

News story: PM to visit Scotland to set out plan for Britain

The Prime Minister will visit staff at the East Kilbride base of the UK's Department for International Development on Monday to set out her aim of building a global Britain that fully embraces its role on the world stage.

As the UK prepares to enter into negotiations to leave the EU, the Prime Minister will make clear that the deal we seek will have at its core the aim of making Britain a stronger, fairer, more united and more outward-looking country.

She will also set out that the deal struck must work for all nations of the UK, and the UK as a whole.

This Plan for Britain, she will explain, will be about getting the right deal for Britain abroad and a better deal for ordinary, working people at home.

The work you do here – in conjunction with your colleagues at the Department for International Development in London – says something important about Britain.

It says that we are a kind and generous country. It says that we are a big country that will never let down – or turn our back on – those in need. And it says that we are a country that does – and will always – meet our commitments to the world – and particularly to those who so desperately need our support.

And that is important to remember.

For we stand on the threshold of a significant moment for Britain as we begin the negotiations that will lead us towards a new partnership with Europe.

And I want to make it absolutely clear as we move through this process that this is not – in any sense – the moment that Britain steps back from the world. Indeed, we are going to take this opportunity to forge a more Global Britain. The closest friend and ally with Europe, but also a country that looks beyond Europe to build relationships with old friends and new allies alike.

The work you do will be at the heart of that effort.

Because from this building, work is co-ordinated that saves lives around the world; that builds a safer, healthier, more prosperous world for people in developing countries; and that makes our own country and people safer and better off too.

It's not all about charity of course. You know that better than anyone. So often, the work you do is about empowering people to live better, fuller

lives.

For example, your work is leading the world in efforts to end the outrage of violence against women and girls. That is a cause that is particularly close to my heart.

You ensure that the UK is working well with important international institutions like the UN and the Commonwealth.

And researchers here are exploring the potential for new vaccines to prevent the devastation caused by serious illnesses and epidemics. I know, for example, that the work to tackle the awful Zika virus that is a source of such anguish for people across Latin America is being led by researchers at Glasgow University, supported by UK government funds.

But sometimes events happen that simply require an immediate and significant response.

And it is because of the work you do that we have recently been able to announce significant support for the nations facing up to major humanitarian crises this year.

Somalia, where we have pledged £110 million of UK aid to provide up to 1 million people with emergency food assistance, over 600,000 starving children and pregnant and breastfeeding women with nutritional help, over 1 million people with safe drinking water, and more than 1.1 million people with emergency health services.

And, of course, our commitment to Somalia goes further than money. We look forward to bringing the international community together in London in May for the second London-Somalia conference, where we hope to be able to help that nation secure and build on the progress it has made in recent years.

It is because of the work you do that the UK was one of the first major donors to respond to the UN's appeal for South Sudan. We are leading the way in that desperate nation by making sure millions of people get the food, water and medicine that they so urgently need.

That includes food for over 500,000 people, life-saving nutritional support to more than 27,500 children, safe drinking water for over 300,000 people and emergency health services for over 100,000 more.

And it is because of the work you do that the UK is able to lead the way in helping countries elsewhere in the region – in Uganda and Ethiopia. And in Kenya, where the Hunger Safety Net Programme aims to reduce poverty and hunger in the short-term, and to build economic resilience for the most vulnerable people in the poorest parts of the country. And that is the best way to give them a sustainable, long-term route out of poverty.

Across Africa, vulnerable men, women and children are being helped by initiatives and projects that come with a simple badge of hope: a badge that says UK Aid.

And the same goes for other parts of the world too. Wherever people are in need, that same badge of hope appears.

The UK is at the forefront of the response to the Syria crisis, with life-saving humanitarian support reaching millions of people inside Syria and in neighbouring countries.

In 2016, the UK was the third largest bilateral contributor to the humanitarian response in Syria, and the second largest overall since the start of the response in 2012. We have pledged more than £2.3 billion to support those affected by the conflict, our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis.

