

Speech: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon's speech at the launch of the 2016 Annual Human Rights Report

Thank you Richard.

Excellencies, Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues, welcome to the launch of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Human Rights Report for 2016. It is a great pleasure to see friends and colleagues who I have worked alongside for many years. It is always a moment of trepidation to see a former boss sitting in the front row. I look forward to working with Sir Eric Pickles on the important issue of tackling anti-Semitism, which remains a clear priority for this Government.

Promoting and protecting human rights and individual freedoms is a priority for this Government, our Prime Minister and for me personally.

I was greatly honoured to be appointed by Prime Minister Theresa May in June as Foreign and Commonwealth Minister with responsibility for Human Rights, as well as the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. I pay tribute to my predecessor Baroness Anelay for her sterling work on these agendas.

Human rights are at the heart of our work here at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, be it at home or abroad. Our Annual Report reviews our progress in promoting and protecting human rights over the last 12 months, and highlights some of our successes. It shows that, thanks to our work with international organisations such as the UN and the Commonwealth, as well as with countries from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, the United Kingdom has been instrumental in bringing about real change.

Today I would like to set out our priorities for the year ahead. But first I want to say a few words about how we approach our human rights work.

Working internationally

Working internationally is absolutely vital. The challenges are immense, as our Annual Report clearly shows. That is why we work closely with our international partners to coordinate our efforts and maximise our impact.

As Minister for the Commonwealth, I am committed to working through that institution and within our diverse family of nations to share best practice, build capacity and make the Commonwealth a relevant and revitalised institution with real world impact. Next April's Summit in London will be a key opportunity to take stock of our achievements and together – all of us – build a vision to take the organisation forward.

As Minister for the United Nations, I will ensure that we continue to use our

membership on the UN Human Rights Council to speak out about human rights violations around the world, and to take the lead on resolutions such as the one condemning human rights violations and abuses in Syria.

We will continue to work with our European partners – and aim to enjoy a deep and special partnership with the European Union once we leave. Our vote to leave the European Union was in no way a rejection of the values we share. Our departure will, as the Prime Minister has said, see us become even more global and internationalist in action and in spirit.

Let me turn now to several priority areas that I will be pursuing in my new role.

Modern Slavery

The first is modern slavery. There are currently thought to be around 46 million victims of this evil trade worldwide. It is an illegal industry – if you can call it such – which generates profits of some \$150 billion per year – bigger than the entire US banking sector.

But there are practical things we can do. In my visit to Ghana last week, I met the young gentleman James Kofi Annan, a former child slave. I was deeply disturbed to hear of the horrors experienced by victims of child exploitation in the fishing industry, and as a father of three, it hits home in a very personal way. James was sold by his own family into slavery as a child fisherman age six. For the seven years that followed, he worked everyday from 8am to 3am. He was tortured and abused, but considers himself to be one of the lucky ones to survive this ordeal. James founded and now runs Challenging Heights, an NGO dedicated to preventing child trafficking, reducing child slavery and promoting children's rights.

Having heard James' harrowing story, I was pleased to have the opportunity to meet with the Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection, to find out more about the steps Ghana is taking to address both the criminal activity and poverty that drives this awful crime. It is a testament to the constructive approach Ghana is taking that James – a former child slave who has suffered such terrible abuse – was able to sit alongside representatives of other NGOs across the table from the Minister and participate in the discussion. We want to see that constructive engagement with civil society in every country, and will continue to be vocal in encouraging it.

More than 200 years ago, fellow Wimbledonian William Wilberforce took a courageous stand to lead Britain in the fight against slavery. Today we require that same level of strength, courage and commitment to root out and bring to justice the present day human traffickers and slave drivers that continue to exploit and abuse some of the most vulnerable in our society.

As you will know, ending modern slavery is an issue also close to our Prime Minister's heart. She championed it as Home Secretary, and oversaw the introduction of the Modern Slavery Act in 2015, a major step forward. Working with international partners, our goal is to end this modern slavery by 2030. We are leading the way and I am proud to serve on the Prime Minister's

Implementation Task Force, as we seek to build an international coalition and cooperation to drive global change on this issue.

I am also pleased to be leading the work of the dedicated Modern Slavery Unit here at the Foreign Office, as part of a cross Whitehall campaign. Our global network has a vital role to play in translating political will into practical action on the ground, much like I saw in Ghana. I was able to brief our heads of mission on our high level of ambition when they returned to London for Leadership Conference earlier this month.

