

British Embassy Ashgabat works with UN to promote human rights in Turkmenistan

World news story

The British Embassy in Ashgabat has forged a new partnership with UN Population Fund (UNFPA) to promote human rights issues in Turkmenistan.



British Embassy Ashgabat and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Turkmenistan have started a new partnership to promote the importance of human rights, dignity, and diversity with the police and young people in the country.

This collaboration was signed by Peter Dalby, Acting Deputy Head of Mission, British Embassy and Ayna Seyitliyeva, Head of UNFPA Turkmenistan on 13 September 2021 at the UN building.

Supported by the United Kingdom, this project complements UNFPA gender-transformative programmes and focuses on improving understanding among local police inspectors and trainees on issues of gender equality, human rights and inclusiveness.

This will be the start of a process to change police attitudes towards women, girls and other diverse communities and vulnerable population groups.

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Supporting the re-integration of modern slavery and human trafficking victims: call for bids

Deadline for submitting project bids is 27 September 2021

This project is part of a wider British Embassy portfolio of projects which seeks to support the Romanian government and civil society in reducing the drivers of serious and organised crime (SOC) and the ability of organised crime groups to exploit vulnerabilities and re-traffic MSHT victims.

Addressing human trafficking and SOC requires international cooperation, as the nature of these crimes is transnational and criminal networks frequently operate across borders. This is a priority policy area for the British government and the British Embassy Bucharest, as Romania is a source, transit and destination country for MSHT. In 2020 only, the British referral mechanism registered 368 Romanian victims of trafficking. Proposals should focus on delivery in Romania but with the potential to link to activities and strategies in neighbouring countries.

Although the Romanian authorities are currently developing strategies to support the reintegration of MSHT victims at the moment there this is an area which depends heavily on NGOs and shelters, to offer the necessary support to victims. These organisations have been badly affected by the pandemic.

In the absence of clear strategies and with largely underfunded NGOs, MSHT victims returning to Romania do not have a consistent support system to rely on upon their return. There is also a high level of societal stigma for MSHT victims, especially for victims of sexual exploitation, which makes the re-integration process a long and difficult one. All of these factors create real obstacles in the victims' attempts at reintegration and building an independent life, leaving them vulnerable to re-trafficking.

Objective

The main objective for this project is to work with the government, civil society and other stakeholders to support the drafting and implementation of re-integration strategies and mechanisms that facilitate an independent life and prevent re-trafficking of MSHT victims.

Scope of work

The project should have a national reach, while also paying special attention to vulnerable communities, which have been identified as hotspots for trafficking.

Activities

Activities financed under this project could include:

- policy development workshops with the government on reintegration strategies
- developing and providing resources to support development or implementation of re-integration strategies, where appropriate
- providing support for reintegration centres/shelters to contribute to the development and later implementation of the strategy
- training social workers and other community leaders on supporting re-integration
- support for those with lived experience of MSHT to engage with policy makers on the development of the strategy and its implementation plan
- encouraging partnerships with the private sector to develop support and opportunities for victims to be financially independent
- supporting development (working with government or other organisations) of communications campaigns or strategies to help reduce stigma for victims

This is not an exhaustive list and the British Embassy welcomes innovative proposals from potential implementing partners which suggest additional or alternative activities to deliver the key objectives.

Project approach

Bidders are asked to submit a project proposal which will be approved by the British Embassy Bucharest and will form the basis for project planning. The proposal should set out how the implementing partner will deliver activities to support the objectives set out above with an implementation plan and supporting budget. The British Embassy Bucharest will oversee the project planning and provide the necessary contacts to the implementers.

The project implementer will manage project logistics, including travel plans, lodging, car hiring etc. and is expected to consider the pandemic context and its possible impact on the project implementation when submitting the bid.

The embassy will provide contact persons and focal points for UK institutions or experts that might be needed in the process.

How to bid

Our process will consist of a one-stage full bid proposal.

Bids should be completed in English using the [Project Proposal Bid Form For Implementers](#) (ODT, 48.3KB) an [Activity based budget template](#) (ODS, 10.4KB) should be submitted alongside it.

