

Press release: UK outlines new humanitarian support and urges international community to save lives before it's too late

The International Development Secretary Priti Patel has today announced new packages of life-saving UK aid for South Sudan and Somalia and issued a call to action to the international community to step up their support before it is too late.

Before this week there has been only one certified famine globally since 2000. Parts of South Sudan are now in famine and in 2017 there is a credible risk of another three famines in Yemen, North East Nigeria and Somalia. Drought and conflict in these countries are pushing families to the brink of starvation and there is also no end in sight to the six-year conflict which has ripped Syria apart.

As the world faces an unprecedented number of humanitarian crises, Priti Patel outlined how the UK will lead the world in supporting famine stricken areas. In response to famine warnings in Somalia and South Sudan she announced new UK support to provide lifesaving food, water and emergency healthcare which will save more than a million lives.

This is alongside continued life-saving aid to Yemen and North East Nigeria which provided food, medical supplies, water and emergency shelter to over two million people in 2016.

International Development Secretary Priti Patel said:

The world faces a series of unprecedented humanitarian crises and the real threat of famine in four countries. These crises are being driven by conflict and drought and we must respond accordingly. Our commitment to UK aid means that when people are at risk of dying from drought and disaster, we have the tools and expertise to avoid catastrophe.

In times of crisis, the world looks to Britain not just for our work on the ground, but also for our leadership internationally. While we step up our support for emergency food, water and lifesaving care to those in need, our message to the world is clear – we must act now to help innocent people who are starving to death.

In Somalia, more than six million people have no reliable access to food and there are 360,000 acutely malnourished children. All the signs are pointing to a famine as bad, or worse, than the one in 2011 which killed 260,000

people. The UK is acting now to prevent this.

Today's announcement of new support to Somalia will provide:

- emergency food to up to one million people
- life-saving nutritional support to more than 600,000 starving children and pregnant and breastfeeding women
- safe drinking water for one million people
- emergency healthcare for 1.7 million people

In South Sudan, famine has now been declared and more than half the population is in desperate need. Almost five million face the daily threat of going without enough food and water and three million people have been forced from their homes because of ruthless violence and widespread rape. The UK is leading the way by providing:

- Food assistance for over 500,000 people
- Life-saving nutritional support to more than 27,500 children
- Safe drinking water for over 300,000 people
- Emergency health services for over 100,000 people
- Livelihood support for over 650,000 people
- Vaccinations for over 200,000 livestock

In North East Nigeria, as Boko Haram is pushed out, we are increasing our humanitarian support. The UK is providing:

- food to more than 1 million people
- treatment to 34,000 children at risk of death from hunger
- access to clean water and sanitation for more than 135,000 people

In Yemen, the UK is delivering life-saving aid to the most vulnerable people which included supplying food, medical supplies, water and emergency shelter to over one million people last year.

To stop famine spreading and help support stability in these regions the system needs urgent reform. The UK is pushing for a faster, more effective international humanitarian system fit for the 21st century, which is firmly in our interests.

-ENDS-

Notes to editors:

1. The UK is providing £100m in new support in Somalia and another £100m in South Sudan for 2017/18.
2. In addition to South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and North East Nigeria, the UK is at the forefront of the response to the Syria crisis. UK aid is helping millions of civilians caught up in the war; supporting Syrian refugees to remain in host countries in the region; and is enabling host countries to accommodate them.
3. The UK has committed £2.3 billion to the Syria Crisis Response between 2012 and 2020. Since February 2012, across Syria and the region, we have distributed over 21 million food rations that feed a person for a month,

over 6.5 million relief packages, over 6.2 million vaccines and provided over 4.8 million medical consultations

4. We are supporting the governments of Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to better cope with a protracted refugee presence, and enable Syrian refugees to remain in the region until they can safely return to Syria. Our programmes are aimed at meeting immediate humanitarian need. In addition, we are improving people's lives by helping support children into school to avoid a lost generation, creating job opportunities and improving skills.

[News story: Westminster welcomes Welsh language at the Welsh grand committee](#)

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MPs will be given the chance to speak Welsh in parliamentary debates in the Palace of Westminster for the first time ever this year.

The UK Government, responding to the Commons' Procedure Committee's report on the matter, today confirms it will bring forward a motion in Government time enabling MPs to speak in Welsh when the Welsh Grand Committee meets in Westminster.

MPs are currently only permitted to speak Welsh in Westminster's parliamentary proceedings when the Welsh Affairs select committee is taking evidence.

Making proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee bilingual means that the Welsh language will be used for short debates, legislative scrutiny and the questioning of ministers in Westminster for the first time ever.

David Lidington, Leader of the House of Commons, said:

Welsh MPs play a vital role in making their constituents' voices heard in the House of Commons.

