

Alok Sharma speech to UN General Assembly on Universal Health Coverage

I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly and colleagues from Thailand and Georgia for leading the Political Declaration on Universal Health Coverage.

Today, we renew our commitment to that goal.

It is an ambitious and vital commitment.

The UK has a world-class health system. For over 70 years, our National Health Service has delivered safe healthcare free at the point of use to the British people. We fully support international efforts on universal health coverage.

This is urgent. Every day around 800 women around the world die needlessly in childbirth or through unsafe pregnancies – all because of a lack of basic healthcare.

The UK is committed to defending and promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights. Women and girls must have control over their bodies, and access to services they need.

We cannot achieve Universal Health Coverage without Universal Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

I am therefore very pleased to announce a £600 million Reproductive Health Supplies programme. This will help 20 million women and girls to access family planning and prevent five million unintended pregnancies each year up to 2025.

This builds on the UK's long-standing commitment to gender equality. As Employment Minister, I worked with the International Labour Organization to address violence in the workplace. We likewise know that effective health services reduce violence against women and girls.

Universal health coverage is a smart investment. Not just for health, but for all the Global Goals. It reduces poverty and drives prosperity.

We cannot afford not to do this.

But we must turn our political commitment into action.

Countries must invest public resources in universal health coverage to protect the poorest. This means addressing causes of illness and death like malnutrition and unsafe water and sanitation, and the threat posed by antimicrobial resistance. We must spend carefully to help as many people as possible.

We need systems that can protect everyone. I have seen for myself Ebola outbreaks being made worse by weak and fractured health systems.

This needs good infrastructure, strong systems and services.

We know what it takes. We have committed to do it. Let's now act to make universal health coverage a reality.

Thank you.

[New Syrian Constitutional Committee: Foreign Secretary statement](#)



The United Nations Secretary General has today announced the formation of a Syrian Constitutional Committee as part of the UN led political process for peace in Syria. The UK welcomes the step and the efforts of UN Syria Envoy Geir Pedersen.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

After eight years of horrendous conflict, this is a welcome first step towards the peace that the Syrian people so desperately need. The regime and its backers must now show that they are committed to finding a resolution to this conflict, by engaging in good faith with the constitutional committee.

Alongside this, all parties need to return urgently to the previously agreed ceasefire, and to protect civilians.

Background

- The Foreign Secretary will host a meeting on Syria with Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the US at the United Nations General Assembly on Thursday 26 September.

- The UK would only consider providing reconstruction assistance if it sees genuine progress towards a credible, inclusive political settlement.

Further information

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[UK experts help stop spread of terrorist videos online](#)

New research backed by UK funding and expertise will help stop violent videos being shared online after terrorist attacks, Boris Johnson said at the UN General Assembly in New York.

The Prime Minister announced new funding to support efforts to develop industry-wide technology that can better identify online videos designed to avoid existing detection methods.

Millions of videos of the Christchurch shootings in New Zealand spread across online platforms in the wake of the attack in March which killed 51 people.

Many had been intentionally altered to slip through current content filters and it took hours and even days for them to be removed. This also meant families of those caught in the attack were faced with footage of their loved ones circulating online.

UK data-science experts will use new funding to create an algorithm which any internet company in the world can use to improve their detection of violent and harmful videos and prevent them being made available to their users.

This will make it much harder for terrorist footage to be shared online. The outcomes of the research will also be used to help identify other types of harmful online content such as child sexual abuse.

The announcement further demonstrates how the UK is bringing together governments and industry in the fight against online extremism. We kick-started this fight by playing a leading role in setting up the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism following the Westminster attacks.

This also honours commitments made in the Christchurch Call to Action to tackle terrorist use of the internet, which world leaders signed up to at a summit in Paris in May.

Today the Prime Minister addressed a leaders' event in the margins of UNGA. Hosted by Prime Minister Ardern, President Macron, the King of Jordan and the

UN Secretary General it followed on from the Paris summit and focused on countering terrorist narratives online and offline.

The Prime Minister said:

The internet can and should be a force for good in the world – one that can unite and empower our citizens, increase our knowledge and understanding, and open up society.

What it cannot be is a place to watch mass murder unfold. We will not allow technology to be harnessed for evil.

British experts are at the forefront of the fight against online terror and this new funding will boost their pioneering work to find innovative new ways to tackle the threats this poses to our values and way of life.

[Joint statement by the heads of state and government of France, Germany and the United Kingdom](#)



We, the leaders of France, Germany and the United Kingdom, recall our shared common security interests, in particular upholding the global non-proliferation regime and preserving stability in the Middle East.

We condemn in the strongest terms the attacks on oil facilities on Saudi territory on September 14th, 2019 in Abqaiq and Khurais, and reaffirm in this context our full solidarity with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its population.

It is clear to us that Iran bears responsibility for this attack. There is no other plausible explanation. We support ongoing investigations to establish further details.

