEs across Lebanon grow their businesses and create sustained jobs, and already supports 24 businesses in and around Tripoli.

He visited the 12th Brigade training area, that was funded by the UK and built in a joint venture through MARCH Lebanon NGO's initiative to strengthen civil and military cooperation for peacebuilding in Tripoli. The UK remains a proud partner to the LAF, as it continues to strengthen its military and security relations.

In his roundtable meeting with Tripoli MPs and business leaders hosted by former PM Najib Mikati, Ambassador Rampling voiced his grave concern towards the deteriorating economic crisis that has resulted in severe humanitarian and socio-economic repercussions not only on the people of Tripoli but across the whole of Lebanon. He urged Lebanese leaders to put Lebanon's national interest above everything for the country's recovery, reiterating the UK's long-standing and continued support to Lebanon, but reflecting that international community could not by itself insulate the Lebanese people from the crisis and that it was up to Lebanon's politicians to act.

Ambassador Rampling laid a wreath in the Commonwealth war graves cemetery in Tripoli to commemorate the 358 sailors who died on 22 June 1893 (127 years ago) in the accidental sinking of the battleship HMS Victoria. The wreck of HMS Victoria stands vertically, with her bows embedded in the seabed, just offshore from Tripoli and is a protected war grave, the final resting place of all who were trapped on board.

At the end of his visit Ambassador Rampling said:

I held very important meetings including with Tripoli's MPs. Discussions

focused on the impact Lebanon's ailing economy has had on people's lives not just in Tripoli but across the whole country. It was excellent therefore to announce a new package of economic support for the city through LEEP. '

For many years the UK has been supporting Tripoli's most vulnerable communities through our programmes. Over the past year the UK's investment in Tripoli alone reached over \$5 million, in support of delivering better public services, economic opportunities, security and promoting social stability to the most vulnerable. But this is not enough to help Lebanon get back on the path towards recovery.

The UK has been a long-standing partner to Lebanon and will continue to do so. But today, more than ever, Lebanon's leaders must act and put the country's national interest above everything to put Lebanon back on the path towards recovery. The government must crack on with reforms that they have been talking about for a long time. There no longer is time and the only alternative to doing these things is to watch the country deteriorate, and that is no alternative for anyone.