Across Whitehall, UK Government ministers are listening and responding – as we are today by promoting the Welsh language in Parliament and its contribution to the cultural diversity of the United Kingdom.

Alun Cairns, Secretary of State for Wales, said:

I am delighted that MPs will be able to participate in the Welsh Grand Committee through the medium of Welsh for the first time in Westminster.

It is vitally important that the people of Wales are able to hear debates in both languages. I hope that MPs who can speak Welsh will choose to use this service in order to help promote the Welsh language across Parliament.

The cost of the translation services – both interpreters and headsets – will be absorbed within Parliament's existing budgets, meaning this change takes place at no extra cost to the taxpayer.

Speech: "This Council has a responsibility to sustain the peace won in Europe seven decades ago."

Thank you Mr President, Mr Minister, and thank you to our three Secretary-Generals for their briefings today.

The three organisations – the United Nations, the OSCE, and the European Union – are all playing a crucial role to preserve peace and security in Europe, and we are grateful for all of the work that you do.

Everything that we do in this Council has come about as a direct result of conflict in Europe. Over seven decades on from the Second World War, we should be proud that Europeans now enjoy a level of stability and prosperity that would have been unthinkable to our grandparents' generation.

And as we heard so clearly in the session on Ukraine earlier this month, instability and insecurity persists in Europe. The borders of Europe are threatened today in a way not seen since the Cold War. The territorial integrity of your country, Mr President, has been flagrantly violated leaving up to 10,000 dead, with millions displaced.

At the heart of this disregard for sovereignty lies the Russian Federation and its world view that thinks Moscow's interests can and should prevail over the sovereign and democratic choices of independent countries. It's a world view illustrated by Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and continued support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine.

Only a few days ago Russia recognised passports from the so-called “People’s Republics” in Donbas under the guise of humanitarian assistance for a conflict which Russia itself instigated. A more appropriate response would be for Russia to honour its commitments under the Minsk agreements, including by withdrawing its troops and equipment from Ukraine; and using its influence over the separatists to implement the ceasefire and heavy weapons withdrawal agreement. Until all such commitments are met in full, Russia will remain under sanctions from the EU and G7 states.

Put simply, we can’t stand idly by in the face of such aggression. This Council has a responsibility to sustain the peace won in Europe seven decades ago, to ensure that the rules based international order, most notably the UN Charter, is respected and upheld by all countries. We have a responsibility to ensure that wars waged across battlefields are ended through dialogue pursued across tables.

The three organisations we’ve heard from today are playing a vital role in those efforts.

In the face of great odds and escalating violence, the OSCE is bravely monitoring the line of contact in Ukraine. The UN is bringing vital aid and much needed relief to those suffering. And through sanctions, the EU is bringing pressure to bear on Russia to meet its commitments under the Minsk agreement.

But these organisations can’t do it alone. All sides must step up and make a ceasefire a reality, implementing their Minsk agreements in full.

Sadly, the need for a peaceful, political settlement extends far beyond the borders of Ukraine. In the interests of time I won’t mention every single conflict in Europe – the flashing light, after all, is meant to be a sign to stop, not an encouragement to keep going. So let me just mention a few of the other conflicts. In Georgia, the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain unresolved, with Russian pressure showing no signs of dissipating. In Moldova, it is long past time for a comprehensive, peaceful settlement of the Transnistria conflict; based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova with a special status for the Transnistria Region.

In Nagorno-Karabakh, a peaceful settlement also remains elusive owing to a high level of mistrust and a lack of any political will to compromise. And we support the efforts of the Co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group.

Across the continent, the United Kingdom will continue to be a force for peace in Europe, through our membership of NATO, the OSCE and, of course, this Council. Our own security has long depended on the strong partnerships of the Euro-Atlantic area, and so we are committed to strengthening those partnerships further, including by maintaining the NATO target of spending 2% of our economy on defence, and I strongly encourage all NATO allies to meet that target.

NATO has responded in a coherent, comprehensive and measured fashion to Russia’s destabilisation and provocation. It has modernised its deterrence

and defence posture, as a balanced response to the instability and insecurity Russia has attempted to sow, while also being open to dialogue with Russia.

Mr President,

Three years on from the Maidan protests, we speak clearly in this Chamber today to reaffirm our total support for the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty as outlined in the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act. We speak clearly to say that we do not, we will not recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea. I am proud to do so again today on behalf of the United Kingdom.

Thank you.

[News story: Celebrating Women in Whitehall: Her Majesty The Queen meets Female Permanent Secretaries](#)

The event held at The Queen's Gallery at Buckingham Palace acknowledged that women are being appointed to the top of the Civil Service at the fastest rate in history.

One in three permanent secretary positions in the past two and a half years went to women.

Three years after Her Majesty became Queen, the Civil Service appointed its first ever female Permanent Secretary, Baroness Evelyn Sharp.