That is a record of which we can all be proud.

And because we are a country that does not duck our responsibilities, let us remember the amazing work being done in Afghanistan today. One of the legacies of years of conflict in that country is the deadly phenomenon of landmines that still lie strewn across hundreds of acres of that land.

But thanks to UK Aid – and in particular, thanks to the work of organisations such as the Halo Trust that has its headquarters right here in Scotland – almost 100 square kilometres of contaminated land has been cleared. And more than 1 million people have benefited as a result.

We will continue with that work – and continue to support Afghanistan's security – because that is in the interests of Afghanistan and in the interests of Britain too.

UK Aid is a badge of hope for so many around the world. It appears on the side of buildings, school books, medical supplies and food parcels in some of the toughest environments and most hard-to-reach countries on the planet.

And it says this: that when this great union of nations – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – sets its mind on something and works together with determination, we are an unstoppable force.

That is why the Plan for Britain I have set-out – a plan to get the right deal for Britain abroad as well as a better deal for ordinary, working people at home – has as its heart one over-arching goal: to build a more united nation.

Because I believe when we work together, there is no limit to what we can do.

A more united nation means working actively to bring people and communities together by promoting policies which support integration and social cohesion.

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland that means fully respecting, and indeed strengthening, the devolution settlements. But never allowing our Union to become looser and weaker, or our people to drift apart.

So in those policy areas where the UK government holds responsibility, I am determined that we will put the interests of the Union – both the parts and

the whole – at the heart of our decision-making.

International development is a prime example of that, and your work here, on behalf of your fellow citizens across the United Kingdom, has a huge impact.

Indeed, the work we do as a United Kingdom on the world stage make an eloquent case for our Union as a whole.

It is about the values we share in our family of nations.

Values of freedom of speech, democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law.

This proud shared heritage provides the bedrock of our lives together in the UK.

And on that foundation we have built a country where we share the challenges that we face, and bring all the expertise, ingenuity and goodwill we share across this Union to bear to tackle them.

That allows us to do amazing things, like the life-saving work which is led from this building.

So as Britain leaves the European Union, and we forge a new role for ourselves in the world, the strength and stability of our Union will become even more important.

Alongside the visit to DFID, the Prime Minister is also due to meet officers from Police Scotland to discuss counter-terrorism issues.

She will then be joined by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon for a bilateral meeting.

Press release: Secretary of State's statement on NI political talks

Mr Brokenshire commented:

Three weeks ago the people of Northern Ireland voted overwhelmingly for effective, devolved, power sharing government.

Since then I have been working intensively with the political parties and with the Irish government to find a way forward,

including putting forward a number of proposals

I am determined to see a functioning Executive in place at Stormont. I have spoken to the Prime Minister this afternoon and this remains the UK government's continuing priority.

This is the necessary first step to addressing the issues of greatest public concern – health, education and other public services in Northern Ireland.

Even at this stage I urge political parties to agree to work to form an Executive and provide people here with the strong and stable devolved government that they want.

[News story: Foreign Office statement on demonstrations in Belarus](#)

We have closely followed events in Belarus leading up to, and during, the Freedom Day demonstrations. We are concerned over the actions of the law enforcement agencies in Minsk. A large number of citizens, activists and journalists appear to have been arbitrarily and indiscriminately detained.

There is no justification for the use of force or intimidation against those exercising their right to peaceful protest. We urge the Government of Belarus to respect and uphold the right to freedom of association, assembly and expression. We further call on the government of Belarus to release all those peaceful protesters still detained.

[News story: Baroness Anelay welcomes conclusions of UN Human Rights Council](#)

This was the first Human Rights Council (HRC) session since the UK's successful re-election in November to serve a second term on the Council. The UK, represented at Ministerial level by my colleague Mr Sharma, Minister for

Asia, played a leading role on a number of important issues, including Syria, Sri Lanka and South Sudan, as well as supporting on Burma, DPRK and Iran.

