

Speech: Priti Patel: UNGA High Level Event on UN Development System Reform

Excellencies and colleagues, I welcome you to this discussion on how we will enable the UN system to meet the needs of the global challenges we face across the international system. I would like to thank my co-hosts for their leadership on this issue and for joining the UK in championing and securing a collaborative approach to reform.

Britain has always been a bold and confident nation, unafraid to stand up for what we believe in. This applies equally to our leadership on development which is a crucial part of Britain's place in the world.

Looking outwards not inwards and utilising our unique history, skills and position as a force for good.

Whether it's tackling global scourges like killer diseases, modern slavery or the oppression of women and girls...

...this is central to our country's place in the world.

And in today's world of new threats and extremist ideologies...we must, and we will, be bold and unapologetic in standing up for our values.

The UK has led the way in responding to urgent need around the world, working as a proud and proactive member of the United Nations.

With these crises the UN and the multilateral system has never been more needed that is why we choose to remain one of the largest core funders to the UN's development and humanitarian agencies

The UN's universal membership is the place where states strengthen alliances, build new relationships and work with 192 other potential partners.

And it is because the UK is a committed supporter of the UN, that we are working so hard to reform and improve it.

Disasters, famines, persecution, terrorism and instability are leaving millions of our fellow citizens without hope or aspiration.

98% of the victims of terrorism are in developing countries, where terrorism is destroying lives, reducing investment, setting back economies and development and causing people to flee their homes to safer countries.

From Yemen to Somalia, an estimated 141 million people in need.

From the current crises across the Middle East, Africa, and Burma, to conflict, droughts, famines and environmental disasters such as Hurricane Irma and now Hurricane Maria – these have shown the world that the international system is, frankly, not coping – it is not fit for purpose.

While the objectives and goals of the UN are timeless, the structures and system we have today are out of date, designed for different eras – and have not adapted to the realities of today: the challenge of fragile states, terrorism, extremism, cross-border conflict, and a changing climate.

These crises have shown the weaknesses in our international system – and one that is recognised by Secretary General Guterres.

Over the last 70 years the UN has ballooned into a multiplicity of agencies, organisations, with billions spent in funds, programmes, costs and overheads, but too little coherence when it comes to collaboration, the sharing of resources and the effectiveness of aid.

The levels of inefficiency are shocking, with competition between agencies and bodies generating institutional turf wars that hinder and harm the very efforts we are meant to assist. Examples such as money wasted, to the inefficient and counter productive use of aid, are just the tip of the iceberg.

Appallingly, we have actually seen child rape, sexual exploitation and abuse carried out under the UN flag – and not just by peacekeepers or in peace operations.

These deplorable crimes have been committed against children and vulnerable people – the very people the UN is mandated to protect.

As a world leader in development, the United Kingdom will be at the forefront of assisting the UN to wipe out this scourge. Inaction is not an option. Obfuscation and denial of the problem will only exacerbate the shame, eventually leading to loss of faith and trust in the organisation.

A NEW UN SYSTEM

As a country that believes in global leadership and using British values to shape a better world, the United Kingdom will be at the forefront driving this fundamental reform.

The UN Secretary-General's first report on system reform creates a strong foundation for building a UN for the 21st Century. One that the UK believes must be transparent, efficient and able to justify to the taxpayers of the world what it does and what outcomes it achieves on their behalf. He has our support in driving this change.

Several key themes come out of this report:

Efficiency – the UN must embrace efficiency. This isn't about doing less it's about doing more, reaching more people with the resources we already have by collaborating, pooling resources including best practice and tackling waste.

Accountability – the UN needs to be more accountable. The United Kingdom wants to see greater transparency on where funding comes from, how it is spent and the results it achieves.

The UK wants to see staff throughout this complicated system being held to account both for their performance and their conduct.

And, crucially, we support the Secretary-General's recommendations of focus on improved performance on the ground.

All aspects of these development reforms are solely about strengthening development impact.

If the UN is to remain relevant there must be improved delivery across all of the UN's activity and particularly on the ground, where suffering and need is the critical priority.

