

Foreign Secretary sets out UK's unique offer to East African nations on visit to region

On a three-country tour of East Africa, one year on from the UK's Africa Investment Summit, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab met with political leaders, NGO's and civil society in Kenya, Sudan and Ethiopia for important talks on tackling shared challenges including COVID-19, security and climate change.

Starting in Kenya on Wednesday (20 January) the Foreign Secretary and President Uhuru Kenyatta met to discuss further opportunities to boost the UK-Kenya trade partnership – worth £1.4 billion annually – following the signing of one of the UK's first trade agreements in Africa in December.

The Foreign Secretary had meetings with senior politicians including Foreign Minister Raychelle Omamo and announced £48 million of new UK climate initiatives for Kenya as we build momentum ahead of COP26 in Glasgow in November.

On a visit to KEMRI Laboratory in Nairobi the Foreign Secretary heard how Kenyan and British scientists have been working together to develop the Oxford Astra-Zeneca vaccine. Here he signed a new health partnership with Health Minister Mutahi Kagwe, to help maximise knowledge sharing between medical professionals in both the UK and Kenya.

Alongside Defence Cabinet Secretary Monica Juma, the Foreign Secretary met soldiers at the UK-backed Counter-IED centre at the Humanitarian Peace Support School in Embakasi, and heard how joint Kenya-UK efforts are countering terrorism.

On Thursday (21 January) Mr Raab travelled to Sudan – the first visit to the country by a British Foreign Secretary in over a decade. He met Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and Foreign Minister Omer Ghereidien as well as the Chair of the Sovereign Council, Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan to express the UK's commitment to Sudan's democratic transition and confirm the contribution of £40 million of UK funding to the Sudan Family Support Programme – helping Sudanese communities while critical economic reforms are implemented.

The Foreign Secretary also highlighted that, as part of a coordinated international package, the UK stands ready to provide a £330m bridging loan to clear arrears to the African Development Bank if Sudan stays on track with its economic reforms agreed with the IMF, and the Boards of the IMF and World Bank approve similar arrears clearance packages.

Meeting some of the women and young people who played a pivotal role in the revolution, the Foreign Secretary heard how their actions in the protests helped bring about life-changing democratic reforms. In talks with key legal

figures working to deliver transitional justice, the Foreign Secretary discussed the incredibly important work they are doing to secure justice for victims of abuses committed during the revolution and under the Omar al-Bashir regime.

At World Food Programme (WFP) sites in Sudan and Ethiopia, the Foreign Secretary saw first-hand the vital role that UK aid is playing in helping those most in need of humanitarian assistance. In Sudan he visited a WFP nutrition centre, where UK funding is providing life-saving food assistance to vulnerable communities, and spoke to families benefiting from this support.

In Gondar, Ethiopia, the Foreign Secretary visited a World Food Programme warehouse, central to distributing humanitarian aid such as food and sanitation supplies to those displaced by the crisis in Tigray. The UK is providing £11.4 million of humanitarian support – with money for healthcare and clean water, as well as shelter, nutrition kits and protection for children. This is in addition to a £94 million package to support Ethiopia's response to the triple threats of COVID-19, climate change and locusts, which are having a devastating impact on the country.

Arriving back in Addis Ababa the Foreign Secretary visited a school with President Sahle-Work Zewde to see how the UK is supporting girl's education and spoke to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali about humanitarian access and a solution to the Tigray crisis, as well as climate change and prosperity. Mr Raab also signed a climate partnership agreement with Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen Hassen for collaboration between the UK and Ethiopia ahead of COP26.

Speaking at the end of his visit, Mr Raab said:

This trip has been an invaluable opportunity to strengthen key partnerships in East Africa, boosting trade, security and our ability to tackle global challenges including Covid-19 and climate change.

We are committed to bringing the best of British expertise to the region, defusing tensions, doing business with integrity and forging strong partnerships on health, climate and other global challenges.

[Extra funding for organisations that](#)

steer women away from crime

- around £2 million to support community services that work with vulnerable women
- cross-government agreement to reduce the number of women in the Criminal Justice System
- extra investment in prison places to improve conditions for women in custody

The funding comes as the government reiterates its commitment to reduce the number of women in custody and improve conditions for those that are serving time.

Over £5 million has already been invested in services supporting women in the criminal justice system since 2018. This latest funding will help cover running costs such as wages, rent and bills at a time when many charities have additional demand for their services due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Ministry of Justice has pledged to work alongside other government departments and public services such as the National Health Service and Public Health England to more effectively support vulnerable women in addressing the issues which can lead them to commit crimes, while up to 500 new prison places will be built in existing women's prisons to improve conditions.

Lucy Frazer QC MP, Minister for Prisons and Probation said:

This funding boost will allow frontline services to continue the incredible work they do with some of the most vulnerable women in our society to prevent them being drawn into crime.