Activity based budgets should list the activities needed to deliver the outcomes (results) of the project and all costs should be in Romanian Lei

(RON).

Deadline for submitting project bids is 27 September 2021.

Email completed forms to rsvp.bucharest@fcdo.gov.uk and andrada.petrache@fcdo.gov.uk.

Please specify in the subject of the email: Name of implementing organisation and title of the project

Reporting

The reports to be produced during the course of this project are to be delivered in English:

- an inception note detailing approach and proposed activities. This should also set out key stakeholders who will be engaged, a proposed schedule of activities, risks, safeguarding approach and any additional details
- a draft report
- three-monthly financial reports
- the final report, following a facilitated process of commenting

Composition of the project teams:

A Project Director, from the part of British Embassy Bucharest (Tanya Collingridge, Deputy Head of Mission) and a Project Manager, from the embassy will oversee the project delivery.

Project proposals should demonstrate that the implementing partner's staffing levels are appropriate to delivery the project and that the staff have relevant expertise and experience in MSHT victim support, as well as detailed knowledge of the MSHT situation in Romania.

Timing and scope of input

The bidding round is an open and competitive process, assessed by the British Embassy in Bucharest. Results will be issued by early October. When a bid is approved, a Grant Contract will be signed with the successful bidders. In the documents section you will find an example of a Grant Contract. Your organisation will be expected to sign the contract within one week of the funds being awarded. Failure to do so will result in the funds being re-allocated. The implementing organisation will be required to submit report updates and a final evaluation of the project.

There are no pre-payments. Reimbursements will be completed once activities have taken place and all receipts submitted. Implementing organisations will request repayments using an invoice (including receipts and a financial report of spend) and the repayments will be carried out during those dates agreed upon in the respective contract. The budget should be presented in Romanian Lei. All payments will be made in RON to a bank account held in

Romania.

Email any questions regarding the call for bids to rsvp.bucharest@fcdo.gov.uk and andrada.petrache@fcdo.gov.uk.

It is expected that the project will be carried out from October 2021 to February 2022. However, this project has the potential to be financed again in Financial year 2022 to 2023 subject to results and availability of funding.

The crucial milestones will be the submission of the draft report (February 2022) and the final report (March 2022).

Budget

Project proposals must include an estimated budget of up to RON 242,500. Depending on the quality of the proposals, the British Embassy reserves the right not to grant all or part of the available funds. The embassy also reserves the right to award a grant of less than the amount requested by the applicants. In such a case, applicants will be asked to increase the amount that they co-finance, to propose other co-financing means or to decrease the total costs without altering the substance of the proposal.

JCVI issues updated advice on COVID-19 booster vaccination

The vast majority of the UK population has received a COVID-19 vaccine since the vaccine programme was launched in December 2020 – including 89.1% of the population who have received a first dose and 81% who have received both doses.

It is expected that coronavirus (COVID-19) infections will continue to circulate in the coming months, alongside seasonal influenza and other respiratory viruses.

The COVID-19 vaccines provide high levels of protection against hospitalisation or dying from the virus. To maintain this high level of protection through the coming winter, the JCVI is advising that booster vaccines be offered to those more at risk from serious disease, and who were vaccinated during Phase 1 of the vaccine programme (priority groups 1 to 9).

This includes:

- those living in residential care homes for older adults
- all adults aged 50 years or over
- frontline health and social care workers

- all those aged 16 to 49 years with underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of severe COVID-19, and adult carers
- adult household contacts of immunosuppressed individuals

The JCVI advises that the booster vaccine dose is offered no earlier than 6 months after completion of the primary vaccine course, in the same order as during Phase 1.

People vaccinated early during Phase 1 will have received their second dose approximately 6 months ago. Therefore, it would be appropriate for the booster vaccine programme to begin in September 2021, as soon as operationally practical.

Early data in older individuals from Public Health England (PHE) suggests that the protection provided by vaccines against severe COVID-19 decreases gradually over time.

Insufficient time has passed to know what levels of protection might be expected 6 to 12 months after the primary course. Taking a precautionary position, the JCVI considers that on balance it is preferable to maintain a high level of protection in vulnerable adults throughout winter.