I welcome the adoption of a strong resolution on Syria, which includes renewing the mandate of the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI). The COI's vital work highlights the unspeakable atrocities being perpetrated in Syria. We will continue to call for those responsible for violations and abuses of international law to be held to account. We remain concerned at the lack of humanitarian access in Syria. We call on the regime to abandon its callous siege and starvation tactics and allow for the immediate, unhindered delivery of aid.

The report presented by the Human Rights Commission in South Sudan was deeply worrying. Following the peace agreement in August 2015, our hope that a transitional government of national unity might turn the tide of violence and begin the process of reconciliation looks to remain just that, a hope. So I welcome the adoption of a resolution, by consensus and with South Sudan's support, that will extend the Commission's work and strengthen its mandate.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) report on Sri Lanka highlighted notable improvements in its human rights situation. But much remains to be done in order to address the legacy of Sri Lanka's armed conflict. I welcomed Sri Lanka co-sponsoring a resolution at this session, sending a strong signal on the importance the Government attaches to reconciliation and human rights. I urge the Government of Sri Lanka to provide the leadership required to fully deliver on its commitments, to develop a comprehensive, time-bound implementation strategy, and to give due consideration to the conclusions of the report of the Consultation Task Force on reconciliation mechanisms.

I thank the Special Rapporteur on Burma for her report to the Council, acknowledging the progress made by the Government in its first year, while outlining the complex human rights challenges that remain, in particular conflict-related violations in Rakhine, Shan and Kachin States. I welcome the establishment of an independent international Fact Finding Mission to look into recent human rights violations, and urge the Burmese authorities to cooperate fully. The UK stands ready to assist the Government in this endeavour and tackling other long-standing human rights challenges. I welcome the resolution on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which draws upon the recommendations made by the Group of Independent Experts on accountability. I hope the UN Special Rapporteur will continue the important task of developing an effective accountability framework with OHCHR in Seoul. The UK will continue to work with partners to maintain international pressure on the DPRK. I call on the Government of the DPRK to take credible steps to address the shocking human rights record and prioritise the welfare of the North Korean people above the country's nuclear and ballistic missile programme.

The situation in Libya remains a grave concern, as highlighted in the latest joint report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. I condemn the recent upsurge in violence between armed groups both in Tripoli and in the oil crescent, and am

deeply concerned by reports of human rights abuses and violations by combatants in Benghazi and elsewhere. Those responsible must be held to account. I welcome the efforts of the Presidency Council and other mediators to de-escalate the situation and secure ceasefires. I urge calm on all sides to avoid further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the country. The UK welcomes the Council's support for the resolution and the emphasis on accountability.

I welcome the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Iran. The human rights situation within the country is deeply worrying, in particular the continued execution of juvenile offenders. The newly introduced Charter on Citizen's Rights has the potential to make a positive impact and I urge Iran to grant immediate access to the Special Rapporteur so she can work with them to implement it.

I also welcome the adoption of the resolution on the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The human rights situation there is deeply concerning. For too long, international organisations have been denied access by the de facto authorities to these increasingly isolated territories. I welcome the opportunity for detailed and objective reporting by the OHCHR. I trust that the de facto authorities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia will grant the mandated access to the High Commissioner and his Office.

The UK once again played a strong role in supporting consensus on the adoption of both the EU's 'Freedom of Religion or Belief' resolution and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's text on the combating religious intolerance resolution. Tackling restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, and addressing intolerance and violent extremism should be a priority for all UN Member States.

This Council has once again reaffirmed the vital role that Human Rights Defenders play in promoting and protecting human rights. The ability of our citizens to hold governments to account, to freely express opinions, to hold and avow their beliefs, is an essential element of protecting our dignity as individuals and societies. In too many parts of the world that ability is being challenged or restricted. During this session, we have also seen attempts by some delegations to restrict the participation of NGOs at the Human Rights Council. Civil society must be able to engage actively in the United Nations – it is in the interests of the international community that they do so. Civil society furthers the UN's ideals, is a source of evidence and expertise, and supports the implementation of the UN's work. We restrict civil society space at our peril.