Many female offenders suffer complex issues and have experienced very traumatic lives – and it's only by addressing this that we will break the costly cycle of reoffending.

The funding announced today (23 January 2021) will support organisations such as Shropshire based Willowdene, which was awarded nearly £60,000 and uses a mixture of therapy that addresses traumatic life experiences and work placements to rehabilitate women dealing with issues such as substance misuse and exploitation. A grant of £60,000 will allow Cheshire Without Abuse to continue its vital work with domestic abuse victims, as cases continue to rise during lockdown. These services play a crucial part in preventing women being drawn into crime and help reduce rates of reoffending for those that are.

Dr Matthew Home, CEO of Willowdene Rehabilitation Ltd said:

Referrals to our service have increased during lockdown,

particularly for women leaving custody and aiming to complete a period of rehabilitation prior to going home. This funding will allow us to maximise the number of women we can help at any one time, as our core costs are covered through the grant.

While women who commit the most serious crimes will always be sent to prison, custody should always be a last resort. The number of women in custody has fallen by 10% since 2010 and government investment in community services should see this trend continue in the long-term. However, the recruitment of an extra 20,000 police officers is expected to cause a temporary increase in the female prison population.

Up to 500 new places will be built in existing prisons to increase availability of single cells and improve conditions. These will include in-cell showers and will allow more women to be held in open conditions, providing greater opportunities for employment and education while completing their sentence. Some of the new places will also allow women to have overnight visits with their children to prepare for life back home. If, as expected, the female prison population falls longer-term, these modern facilities will allow the Prison Service to close old accommodation.

Around half of women in prison have a mental health issue and a similar proportion have a history of drug use. Dealing with these underlying issues can help reduce the chance of women entering the criminal justice system in the first place and reduce reoffending rates when they do.

This requires a whole host of different agencies, local and national, to work together to help each individual offender, whether that be, getting into addiction treatment, finding a stable home or escaping an abusive partner. This 'whole-system approach' gives women a better chance of turning their lives around and has been endorsed again by government today in the [National Concordat on Female Offenders](#).

The drive to cut offending by women also stands to benefit from the largest increase in drug treatment funding in fifteen years announced earlier this week. An extra £80 million is being invested in services across England to increase the number of treatment places for prison leavers and those diverted into tough and effective community sentences.

[Transport Secretary launches £794 million investment to boost rail links in north and south](#)

- £794 million investment into next phase of East West Rail and reopening

of the Northumberland line as part of government's ambition to build back better

- final round of Restoring Your Railway Ideas Fund opens to develop proposals to restore railway lines, services and stations axed under the Beeching cuts
- investment to reconnect communities and stimulate economic growth, with East West Rail works set to create 1,500 skilled jobs

A £794 million investment package to reopen 2 important rail routes closed more than 50 years ago has been announced today (23 January 2021) by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps.

The new funding includes £760 million for the delivery of the next phase of East West Rail, which will create 1,500 skilled jobs, and reinstate direct rail services between Bicester and Bletchley for the first time since 1968.

[Short video on the next phase of East West Rail and the reopening of the Northumberland Line](#)

It also includes £34 million to rapidly progress plans to reopen the Northumberland line between Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Ashington, which closed to passengers in 1964 as part of the Beeching cuts.

The Transport Secretary has also today called on local authorities, MPs and community groups to submit bids for a share of the [third and final round of the Department for Transport's Ideas Fund](#), designed to encourage proposals to reopen railway lines, services and stations.

Today's announcement forms part of the government's commitments to build back better from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and level up transport infrastructure across the country by investing in rail connections that will boost economic growth, unlock new housing, and create jobs and opportunity.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

Restoring railways helps put communities back on the map, and this investment forms part of our nationwide effort to build back vital connections and unlock access to jobs, education and housing.

Returning these routes to their former glory, and progressing work to reopen even more lines and stations shows our commitment to levelling up journeys across the country as we build back better from the pandemic.

Simon Blanchflower, Chief Executive Officer at East West Railway Company, said:

We are delighted that the government has shown a big commitment to East West Rail and the Oxford-Cambridge arc with today's investment decision. This funding will enable us to get on with the

construction work that will connect communities who live on the East West Rail link.

We are committed to improving connectivity across the Oxford-Cambridge arc, and fully recognise our responsibility to ensure that it is delivered in a way that minimises disruption, supports the regional economy, maximises benefits and supports jobs across the region.

Today's funding marks an important milestone in the delivery of East West Rail, which will provide better connectivity along the Oxford-Cambridge arc and shorten journey times between routes outside of London, boosting economic growth and serving major new housing developments.

The works between Bicester and Bletchley are expected to create 1,500 jobs. This phase of the project will include the construction of a new stations at Winslow, as well as enhancements to existing stations along the route, including Bletchley. By 2025, 2 trains per hour will run between Oxford and Milton Keynes via Bletchley.