FoRB

The second area, and one that is a personal priority for me, is our work on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). As the Prime Minister said at a 10 Downing Street reception earlier this year, "We must reaffirm our determination to stand up for people of all religions to practice their beliefs in peace and safety". Working in collaboration with faith leaders is key to this effort, and I am delighted His Grace Bishop Angaelos has joined us on today's panel to speak about his work in this area.

The Report describes our diplomatic efforts to safeguard Freedom of Religion or Belief for Rohingya Muslims and Christians in Burma, Ahmadiyya Muslims and Christians in Pakistan, people of the Baha'i faith in Iran, as well as faith groups in other countries, be it China, Russia, Indonesia or Sudan, to name a few.

The report also highlights our groundbreaking conference last year, which explored how inclusive societies could build resilience against violent extremism. Building on that strong foundation, I want to take a fresh look at how the UK can lead internationally on these two mutually enforcing areas of work. I want to ensure that we stand up not just against persecution, but to secure full respect for the human and citizen rights of minority communities around the world.

Women and Girls' Rights

Turning to the rights of women and girls, improving gender equality internationally is high on the Foreign Secretary's agenda, and indeed it is high on mine too. The Foreign Secretary's commitment was demonstrated most recently by his appointment of Joanna Roper as his first Special Envoy for Gender Equality. We want to help bring an end to violence and discrimination and to ensure women and girls everywhere around the world enjoy equal opportunities. I will be working closely with Joanna in the coming months in pursuit of that objective.

The scale of challenge is huge. Our Report shows that 31 million girls of primary school age have never been to school. One in three women around the world suffer violence or sexual abuse in their lifetime. 200 million women have undergone genital mutilation. These statistics are frankly appalling. Women and girls suffer both immediate and long-term effects, and this is to the great detriment of the whole of society.

I was hugely honoured and humbled to be appointed as the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and in this role, will be working hard to promote our campaign to end the stigma associated with sexual violence. After the trauma of sexual violence, survivors face the equal horror of rejection by those they rely on most for support in their rehabilitation. This must change. I will present our new 'Principles for Global Action' at the UN General Assembly, and will call upon the international community to join our campaign.

LGBT

I've already talked about our work to end discrimination and persecution based on faith and gender, but our work on equalities also extends to the important issue of protecting and promoting the rights of LGBT communities. Around the world, 72 countries continue to criminalise consensual same sex relations. Our Report outlines the United Kingdom's efforts to support the legal, cultural and social change required to make LGBT equality a reality the world over. We will continue to stand up for LGBT rights – as the Foreign Secretary did recently in response to the persecution of LGBT people in Chechnya.

FCO Human Rights Programme Funds

Lobbying and advocacy on human rights are the bread and butter of what our diplomats do, but our efforts are also backed up by financial assistance. In 2016 the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy and the new Rules-Based International System Fund were worth over £20 million overall. They supported over 160 projects in more than 80 countries. The Report describes projects in some of our 30 human rights priority countries.

That list of priority countries remains under constant review as we seek to target our human rights efforts most effectively in a changing world, but we continue to believe long term, constructive engagement to offer the best chance of success across the board.

Conclusion

I hope that what I have said today reassures you that the Government stands with you in your efforts, and that the United Kingdom will remain a committed, consistent and passionate advocate for universal human rights. We need to build upon our work and become bolder and stronger, not just in condemning abuse and disregard for human rights, but calling for the principles of absolute justice, as we seek to protect, promote and strengthen the rights of all communities, wherever they may be in the world. Sometimes this will be best achieved by publicly calling out flagrant abuses of human rights; other times firm and clear private messaging will be the most effective method to achieve our aims. On other occasions, it will be a blend of both. But most important and critical to this work is your partnership, your advice, your thoughts, ideas and reactions to the report. I look forward to collaborating with you, as we strive to change the world for the better, for everyone. Thank you.

Further information

[News story: Defence Minister announces helicopter work will stay in the UK](#)

Options had been considered to relocate the fabrication work for future AW159 helicopters orders – the export version of the Wildcat helicopters already in service with the British Army and Royal Navy – overseas.