The JCVI advises a preference for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for the booster programme, regardless of which vaccine brand someone received for their primary doses. This follows data from the COV-BOOST trial that indicates the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is well tolerated as a third dose and provides a strong booster response.

Alternatively, a half dose of the Moderna vaccine may be offered. Where mRNA vaccines cannot be offered, for example due to allergies, the AstraZeneca vaccine may be considered for those who received it previously.

Professor Wei Shen Lim, Chair of COVID-19 Immunisation for the JCVI, said:

The UK's COVID-19 vaccination programme has been hugely successful in protecting people against hospitalisation and death, and the main aim of the booster programme is to prolong that protection and reduce serious disease as we head towards the colder months.

The JCVI is advising that a booster dose be offered to the more vulnerable, to maximise individual protection ahead of an unpredictable winter. Most of these people will also be eligible for the annual flu vaccine and we strongly advise them to take up this offer as well.

The ComFluCOV trial indicates that co-administration of the influenza and COVID-19 vaccines is generally well tolerated with no reduction in immune response to either vaccine. Therefore, the two vaccines may be co-administered where operationally practical.

As most younger adults will only have received their second COVID-19 vaccine

dose by late summer or early autumn, the benefits of booster vaccination in this group will be considered at a later time.

This advice is separate from, and does not supersede, [recent JCVI advice](#) on a third primary dose for the severely immunosuppressed. The JCVI will review whether this group requires a further booster at a later date, following completion of their 3-dose primary course.

The JCVI will continue to review emerging scientific data, including data relating to the duration of immunity for those less vulnerable to severe outcomes from COVID-19.

[UK Strategic Commander DSEI 2021](#) [Speech](#)

Good morning. It's great to be back doing events live and in person and I want to join you all in expressing my thanks to Clarion, the organisers and Fujitsu, our sponsors here, for putting on such an outstanding conference, so far. It is very good to see so many faces in the audience.

When I last spoke here, in 2019, it was shortly before we launched Strategic Command. It's been quite a journey, standing up the Command to drive the Integration and S&T agenda for Defence, but I think the fact that Multi-Domain Integration is the theme of DSEI this year shows that the imperative is well-recognised and our advocacy has been gaining some traction. Why should we care about Multi-domain integration?

One word: Threat.

The threat isn't diminishing. In fact, the security outlook is more perilous than it was 2 years ago: we are now facing the twin spectre of emboldened Jihadi terrorists and something not seen since the 1930s – a growing authoritarian zeitgeist that celebrates the suppression of political and individual freedom as a better way to govern. This ideology is intersecting with geopolitics and driving great power competition as these autocratic regimes subvert and challenge the international order and adopt bold risk-taking strategies.

The risks are clear: it is a recurring pattern of great power behaviour that interests expand with power, that the appetite grows with the eating, and that risk-taking accelerates the potential for escalation and miscalculation unless this behaviour is challenged and contained. Without that we will find ourselves in a world where the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must. Or put another way to use my favourite cautionary tale from Hilaire Belloc: Pale Ebenezer thought it wrong to fight. Roaring Bill, who killed him, thought it right.

What links these authoritarian regimes (let's name them, Russia and China) is two things.

First an approach that seeks to win without fighting. What George Kennan described memorably as political warfare. General Gerasimov put it like this "The very rules of warfare have changed. The role of Non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown and in many cases they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness". Welcome to the so-called Grey Zone.

And secondly the expansion of warfare into the novel domains of space and cyber, coupled with an approach to modernisation that pursues the exploitation of disruptive information age technologies and allies these to winning operational concepts that seek to have the same impact as Blitzkrieg did. It is nothing less than a race for advantage in the defining technologies of the future.

Under its 'Made in China 2025' strategy, China has explicitly declared the ambition to dominate these technology frontiers. It includes artificial intelligence, advanced computing, quantum technologies, robotics, autonomous systems, commercial space technologies, additive manufacturing and the Internet of Things, along with new generations (5G and beyond) of the mobile telecommunications that will connect it.

