

Speech: PM's speech at Downing Street reception to celebrate the legacy of Jo Cox: 17 January 2018

Thank you, thank you very much for those excellent words, Seema, and good afternoon, everyone. It's an honour to have you all here today as we remember the life of a remarkable woman and thank those who are continuing the work that meant so much to her. And I'd like to give a very special welcome to Jo's immediate family. Her husband, Brendan, who has been an inspiration to so many over the past year and a half. Her wonderful children, Cuillin and Lejla; her proud parents, Jean and Gordon; Brendan's parents, Sheila and Gordon; and Jo's beloved little sister, Kim. Kim once said of her older sister that she wasn't a complainer but a doer. It's all too easy to stand on the side lines and say that something must be done. Actually getting out there and doing it, as Jo did throughout her life, takes an extra level of effort and commitment. And that determination to make things happen, to bring about change, was something that defined Jo's work, both before and after she entered Parliament. And in the 19 months since her death, it's a legacy that has been carried forward both by her family and by the Foundation and Commission that bears her name, and at the heart of that work is the fight against loneliness.

In a country of more than 60 million people, and in an age where we can instantly connect with friends, relatives and even strangers around the world, it may seem counterintuitive that any of us could find ourselves feeling lonely. Yet, more than 9 million of us say that we always, or often, feel lonely. 200,000 older people have not had a conversation with a friend or a relative in more than a month. Up to 85% of young adults with disabilities say they feel lonely most days.

As Jo herself used to say, loneliness doesn't discriminate. But just as loneliness can affect any of us, so any of us can help to tackle it. And that could mean simply popping round to see an elderly neighbour or picking up the phone to a relative. Or you could follow the example of Phil Burton, a former Royal Artillery Lance Bombardier who is here with us today. After leaving the Army, Phil realised that many of his ex-servicemen were suffering from social isolation; they had lost the close-knit family that the Armed Forces provided. So, last year, he founded the Veterans Café in Lancashire. Its fortnightly get-togethers create a place where former members of the Armed Forces can come together, talk, share experiences and access support from charities and the NHS, and the projects proved a huge success, attracting hundreds of veterans of all ages. And just talking to Phil earlier on, he was saying that for many veterans they won't open up to somebody in authority or somebody who's there to help them, but they will open up to another veteran. And that is so important to them, and so many lives have been changed as a result of what Phil has done. So, I was delighted to meet him and present him with a Points of Light award earlier, which recognises outstanding volunteers

in our country for their service to others. And the Veterans Café is exactly the kind of local project Jo supported, celebrated and encouraged.

And over the past year and a half, the Jo Cox Foundation has continued that work, most notably with The Great Get Together, and last summer's events were the biggest set of neighbourhood celebrations since the Jubilee street parties. I had the pleasure of attending one in my own constituency, and I am very pleased to confirm that The Great Get Together will return this summer, on 22nd June. It will bring together millions of people on what would have been Jo's 44th birthday. I am certainly looking forward to it.

But Jo's legacy doesn't end there. There is also the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, created just over a year ago. And in the spirit of having more in common, it is, as you've just heard from Seema, jointly shared by two MPs: one Conservative, my good friend, Seema Kennedy, who you've just heard from; and one Labour, Rachel Reeves. And both worked closely with Jo during her all too brief time in Parliament. And both have spent the past 12 months looking at what the Government and others can do, to continue her legacy. And the Commission's report, which was published just before Christmas, highlights a range of areas where action is needed. And in response, we've started work on an England-wide strategy to tackle loneliness, which will be published later this year.

Work has also begun on developing the evidence base around the impact of different initiatives, across all ages and within all communities. And the Office of National Statistics is committed to establishing a framework for measuring loneliness, so consistent figures can be used in major research studies. And we will create a new, dedicated fund that will see government working with charities, foundations, and others, to stimulate innovative solutions, provide seed funding for community initiatives, and scale-up existing projects. And all this work will be overseen by a new ministerial lead on loneliness, Tracey Crouch. She will be keeping the challenge of tackling loneliness firmly on the agenda of colleagues across Whitehall. And any of you have met Tracey today at the reception, I think will agree that she is hugely enthusiastic about the role that she has taken on. Because this issue isn't just an issue for our Health Service, or for local councils, every department has a role to play and Tracey will be responsible for bringing them all together to get things done, and she'll be continuing to work closely with the Jo Cox Commission. And of course, she'll also be collaborating with people like you here in this room today. People who, like Jo, believe in causes and ideals, in working together in making a difference. And when I look around the room today, those are the kind of people that I see. You are all contributing in your own way, but in so many different ways. And Tracey and I are looking forward to working with you to make this project a fitting tribute to everything that Jo stood for.

In Brendan's memoir of life with Jo, he recounts the awful first night after Cuillin and Lejla learnt that their mother had died, and he describes how Cuillin, then aged just five, wrote and sang a song in tribute to her; a song with a simple yet devastating refrain, 'I love my mummy, I will not leave her behind'. Cuillin, don't worry, none of us will leave your mummy behind. None of us will forget her life, her ideals, or what she stood for. And all of us

will do all that we can to see that, in her memory, we bring an end to the acceptance of loneliness in our society. Thank you.