These attacks may have been against Saudi Arabia but they concern all countries and increase the risk of a major conflict. They underline the importance of making collective efforts towards regional stability and security, including finding a political solution to the ongoing conflict in Yemen. The attacks also highlight the necessity of de-escalation in the region through sustained diplomatic efforts and engagement with all parties.

In this regard, we recall our continued commitment to the JCPoA, agreed with Iran on July 14th, 2015 and unanimously endorsed by the UN Security Council. We urge Iran once again to reverse its decisions to reduce compliance with the deal and to adhere fully to its commitments under it. We call upon Iran to cooperate fully with the IAEA in the framework of the JCPoA and its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement.

Conscious of the importance of collective efforts to guarantee regional stability and security, we reiterate our conviction that the time has come for Iran to accept negotiation on a long-term framework for its nuclear programme as well as on issues related to regional security, including its missiles programme and other means of delivery.

We are committed to continuing our diplomatic efforts to create conditions and facilitate dialogue with all relevant partners interested in de-escalation of tensions in the Middle East, in the interest of preserving international peace and security, building upon our joint declaration on July 14th, 2019 and G7 conclusions adopted in Biarritz. We urge Iran to engage in such a dialogue and refrain from further provocation and escalation.

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1. 24 September 2019 Added translation
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Healthcare for everyone must prioritise women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, says UK at UN General Assembly

The International Development Secretary, Alok Sharma, has announced new funding that will provide millions more women and girls with access to family planning – a sign of the UK's commitment to women and girls' rights around the world.

There are women in the developing world who are unable to exercise their rights over their body because they can't access contraception. Speaking at an event at the United Nations General Assembly, Alok Sharma said the world cannot achieve universal health coverage without prioritising universal sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) access for women and girls.

With this programme and other ongoing DFID-funded family planning programmes, such as WISH, UK aid is collectively going beyond the ambition set out at the 2017 Family Planning Summit of reaching 20 million women a year.

The programme announced today will provide £600 million over 2020-2025 and will buy family planning supplies for millions more women and girls in the world's poorest countries each year. This includes those affected by humanitarian crises, such as Syria, Yemen and Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh – helping to fulfil that unmet need and save the lives of tens of thousands of women. It will also give them access to life-saving medicines in hospitals, which can help prevent death in childbirth.

The new funding represents a significant uplift in the UK's already world-leading support for family planning and will transform access to it.

International Development Secretary Alok Sharma said:

The UK has been at the forefront of global efforts to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights for women and girls living in the world's poorest countries.

Between April 2018 and March 2019 alone, UK aid reached at least 23.5 million women and girls. But there are still millions more who are being denied their rights to decide what is right for them.

This UK aid will help give millions of women and girls control over their bodies, so they can choose if, when and how many children they want. That is a basic right that every woman and girl deserves.

Over the next five years, this new UK aid support (£600 million from 2020-2025) will:

- give over 20 million women and girls access to family planning per year. This is 5 million more women per year than the UK's previous reproductive health supplies programme
- prevent more than 5 million unintended pregnancies per year
- prevent at least 1.5 million potentially-fatal unsafe abortions per year
- save an estimated 9,000 women's lives per year from complications in pregnancy or childbirth.

Notes to editors

This package includes a renewed investment in UNFPA Supplies, which operates in 46 countries, representing those with the highest rates of maternal

mortality and lowest rates of modern contraceptive use.

The UK has been at the forefront of global efforts to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for women and girls living in the world's poorest countries.

- From 2013-2020, the UK invested £356 million in a reproductive health supplies programme, which provided family planning for 15 million couples a year.
- In 2018, the UK announced our flagship comprehensive SRHR programme – Women's Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) – will ensure six million couples can reliably gain access to life-saving voluntary contraception and the full spectrum of sexual and reproductive health care in 24 countries in Africa and 3 countries in Asia, every year of the programme.

Since 2012, millions more women and girls have access to modern contraception, in large part thanks to the work of UK aid. Between April 2018 and March 2019 alone, UK aid reached at least 23.5 million women and girls, preventing millions of unsafe abortions and saving thousands of women's lives.

Every day at least 20,000 adolescent girls become pregnant. There are at least 38 million adolescent girls in developing countries who are sexually active but want to avoid or delay pregnancy, only 15 million of whom are using modern contraception. Providing adolescent girls with access to the contraceptive choices they want would prevent 6 million unintended pregnancies and 1.9 million unsafe abortions, saving 6,000 maternal lives each year.

Family planning is one of the best investments in development. According to the Copenhagen Consensus, family planning is among the most cost-effective interventions – long-term benefits accrue from avoiding unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions, and averting infant and maternal deaths. Every \$1 invested in meeting the unmet need for contraceptives in the long-term can yield up to \$120 in accrued annual benefits.