And so the PLA has concluded that the Centre of Gravity in military operations has shifted from the concentration of forces to information systems. They look to dominate a system of systems confrontation, creating new operating concepts: cross domain, autonomous swarms and precision attack to achieve persistent paralysis.

So how can we respond to these threats?

Well we shouldn't take counsel of all our fears. Great power conflict is not inevitable. Coercion doesn't have to lead to a binary outcome between capitulation or conflict. Competitive coexistence is possible. But we can't be passive: the preservation of peace requires active effort, planning, the expenditure of resources and sacrifices to underscore our credibility and will to secure our national interests, just as war does.

And we should recognise the advantages we have. Most notably for Defence, in the last 12 months we have been given the means to modernise with a historic funding settlement, the mandate to radically adapt our acquisition model in DSIS and in the Integrated Operating Concept the source code for how we will operate and fight as an integrated whole across domains.

We can respond to these threats at a national level by being more strategic, more assertive, by modernising and by being more integrated across domains, nationally, with partners across government, industry, academia and civil society, and of course internationally, with allies and partners.

But I want to be more specific. Because the reason we are all here at DSEI is to solve operational problems together and create national strategic

advantage by harnessing the latent talent and ingenuity that exists in industry, and allying it to those who will have to adapt and overcome these threats in future – for those in uniform. So I want to spend the rest of my time here bringing MDI to life in a way you can relate to so you can help us solve some of these challenges, then describing the technological advances I need us to work on together, pose some questions about how we can grow the skills in our workforce to tackle these problems and then suggest how we might develop an integrated relationship with you as our industrial partners.

So what does MDI look like when it's operationalised? And it's important that we develop specific operational concepts to solve problems either against a particular adversary, a bit of geography or a particular problem

We need to become much more adept at operating with agility across this grey zone. Fundamentally, we have to make sense of, exploit and manipulate data. Our challenge is twofold – the data landscape is so complex and handling the sheer volume of information (and intelligence) that could be available to us. Using software to exploit freely available information is important – which is where many of our conversations are with industry – but it is much more challenging than that. Let me try to explain why.

If you work left to right, if you will, across this spectrum between competition, confrontation and conflict. We want to be more proactive on social media, exploiting it to deliver consistent, pervasive and also targeted messages. We also need to 'operate' through social media platforms with much greater agility, countering adversarial campaigns through a range of fora, including using third parties if necessary.

Taken a step further, we may wish to generate social reaction 'on the ground'. To do all of this, we need a deeper understanding of our audiences. This will take time to build, we need well trained people, including locals, and the right tools. In short, we must become more adept, and comfortable, with acting across and dominating the cognitive domain.

Let's step up the pressure. We need to be prepared to conduct 'precision soft strike'. Sometimes this will be avowed, to deter, sometimes not. We may wish to target adversarial media campaigns, as we have in the past, or disrupt, even neutralise, military systems, such as a supply chain. These activities take potentially years to plan, so we need to think ahead, ensuring that they are nested within enduring campaigns, its to taking a strategic view

Let's go one further. We will be prepared to prosecute hard strike, at extreme range, to destroy carefully selected targets. Designing, maintaining and constantly developing a pervasive ISR architecture, across all five domains, at multiple classification levels, has to be central to this. Communicating across it, protecting it, understanding and exploiting the bulk data inherent within it, measuring the impact of strikes and then going again – all of this requires us to move well beyond a fragmented, stove-piped and poorly governed environment to a single, interactive and responsive one.

We need to create synthetic environments where we can practice. To wargame, experiment, to plug and play. We need to work out what a flatter, more

dispersed, more resilient command and control architecture looks like. Fundamentally, we must develop MDI operational art. We must exploit current operations in order to do so, and ensure lessons are fed into an interactive learning domain. We must integrate this with our longer-term conceptual development through the creation of digital twins and synthetic environments.

Bringing all this together, deliberately, and keeping it up to date, and operational, lies at the heart of our approach to MDI. It's much more than buying a software service.

What technological edge are we seeking?

Fundamentally, the source of battlefield advantage will not come from platforms. If we focus, as some commentary invariably does, on the number of grey hulls the Navy has, the number of Fighter Squadrons in the RAF and the strength of the regular Army, we will simply perpetuate a traditional, industrial age force that is costly, exquisite and vulnerable to being defeated in detail.

