

## UK Head of Mission ends two-day visit to South Lebanon

Dr. Longden met the Mayor of Saida Mohamad Saoudi and visited two UK- funded community projects benefiting the residents of the city and their livelihoods. Longden saw how the rehabilitation of Saida's Fish Market supported local fishermen, joined by Ziad Hakawati, municipality focal point on the fish market project. He also saw how the installation of 160 solar-powered streetlights across the city's 7km coastline helped boost tourism and livelihoods. Since 2014, the UK has provided over \$105 million support to its Lebanon Host Communities Support Programme, reaching over 220 municipalities in collaboration with UNDP and the Ministry of Social Affairs.

At a roundtable discussion with Palestinian men and women from the Saida's refugee camps and neighbourhoods, participants presented their initiatives for increasing recycling projects, championing women's empowerment, and supporting the Palestinian communities through Civil Defence representation. Thanks to the UK's Conflict Security and Stability Fund (CSSF), the project has benefited the resilience of tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees and facilitated social integration despite the immense challenges.

In Tyre, Dr. Longden visited the Imam Sadr Foundation with its Director General Nijad Charafeddine and saw a project focusing on vocational training for 18-25 year olds. He visited the Papyrus project previously funded by the UK embassy, which employs vulnerable Lebanese, and refugee women to collect, recycle and convert waste paper into eco-friendly handicraft, and saw the handwoven carpets made by women and vulnerable refugees.

Paying tribute to Becky Dykes's life and the values she upheld, an olive tree was planted in her memory in Qana by UN Women. The tree planting was part of a ceremony to mark the end of a Rebecca Dyke's foundation and UN Women project training women community mediators in conflict prevention. Dr. Longden thanked the women for their touching tribute to an excellent colleague and humanitarian.

The visit to South Lebanon was an opportunity to highlight the impact of climate change on our daily lives and the importance of protecting fragile ecosystems. The British delegation benefited from a guided tour at Tyre Coast Nature Reserve by Dr. Nahed Msayleb head of the Tyre Natural Reserve NGO, and heard about its unique biodiversity providing a safe haven for fauna and flora to flourish.

On day two of his visit, Dr. Longden met in Bint Jbeil's Social Development Centre (SDC) women and girls from various backgrounds who found a safe space to learn and gain skills, benefit from psychosocial support, and integrated Gender Based Violence-Youth programme activities. The safe space in the SDC is part of the UK's No Lost Generation Initiative and provides services to over 1100 beneficiaries every year. It is one of 12 safe spaces set up in SDCs in Lebanon run by the Ministry of Social Affairs in collaboration with

UNICEF Lebanon and local NGOs. With the No Lost Generation Initiative (£92m – 2016-2022) the UK has reached more than 134,000 boys and girls with child protection, Gender-Based Violence services and psychosocial support services to prevent and respond to violence.

At Kfarhatta's Secondary Public School, part of the British Council's Connecting Classrooms Programme, Dr. Longden saw four interactive projects by 48 students and their teachers focusing on Mental health and wellbeing, Media literacy, Climate change, Build back greener and Embrace diversity. The connecting classrooms Programme engages over 100 schools in Lebanon reaching over one hundred thousand boys and girls of all ages.

Dr. Longden also met with MP Bahia Hariri, and visited Beaufort castle.

At the end of his visit, Dr. Martin Longden said from Bint Jbeil:

It has been great to escape the Beirut bubble and come down and meet with people and communities here. And my programme has been really varied, busy which reflects the very special agenda that underpins the UK-Lebanon relationship.

I am really proud to see the transformational impact of British aid programmes here in Southern Lebanon. So from education programmes and protection for women and girls here in Bint Jbeil to support for Lebanese livelihoods in Saida and help to refugees in Tyre. These programmes are making a real difference.

These are truly difficult times for Lebanon. And although the UK will always do what it can to stand by the people of this country, we cannot make the difference without a serious and a credible Lebanese government, that can be a partner to take the reforms necessary to really turn the situation around. How long must the people suffer before Lebanon's politicians come together and take collective action to deal with this crisis?

But on a positive note, I see here in Southern Lebanon as elsewhere in the country people with a real passion and talent and commitment to really make a positive difference to people's lives. And to me these are the true leaders of Lebanon the ones who are getting on and doing what they can to make this country a better place and the UK is really proud to stand with you and support you in this. Thank you.