The investment on the Northumberland line will fund preparatory works, including land acquisition, detailed design work and early site works.

Northumberland County Council Leader Glen Sanderson said:

This is absolutely fantastic news, and means we can now finalise our plans to deliver this transformational project for both Northumberland and the wider region.

The Northumberland line will bring a huge boost to the area in terms of economic growth, housing, employment and education opportunities, as well as providing a fast and efficient new transport link between the south-east of the county and Tyneside.

Plans for the project include new stations at Ashington, Bedlington, Blyth Bebside, Newsham, Seaton Delaval and Northumberland Park in North Tyneside, as well as upgrades to the track and changes to level crossings where bridges or underpasses may need to be built.

The latest round of the Ideas Fund will run until 5 March 2021 with successful bids due to be announced later this summer.

[Appointment of Scott Mann MP as a](#)

Government Whip: 22 January 2021

Press release

The Queen has been pleased to approve the appointment of Scott Mann MP as a Government Whip (Lord Commissioner of HM Treasury).



The Queen has been pleased to approve the appointment of Scott Mann MP as a Government Whip (Lord Commissioner of HM Treasury). This role is unpaid.

Published 22 January 2021

UK Government and seafood industry make good progress on exports

News story

Today Minister David Duguid spoke with senior figures in the Scottish seafood industry to acknowledge there have been difficulties and provide solutions



Temporary issues felt in the seafood supply chain are steadily improving, UK Government Minister for Scotland David Duguid heard in a meeting he chaired today with senior figures in the industry.

“The UK Government has been striving night and day to help the industry and I am encouraged that solutions now in place are beginning to bear fruit,” he said after the latest meeting of the Scottish Seafood Export Working Group, attended online by the Scottish Seafood Association and Scottish Fishermen’s Federation.

The Minister also spoke with DFDS, the logistics experts who operate the Larkhall hub, through which much of Scotland’s seafood exports pass.

He said:

It is essential that we know precisely what difficulties are arising so we can tailor solutions. The excellent feedback from DFDS is massively helpful. We are working to streamline systems, while supporting exporters and partners such as DFDS, and the commitment to making the system work is clear across the board.

The UK Government has acknowledged there have been difficulties and we want to work together to provide solutions and restore confidence within this crucial sector so that world-class Scottish seafood can be harvested at sea and sped from port to plate for customers here and abroad.

A £23m additional support scheme for the seafood sector has been announced and the UK Government knows the urgency of rapid delivery. Meetings such as today’s allow us to take on board the industry’s concerns about the eligibility for that support fund, about making it swift and readily accessible.

There are still issues with the supply chain and we are doing all we can to ease them. I have today written to Scottish Government’s Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy, Fergus Ewing, encouraging take-up of our offer of additional support for Food Standards Scotland at Larkhall and providing further detail of our direct support for businesses with the embedding of experts to help firms with paperwork required by the EU.

We want a workable, sure-footed system so the industry can maximise the benefits of Britain’s new status as an independent coastal state, outside the Common Fisheries Policy.

The £23m fund will be targeted at fishing export businesses who can evidence a genuine loss in exporting fish and shellfish to the EU. Support will be available immediately and paid retrospectively to cover losses incurred since 1 January 2021. The scheme will be targeted at small and medium enterprises and the maximum claim available to individual operators will be £100,000.

The Marine Management Organisation will administer the scheme on behalf of exporters across the UK. More details will be available on eligibility criteria in the coming days. The UK Government will be consulting industry across the UK and working with the devolved administrations on these eligibility criteria before they are confirmed.

Other support provided to the industry includes:

- Constructive dialogue between UK Government and industry has already helped to resolve a number of initial problems that caused difficulties for the industry, including – but not limited to – computer system glitches.
- Issuing clear guidance on the required IT forms and paperwork to stakeholder representative groups, hauliers and businesses.
- Frequent meetings with businesses to understand and address issues as they arise.
- Working closely with individual businesses to help them get used to the new procedures required to ensure that errors or problems are tackled early.
- The UK Government is providing extra physical resources to support certification in Scottish Hubs.
- The UK Government has provided specialist certifiers to support Food Standards Scotland and DFDS.
- An experienced certifying officer from Defra is in Lanarkshire supporting Official Veterinarians with the issuing of health certificates.
- Additional Official Veterinarians are on standby, available to Scottish Hubs, to support exporters if required.
- Working with French authorities to ensure that minor administrative issues associated with EHCs do not prevent goods from entering the market, and working with the EU Commission to help member states adopt consistent approaches.
- Providing extensive guidance as part of a range of measures to help the industry meet new export requirements, including training, regular engagement and weekly bulletins. Separately, the Prime Minister has also committed to providing a £100m fund to help modernise fishing fleets, the fish processing industry, and rejuvenate a historic and proud industry in the UK, on top of the £32m that will replace EU funding this year.

Published 22 January 2021