The true source of battlefield advantage will come from our ability to sense, understand and orchestrate across domains at a tempo faster than the enemy. To create and close kill chains, as Christian Brose put it, and this means a digital force – software defined, hardware enabled. A force that harnesses pervasive sensors, resilient networks, cloud and edge computing. One that applies Machine Learning and AI to exploit data, support decision-making and enable expendable autonomous systems and swarming. It will be more about drones and missiles, than manned platforms.

The IR investments lay the foundations of this force, specifically the Digital Backbone, which Defence Digital are building with its focus on people, process and technology to build ubiquitous and resilient networks, curate, harness and exploit our data, expedite cloud computing at multiple layers of classification and pursue agile software development through the Digital Foundry. We need your help with this. In all humility. But we urgently need to go further and faster together. In three areas in particular.

First in the development of synthetic environments for the reasons I covered earlier.

Secondly in pursuing the combination of pervasive sensors and edge computing that will enable us to create a Military internet of things and realise the potential offered by autonomous systems and intelligent machines. And that in turn will allow us to field a larger, more capable and more affordable force. Here we aren't harnessing the pace of development in the commercial sector.

The text-book sized processor on an autonomous car has 800 times more processing power than the most advanced processor on any military platform – and that is the one on the F35, nicknamed the flying super computer. The same car has more sensors than any military platform, just as many of your homes have more sensors than any military base. We can change this paradigm.

And third, in the development of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. We don't have the time here to do justice to the potential of this technology – you could devote the entirety of DSEI to it, we probably will one day, and still only scratch the surface. Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Alphabet, said recently of AI: "We are in the early stages, but I view AI as the most profound technology that mankind will ever develop and work on...even more important than fire, electricity or the internet".

The military use cases for AI – narrow AI at this stage – are pervasive: autonomous systems, swarming, cyber defence, decision support, intelligence processing to name only 5. But two things are clear. First, threat: Our adversaries will gain a decisive advantage if we do not compete in a more concerted and urgent way in this technology. And secondly, opportunity: Investment in military AI – will be symbiotic with the growth of AI in other sectors and will be at the heart of fuelling the UK as a S&T superpower.

I want to turn to the issue of skills, because we need to be clear-eyed about what is needed. Our current workforce is brave, talented, inventive, resourceful and resilient. But it isn't yet imbued with the culture to pursue Multi-Domain Integration, nor does it have the diversity and skills needed to be competitive in the digital age. Culturally we are still largely and recognisably a tri-service organisation, and that's where many of our strengths lay. We don't provide joint education until around the 15-20-year point in someone's career, yet MDI expertise will be needed at every level including the most junior. We value Royal Marines for being amphibians: comfortable in two environments. Some of us become tri-phants – truly joint across all three physical environments.

But we need to evolve penta-phants, with the ability to operate seamlessly across all 5 domains. We're going to need to think radically about the career model, training and education that accelerates the pace of this evolution because if we don't adapt, we will become at best become exquisite but irrelevant, and at worst we will die. In a similar vein, to achieve the vision of S&T advantage painted in the IR we are going to need access to fundamentally different skills and talent and to place equal value and afford equal status to computer scientists, data engineers and cyber operators as we do on the traditional warrior elite. I have more need of Q, than I do 007 or M.

So we will have to address the skills gap through attracting far more diverse talent, by inward investment, because we've not got enough STEM graduates so that coding and data literacy are seen as being as much a core skill as weapon handling, by much greater use of a larger and more diverse reserve, and by enabling a much more porous and flexible flow of talent between Defence, Industry and Academia.

Relationship with Industry

Bringing this to a close, I want to offer some thoughts about our relationship with you, our industrial partners here at DSEI, but I hope my voice may also reach the start-ups and small and medium sized enterprises for whom this is not a natural stamping ground.

The predominant image of the defence sector's impact on the economy is of aircraft carriers and jet fighters. As important as these industries are, in a world in which capabilities are moving to the cloud and software and data can be as 'real' as any physical assets for a modern military, this image is dated.