The UK remains committed to ensuring that the Council's Universal Periodic Review process delivers real improvements on human rights. I am pleased that the UK took the lead alongside Paraguay, Morocco and Brazil on a joint statement this session, outlining commitments to improve implementation of UPR recommendations. We were pleased to lead a joint statement on the Rule of Law, stressing that implementation is as important as the rules themselves.

Finally, in addition to our duty to address egregious human rights issues, I believe we must acknowledge positive developments. We should encourage a

“race to the top” as States engage positively with the UN human rights system and support each other in translating political will into action. Alongside Colombia, the UK launched the “Race to the Top” initiative during the September HRC session. This session we delivered a joint statement on the initiative, which we were pleased enjoyed broad support.

At the start of our second term serving on the HRC, the UK was pleased to play a leading role on a number of critical dossiers. We look forward to working with member states on consolidating progress made in this session.

Speech: “What we’re witnessing is a systematic and corrosive assault on history, on religion, on the very fabric of identity”

Let me begin by thanking our briefers this morning, by welcoming the unanimous adoption of resolution 2347, and by paying tribute to France and to Italy for bringing this issue to the Council.

Today all our briefers, and all members of this Council, have really brought home the sheer scale of the problem that we face. Whether in Timbuktu, Palmyra or Bamiyan, this is an issue that goes beyond statues, beyond artefacts and beyond museums. What we’re witnessing is a systematic and corrosive assault on history, on religion, on the very fabric of identity. What we are witnessing are, in many cases, war crimes.

This isn’t just wanton pillaging and vandalism, this is a matter of international peace and security. Stolen statues in Syria and Iraq don’t just line the pockets of opportunists and looters, they provide a source of revenue for Daesh. And in the region, the destruction of religious and cultural sites is about more than just bricks and mortar; sectarian division can be fuelled by pickaxes and sledgehammers just as it can be by bullets and guns.

So let us respond to this cultural destruction with the same intensity and the same unity of purpose as any other threat to international peace and security.

Through this resolution today we have taken a step forward in doing so. This unanimous resolution shows the strength of our resolve and of our condemnation of such actions. It shows our commitment and determination to act against perpetrators so that we can combat terrorism, prevent conflict and protect vulnerable communities. But as with so many issues before this Council, implementation is now needed. The UK will do its utmost to do so.

That is why we have established a \$30 million Cultural Program Fund to support projects which help foster, safeguard and promote cultural heritage in countries affected by conflict.

These projects are helping complete the new museum in Basrah, helping protect heritage and traditional craft skills in Kabul, and supporting advanced archaeological techniques and technology for archaeologists across the Middle East and North Africa.

It's an effort furthered by the British Museum who are training Iraqi heritage sector workers, so that they have the skills needed to assess and record the condition of their heritage sites and carry out "rescue archaeology" as required. It's already bearing fruit; a participant in the training has been appointed by the Iraqi State Board to lead the assessment of the site of Nimrud, recently released from Daesh control. And another participant is looking forward to returning to Mosul Museum soon.

But it isn't enough to train civilians. It's often the brave men and women of the armed forces who are at the frontline of the threat against culture heritage. That's why the United Kingdom last year set up a Cultural Property Protection Unit so that respect for cultural property is further integrated into training and operations of our armed forces. This includes respecting domestic and international law, as well as the obligations of the 1954 Hague Convention and its Protocols, which we will shortly ratify.

The action we take as a Council or as member states will count for little unless we show there are real consequences for those who carry out these acts. Truly to rid the world of this scourge, we need to deter and punish, as well as prevent.

Ahmad al-Faqi al-Mahdi was the first person convicted by the International Criminal Court for attacking protected sites, but he cannot be the last. If we are to deter others from following his path, we need to see more convictions, more consequences. His story should serve as a warning to all those who choose to attack cultural heritage; a warning that this Council must ensure is heeded.

Thank you.