Baroness Sharp entered the Fast Stream in 1926 just one year after women were allowed to apply. Now there are ten female permanent secretaries, making up just over a quarter of all permanent secretaries.

The event marked this great achievement but also brought together role models for future generations and future permanent secretaries.

Sue Owen, Permanent Secretary at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and diversity champion for the Civil Service said:

I was delighted to welcome so many women who have broken the glass ceiling past and present to get to the very top of the Civil Service.

Women make up more than half the Civil Service and we benefit from their skills. It is absolutely right that women should be properly represented at the highest levels. Whilst the first female

Permanent Secretary was appointed in 1955, it is only in the last decade or so that real progress has been made.

We want this trend to intensify. We will support women at every level to achieve their full potential and to know they can reach the very top.

Sir Jeremy Heywood, Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service said:

The Civil Service is committed to being a place where everyone can thrive regardless of background, with the aim of becoming the most inclusive employer in the UK.

Currently, over 40% of the Senior Civil Service are women. But there is still more to do, which is why we are determined to build on our progress to date by removing any remaining barriers for women and other underrepresented groups in the Civil Service.

Further information

In total, there have been 35 female permanent secretaries, including those currently in post.

The figure of ten female permanent secretaries includes Antonia Romeo, Permanent Secretary at the Department of International Trade who takes up her role in March 2017.

Speech: The UK post-Brexit: a stronger and even closer ally to Latvia

There is a well known saying in Latvia, 'Veca mīlestība nerūs' – old love does not rust.

And it is with a very similar sentiment that the UK is approaching the upcoming negotiations with the European Union. We are seeking a new, strong partnership with our closest neighbours in Europe.

For the UK and Latvia, we hope that that our new partnership will be deeper than just our individual relationships with the European Union. Our histories do, of course, pre-date the establishment of the EU.

Our shared history can be seen in your capital city – transformed by its

former mayor and British emigrant, George Armistead.

It can also be seen at Oxford University where the legacy of the great Riga-born philosopher and historian, Sir Isaiah Berlin, lives on.

I'm proud too of the fact that the United Kingdom was the first country to de facto recognise Latvia's independence almost a century ago – a week before Latvian independence was declared. And deeply honoured that you annually commemorate our Royal Navy's important contribution to defending your independence in 1919, when the British cruiser HMS Dragon helped the Latvian Army to protect Riga from West Russian Volunteer Army.

We are natural allies for a number of reasons.

We are both strong supporters of global free trade and have a trusted relationship when it comes to questions of security and defence.

So the message I bring with me to Latvia today is a simple one – the UK and Latvia will continue to be reliable partners, willing allies and close friends.

I know there are many here who were disappointed with the outcome of the UK's referendum vote, which I understand.

But today I'm meeting with your Prime Minister and your Foreign Minister to make clear that we can use the UK's departure from the EU to deepen and reinvigorate our partnership.

For while we may be leaving the institutions of the EU, we are not leaving Europe.

What we are seeking is a smooth and orderly exit from the EU and a strong new partnership.

And I'm confident that if we approach negotiations in a spirit of goodwill, we can deliver a positive outcome that works for the mutual benefit of all.

Because it is absolutely in the UK's interests that the EU succeeds and prospers politically, economically and socially.

For our bilateral relationship, there are three areas where our mutual interests converge.

Firstly, Latvians living in the UK contribute a great deal to the fabric of our society and we'll continue to welcome the brightest and the best to the UK.

I want to emphasise that Latvians' existing rights to reside in the UK are not affected by the EU referendum vote, so there is no reason for any Latvian national who is legally living in the UK and obeying the laws of the country to feel insecure.

And the British government has been clear – we want to get a deal done

quickly that protects the rights of all EU citizens living in the UK, and British citizens living in the EU.

Indeed, we would have liked to have come to such an agreement already, and have been clear it will be a priority once formal negotiations begin.

Secondly, maintaining security and defence in Europe will continue to be uppermost in our minds. So we'll stand by our NATO commitments to spend 2% of GDP on defence and help protect the interests of our allies and friends.

Finally, trade between our countries is significant, totalling well over a billion pounds last year and covering a range of sectors, including timber, machinery and financial services.

And we are trading more, not less, with trade between the UK and Latvia growing by around a fifth last year.

So we will continue to buy Latvian goods and services, sell you ours and trade with you as freely as possible. That is exactly why we are pursuing a new free trade agreement that will be to our mutual benefit.

Britain's decision to leave the European Union wasn't about us closing ourselves off from the world. Instead it was about us opening ourselves up to the rest of the world.

We'll remain an outward-looking country that aims to be an even closer ally to Latvia.

Because just as our histories have been closely intertwined, so will we both positively shape the direction our countries take in future.

Latvia and the UK will remain close partners. My message to you is that our important relationship will not diminish after our exit. Indeed, it will grow stronger still.