And it's worth reminding ourselves that the Digital sector is growing 2.6 times faster than the wider economy and that the market for military AI is projected to grow from £3.8Bn in 2016 to £6.6Bn next year. The benefits of this are much wider than Defence – it will drive a wave of upskilling across the economy.

Rob Magowan, my deputy, is part of a panel that follows this presentation. He will explain in more detail how we need to exploit DSIS in our development of MDI. He will set out those areas where we need to be most closely integrated with industry and suggest some collaborative models that will enable us to work on problems together.

No doubt, UK Defence needs to become much more agile and forward leaning in this space; and, if I may, industry needs to take some risks too, in order to protect and promote SMEs, and by companies working alongside each other for the common good, where necessary.

Thank you for your time today. Acting together, we can mobilise our armed forces to pursue the political vision of a bold, confident and active European power with a global perspective. Armed forces that campaign dynamically, adapt to threats and seize opportunities to strengthen alliances, partnerships and secure national advantage.

Working together we will ensure Defence is more closely integrated and modernised to deliver the IR and gaining advantage in science technology data and AI. And we can upskill our Armed Forces for the digital age.

[£72.5m investment for laser and radio frequency weapons](#)

The MOD has awarded three contracts worth around £72.5 million to UK industry to produce advanced laser and radio frequency demonstrators as part of the Novel Weapons Programme (NWP).

Known collectively as Directed Energy Weapons (DEW), these next-generation technologies could revolutionise the battlefield and reduce the risk of collateral damage. The systems are powered by electricity and operate without ammunition, significantly reducing operating costs, increasing platform endurance and providing unprecedented offensive and defensive flexibility to personnel on the frontline.

Awarded to consortia headed by Thales and Raytheon UK, the four-year contracts will create at least 49 new jobs and sustain 249 jobs.

The first laser will undergo user testing onboard a Royal Navy Type 23 frigate by detecting, tracking, engaging and countering Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), whilst the British Army's Wolfhound armoured vehicle will host a laser demonstrator that will investigate capability against UAV and other air threats. The radio frequency demonstrator will also be used by the British Army, hosted on a MAN SV truck to detect and track a variety of air, land and sea targets. This will create around 30 new jobs at Thales in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Minister for Defence Procurement, Jeremy Quin, said:

"We are investing £6.6 billion in research and development across Defence over the next four years, reaffirming our commitment to provide the Armed Forces with truly advanced capabilities.

"Directed Energy Weapons are a key element of our future equipment programmes and we intend to become a world-leader in the research, manufacture and implementation of this next-generation technology."

Marking a significant step towards the use of high-powered laser and radio frequency weapons across Defence, the investment reaffirms commitments outlined in the Defence Command Paper ensuring UK Armed Forces are equipped with the best possible equipment ready to deal with new and emerging threats.

Further supported by an increase of £24 billion of Defence spending over the next four years and an additional £6.6 billion of funding for research and development, this a prime example of how the MOD is using research partnerships with industry to invest in the technology of tomorrow.

These innovative capabilities will be integrated onto existing platforms for the Royal Navy and British Army and will undergo user experimentation from 2023 to 2025. The experimentation will focus on operation and maintenance of these new systems and will provide invaluable knowledge, information and experience to assess whether DEW can be fully embedded on other Defence assets in the future.

MOD Director Strategic Programmes, Shimon Fhima said:

"These technologies have the potential to revolutionise the future battlefield for our Armed Forces, enabling the prosecution of new targets in the land, sea and air domains and allowing commanders to meet mission objectives in new ways.

"We must exploit at pace the cutting-edge technologies developed by the talented scientists and engineers across the UK to capitalise on its benefit."

The newly formed Team Hersa brings together the best acquisition skills from Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) and the best in technical expertise from

the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl).

Team Hersa will manage delivery of the demonstrators and is responsible for preparing Defence for the introduction of innovative weapons systems, ensuring the UK Armed Forces can successfully integrate the weapons on current aircraft, ships and vehicles.

The new contracts will exploit decades of MOD experience developing cutting-edge laser and radio frequency weapons technology and globally recognised strengths in performance testing and evaluation of these systems.