After careful joint analysis with the Ministry of Defence, Leonardo Helicopters in Yeovil has confirmed that it will carry out all future fabrication for the AW159 helicopter in the UK, with much of this work being undertaken at its Somerset facility – an agreement that will sustain 40 highly skilled jobs across the UK-based supply chain.

Wildcat is a highly versatile aircraft, capable of a wide a range of tasks over land and sea. The Royal Navy's maritime Wildcat forms the core of the UK's Frigate and Destroyer aviation capability and performs tasks including Anti-Surface and Submarine Warfare, force protection, transport and the vital information, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance (ISTAR) role. Similarly, the Army variant performs reconnaissance, command and control, force protection, and transport roles in a wide variety of environments.

Minister for Defence Procurement Harriett Baldwin said:

I am delighted that a solution for UK-based fabrication for the AW159 helicopter has been identified between the MOD and Leonardo Helicopters. An agreement that secures Yeovil as the home of AW159 and Wildcat production and maintenance in the UK.

This work has not only helped sustain 40 of highly skilled jobs within the UK, but will act as a positive boost for the company and, through improved cost-effectiveness, their export customers. I would also like to pay tribute to Marcus Fysh MP, who has worked tirelessly to secure this great result.

Over a decade ago the MOD bought, as part of the 2006 Wildcat (then Future Lynx) demonstration and manufacturing contract, a number of specialised jigs and tooling for the fabrication of the AW159 Wildcat Helicopters. These essential parts are used to ensure airframe alignment, mould, patterns and manufacturing tools and gauges. These will now be used by Leonardo to carry out the fabrication work in the UK.

The MOD's continuing commitment to the Wildcat was also highlighted earlier this year, when a [£271 million five year deal](#) was signed to deliver a range of support and training services for the UK's entire fleet of 62 AW159 Wildcat helicopters, securing 500 jobs at Leonardo's facilities in Yeovil and Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton.

[Press release: Foreign Secretary arrives in Sydney for AUKMIN 2017](#)

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson arrives in Australia to attend the annual meeting of UK and Australian Foreign and Defence Ministers

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson arrives in Australia today (Tuesday 25 July 2017) to attend AUKMIN, the annual meeting of UK and Australian Foreign and Defence Ministers, which will take place on Thursday. The Secretaries of State will discuss regional security and defence, East Asia, the future of Europe, terrorism and promoting our common values.

During the visit he will also:

- Meet with Minister for Foreign Affairs Julie Bishop, to discuss the bilateral relationship, cyber security and the Commonwealth
- Deliver the Lowy Institute's annual Lowy Lecture on Thursday evening, speaking about the UK-Australia relationship, Britain in Asia and Britain in the world
- Take a tour of the Sydney Opera House, and meet with representatives of UK company Laing O'Rourke, who are currently refurbishing the Opera House
- Visit the Tyro Fintech hub, to promote collaboration between the UK and Australian fintech sectors
- Meet with the leaders of top UK investors in Australia, and with major Australian investors in the UK to discuss UK-Australia trade and business opportunities

The Foreign Secretary said:

The bonds of kinship between Britain and Australia are deep and enduring. It is fantastic to be back in Australia, my first time as Foreign Secretary. Our relationship is based on shared history, interests and values, with large numbers of our nationals making each other's countries home.

I look forward to strengthening even further our partnerships on global challenges and opportunities, such as North Korea, the fight against extremism and terror, modern slavery and trade. Talks with businesses and government on boosting trade between us when we leave the EU will also be at the top of agenda. I can't wait to catch up with old friends and to make new ones.

The Foreign Secretary's visit to Australia is the last stop in a three country trip. He held two days of positive talks in Japan last week, before moving on to New Zealand and finally Australia.

Further information

[News story: Chief of the Defence Staff strengthens bonds with India](#)

Under the umbrella of the 2015 Defence and International Security Partnership (DISP), Sir Stuart met senior Indian military figures, including the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC), currently Admiral Sunil Lanba; the Chief of the Army Staff, General Bipin Rawat; and the General Officer Commanding in Chief Eastern Command, Lieutenant General Praveen Bakshi. Sir Stuart also met with the Indian Defence minister, Shri Arun Jaitley, and the National Security Advisor, Shri Ajit Doval.

Sir Stuart's exchanges centred on the continued growing defence relationship through the recently established Capability Partnerships, the joint threats of terrorism and extremism faced globally, upcoming exercises and UN Peacekeeping among other topics.