UK ACTION & FUNDING

For our part the UK is fully committed to working with you all to build a better UN for the 21st Century.

And Britain will lead the charge – from next year almost a third (30%) of our core funding to UN development and humanitarian agencies will be dependent on improved results and progress on reform priorities.

For all major emergencies, agencies will have to demonstrate that effective accountability and feedback mechanisms are in place if they want full funding from British taxpayers.

And we are demanding more effective and efficient delivery of assistance to the vulnerable – including greater use of cash transfers. Cash, rather than flying in food and other supplies, is more efficient, it enables those in need to choose how to support themselves. Crucially, it helps build local markets, local markets that create jobs and economic growth rather than perpetuating the aid dependency across these communities.

PRIVATE SECTOR

No country can defeat poverty and leave aid dependency behind without sustainable economic growth and jobs.

We know that trade, investment, free markets and economic growth are the route out of poverty.

UK Aid seeks to raise horizons, transform people's lives and secure better futures. If we can liberate the energies and talent of people around the world, to work hard and exchange the fruits of their labour in open markets, then people will work their way out of poverty.

So I am also calling on the UN to collaborate more closely with the private sector, the engine of job creation around the world, the vehicle to end poverty and we will link Britain's development spending to long term private sector investment, in order to lift people out of poverty and end aid dependency.

SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

One example of where the international system has failed is on the issue of the scourge of child sex abuse, and child rape, in development and peacekeeping.

The United Kingdom's position could not be clearer;

We call upon the UN to have the best in class systems for training, prevention and detection in order to protect the world's vulnerable children from abusers and abuse;

To do much more to support Member States to enhance their investigation and prosecution capability;

Legal immunity, of whatever form, must neither exist nor be claimed for child sex crimes. We, must declare that child sex crimes do not fall within the scope of protection envisaged by the Convention on UN Privileges and Immunities.

In practical terms we must fight to see;

- The Confirmation that Agencies heads are accountable for action, and failure of action, on sexual abuse and exploitation, reporting annually to Boards and in keeping with the new MoUs that I have issued on behalf of the British Government;
- An Assurance that the Special Task Force on SEA will not be closed after one year;
- Agreement that the UN's Sexual exploitation and abuse database is updated to include HQ as well as field based staff, officials, experts, contractors and others for all UK funded agencies;
- And assurances that the UN will toughen its investigation and prosecution response.
- A commitment to a real inter-agency response to help bring perpetrators to justice in countries where concerns and caseloads are greatest.

The UK government recognises the progress made with the Voluntary Compact, but will nevertheless not be shy however in calling out agencies and organisations that do not take all necessary steps in training, prevention, detection to as fast as possible eliminate this scourge.

Britain will have agreements in place whereby all agencies we support endorse a 'zero tolerance' policy when it comes to child sex abuse, which will apply to its staff, officials, experts, contractors, implementing partners and any

other organisation or individual that benefits from Agency support or direct or indirect funding.

And we are absolutely clear that all UN agencies must be fully transparent about any and all accusations made against their staff, contractors and implementing partners.

Any agency that receives funds from us must have the strongest possible measures in place to protect vulnerable populations, especially children, and to deter, detect and catch paedophiles and sex offenders.

Under these agreements agencies must also have robust and credible whistleblowing mechanisms and the UK will host an international conference to plan on how we, together, set up, fund and support such a mechanism.

This is a defining moral issue for the UN and for Member States and there can be no more excuses.

AN URGENT AGENDA

No one in this room can doubt the urgency of reform.

On behalf of British taxpayers, the UK Government will put our money where our mouth is on our reform priorities and I call upon others to do the same.

The UN's goals and objectives are timeless.

But a UN that embraces reform can realise its enormous potential to build it up and make it relevant to the 21st Century.

We can't allow our international institutions to slide into irrelevance at a time when disasters, conflict, instability and poverty are desperately in need of global co-operation and global leadership.

A global Britain will lead this challenge and work together to create a more engaged and outward looking international system. Our work is to serve, and serve those whose futures are dependent upon the actions we undertake today.

Thank you.