

UK to step up help to combat Caribbean crimewave

- UK Government will increase support to ensure the safety of people in the Turks & Caicos Islands
- The British Overseas Territory has seen a major surge in gang violence, with 15 fatal shootings since 3 September
- UK has sent a ship and agreed a deployment of 24 firearms officers from the neighbouring Bahamas

The UK Government is sending a Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship to the Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI) – and has agreed a deployment of specialist police from neighbouring Caribbean islands – to ensure the safety and security of people, amid a surge in gang violence.

TCI is a British Overseas Territory with a population of less than 50,000. The UK is responsible for the safety and security of people there.

A detachment of 24 highly-trained specialist firearms officers from The Bahamas arrived on Friday and are now on active duty on the islands. Discussions are underway with other neighbouring states on additional support. In parallel, the UK is providing a package of longer-term support to build local capacity on areas including intelligence gathering, firearms training and border control.

The Royal Navy has deployed RFA Tideforce, which is on the way to the islands. The ship is a Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker and will be used as a platform for operations, bringing with it a Wildcat helicopter, which offers a surveillance capability and can support security operations.

Alongside this, a package of maritime surveillance support has been agreed from the US, over October, to include a fixed-wing aircraft and a Blackhawk helicopter.

Foreign Secretary James Cleverly said:

The UK has a moral and constitutional responsibility to support and protect the people of the Overseas Territories, who are a valued part of the UK family. We had to act following the terrible violence we've seen in the Turks & Caicos Islands these past few weeks.

I'm grateful to the brave men and women of the local police force, as well as those from the Bahamas who are providing invaluable immediate support. The Governor and Premier are also working tirelessly to protect communities. Together, we will ensure that violent crime is stamped out in the TCI in the long term.

This help forms part of a wider package of support from the UK Government to tackle violent crime on TCI, which includes:

- The UK Government is also working to recruit and fund a new serious crime team who will sit at the heart of the TCI police force, building a permanent capability to tackle gang crime;
- UK police are engaging with local TCI counterparts to finalise a contingency plan for additional specialist support to deploy, if needed;
- This is in addition to a series of deployments of UK police to provide longer-term support for operations and to build capacity in the TCI to tackle gang crime. These include firearms trainers, detectives and border force agents;
- The UK is procuring a permanent maritime surveillance aircraft to help secure TCI's borders;
- The National Crime Agency is deploying staff to the TCI, working closely with local police intelligence teams, to support the development of additional intelligence capability within TCI, including advice on lawful intercept legislation;
- Ongoing support through the Conflict, Security and Stability Fund has included a secondment of a Border Security lead, a programme of training and capability building to the TCI police, as well as support for a project of customs and border transformation.

TCI has seen a surge in violent crime in the past few months, which is believed to be linked to the arrival of organised criminal gangs from elsewhere in the Caribbean.

The security situation has rapidly deteriorated in TCI over the past weeks, with 11 fatal shootings in September and a further four in October.