UK Chief of the Defence Staff Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach said:

My interactions with the civilian and political officials have served to underpin our already strong bonds. Our shared values provide a platform on which, as partners, we can contribute to regional and global security and jointly develop cutting edge capabilities for our armed forces. Whether beating terror, securing peace and stability through better peacekeeping or sharing operational knowledge and technology, as defence partners, we are

world beaters.

The Chief of the Defence Staff visited Delhi and Kolkata over four days. In addition to meetings with senior military and civilian officials, he laid a wreath at India Gate in commemoration of the 74,000 Indians who served and died in the First World War.

Chief of Defence Staff Sir Stuart Peach presents a memento to Admiral Sunil Lanba PVSM AVSM ADC, Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC).
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Sir Stuart also interacted with students at the prestigious National Defence College, India's principal establishment for strategic learning for senior Indian and selected international Defence officers. His trip was completed by a visit to the Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd, the premier Warship building Company in India.

The UK's and India's Armed Forces continue to benefit from a close relationship and Sir Stuart's visit fortifies this. Both countries' Armed Forces are undergoing a transformation in some guise and the learning experiences from each other in areas like the joint aircraft carrier projects, to combatting terrorism, develops best practice between global partners.

[News story: New Director Generals to head HMRC's Customer Services and Customer Compliance Groups](#)

Angela MacDonald, currently Operational Excellence Director in HMRC, will step up to lead the Customer Services Group, which oversees most of HMRC's interaction with individual taxpayers, tax credits recipients, and small and mid-sized businesses online, by phone or face-to-face.

Penny Ciniewicz, currently Chief Executive of the Valuation Office Agency (VOA), will now return to HMRC to lead the Customer Compliance Group, which includes compliance for all customer groups, from large businesses to individuals, as well as HMRC's counter-avoidance and fraud investigation functions.

Melissa Tatton, currently Director for Individuals and Small Business Compliance, HMRC, will step up to take over as Chief Executive for the VOA.

Approved by the Prime Minister, these appointments follow an extensive competition across the Civil Service and public and private sectors.

Chief Executive, Jon Thompson, said:

I'd like to congratulate Melissa, Penny and Angela on their appointments, and am delighted to welcome them to HMRC's Executive Committee. They bring a wealth of capability, leadership and experience with them, and will have vital roles to play in helping build our future and achieve our vision of becoming a world-class organisation.

Melissa Tatton said:

I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to lead the Valuation Office Agency, given its strong delivery track record, as it continues to transform, and to be joining HMRC's Executive Committee.

Penny Ciniewicz said:

It's a privilege to be returning to HMRC after nearly eight years as Chief Executive for the VOA. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to build on the work of Jennie Granger in ensuring we reduce the tax gap and promote compliance, ensuring we bring in the money that pays for the UK's public services.

Angela MacDonald said:

As Operational Excellence Director, I see firsthand the commitment and passion among our people for delivering high-quality customer service. This is a fantastic opportunity and it is a privilege to follow in Ruth Owen's footsteps, investing in and building the best service we can for all our customers, now and in the future.

Angela will take up the DG Customer Services Group appointment on 7 August. Penny and Melissa will take up the DG Customer Compliance Group and Chief Executive, VOA, appointments on 4 September, respectively.

1. Penny Ciniewicz was appointed Chief Executive, Valuation Office Agency in September 2009, having joined HMRC in 2006. Her previous posts include:
 - Director of Knowledge, Analysis and Intelligence, HMRC (2007-2009)
 - Principal Private Secretary to the Cabinet Secretary, Cabinet Office (2004-2006)
 - Director Aerospace and Defence, Department for Trade and Industry (2002-2004)
2. Angela MacDonald was appointed Director for Operational Excellence, HMRC in January 2017. Her previous posts include:
 - Operational Excellence Director, Department for Work and Pensions

(2013-17)

- Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission (2009-13)
- Before joining the Civil Service, Angela worked in the Financial Services Industry, gaining experience across a broad range of roles.

3. Melissa joined the Inland Revenue as a graduate tax inspector and has forged a successful career as a tax leader across a wide range of roles. Melissa was appointed to her current post as Director for Individuals and Small Business Compliance in 2014. Before that she held the following posts:

- Director, Large Business Service (LBS), HMRC (2011-14)
- Deputy Director, Business International, HMRC (2009-11)
- Melissa was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in June 2016.