

UK Armed Forces step up support to the Caribbean Overseas Territories during coronavirus pandemic

On 08 May an RAF flight delivered Foreign Office-sourced supplies to the Turks and Caicos Islands including 6 ventilators, blood and medication to support the Islands' health care systems during the coronavirus pandemic. This flight is part of the wider support being offered by the UK Government to its Overseas Territories in order to maintain access to essential goods including food, fuel and medical supplies.

Alongside this, the Royal Navy's disaster relief specialists on RFA Argus are preparing for hurricane season by testing their skills across six of the Overseas Territories. Operating in and around Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla, Montserrat, the Cayman Islands, and Turks and Caicos, the crew have been familiarising themselves with the terrain of each island and identifying potential landing sites should aid need to be delivered.

RFA Argus and troops on board have conducted exercises on Montserrat and Turks and Caicos. The exercises use simulated scenarios to test the crew's ability to quickly land personnel, equipment and stores ashore in the aftermath of a disaster and deliver life-saving aid to local populations.

Minister for the Armed Forces James Heapey said:

"The commitment of our Armed Forces to support the Overseas Territories in times of pandemic or national disaster is unwavering.

"We will continue to support our partners in the Caribbean, engaging with both the local communities and authorities as they prepare for the hurricane season and adapt to the challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak."

Baroness Sugg, Minister for the Overseas Territories said:

"We've seen how hurricanes can devastate communities in the Caribbean and when combined with the coronavirus, that devastation could lead to even more lives being lost.

"By providing life-saving aid alongside the world-class expertise of the British military, the UK is making sure British nationals and others living in the Overseas Territories, are prepared and supported ahead of the hurricane season."

The early deployment of a Royal Navy ship ahead of the hurricane season is vital for the personnel on board to be able to gather local knowledge of the islands and establish working practices with local authorities. Crew on board RFA Argus have been practising how to deliver aid and support local residents if a hurricane hits during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ship carries hurricane-related aid from the Department for International Development such as water, ration packs, medical equipment and materials to repair damage and clear blocked roads. It is staffed by an experienced team of sailors, aviators and marines equipped to deploy in the wake of a humanitarian disaster.

Other recent support provided by the Armed Forces to the Overseas Territories includes:

- Small security assistance teams have been deployed to both the Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands. Each team will reinforce the capacity of local police and support local authorities
- A new military co-ordination cell has been formed with our French and Dutch allies, optimising our support for Overseas Territories in the Caribbean as they co-ordinate their response to COVID-19.
- A small medical team alongside 2 Intensive Treatment Units have been deployed to the Falkland Islands and the RAF has also flown in supplies of oxygen and medicine
- 310kg of essential supplies have been delivered to Ascension Island and St Helena
- 175 personnel have been deployed to Gibraltar, to support the delivery of food and medicine to residents

The deployment of military capabilities and UK personnel is just one way the UK Government is supporting the people of the Overseas Territories. Specialist health professionals from Public Health England are providing crucial guidance and training on infectious disease management and we are providing advice on sourcing medical personnel and equipment.

There are around 270,000 people living in the Overseas Territories, most of whom are British nationals.

[Lord \(Tariq\) Ahmad of Wimbledon](#)
[statement on Afghanistan political](#)

agreement

Press release

FCO Minister for South Asia Lord Ahmad has commented on the agreement between Afghan leaders to form an inclusive government.



The Minister for South Asia, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

I welcome the agreement between Afghan leaders on forming an inclusive government.

A strong and unified government is vital at this critical time for Afghanistan. There is a real opportunity to end decades of conflict – the devastating impact of which has been brought into focus by recent attacks – and a need to slow the spread of Covid-19 throughout the country. As ever, the UK is ready to support the Government of Afghanistan as they face these challenges.

The Afghan people expect their leaders to follow through on their commitments and to continue to adhere to the principles of good governance, rule of law, human rights and justice. For the benefit of all Afghans, I urge Afghanistan's leaders to build upon this agreement, set aside their differences and work together constructively to tackle the challenges facing the country.

Follow Foreign Office Minister Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon [@tariqahmadbt](#)

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For journalists

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Sensible measures protect the NNL workforce keeping the lights on

News story

We are sharing stories of people working on the Sellafield site throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Today we feature National Nuclear Laboratory's Andy Haile.



Manager Andy Haile

As a manager in the National Nuclear Laboratory's (NNL) operating Active Handling Facility on the Sellafield site, Andy Haile has had to consider measures to protect his own safety and that of his colleagues.

He has continued to attend work since the coronavirus lockdown began, as he explains:

One of the key roles of our facility is to support the EDF programme. That means we need to operate to keep the country's lights on. As coronavirus hit, it quickly became clear we needed to make some changes to help keep everyone safe.

The first change we made was reducing those who needed to come to work to a minimum. We'd ordinarily have around 100 employees at work, but we've reduced this to a quarter of those. Despite this, we still needed to make other changes – after all lockers aren't 2 metres apart.

We've also reduced the number of maintenance jobs taking place, and split jobs up, so fewer people are likely to be in an area at a given time. We've staggered start times so people were able to access work more easily.

It has been strange coming to work – I sometimes worry I've walked past a no entry sign when there's no one around me, but of course there are fewer people around.

Our team has been fantastic. They understand that things are surreal and scary, but that we need to continue our essential mission. To help, they are doing all they can to ensure they, and others, are safe.

People have been changing their bait times, to avoid putting pressure on the canteen and you see people checking their exit is safe before they leave a room.

We know that more people will be coming back to site and our NNL facilities, in the near future. But we also know that we have to take small, gradual steps when doing so. The team have been great at giving feedback on what is working and what needs tweaked. This feedback is essential.

Andy recognised that things are unlikely to get back to how they were for quite some time, and NNL are looking at the 'new normal'.

The biggest concern when more people are back at work will be how people get to work. I think we need to continue to encourage people to work from home when they can. Even if employees do need to come on to site, they should only come here for that specific piece of work. When it's done, they should leave again. That's not how we've previously worked.

After all, working from home is the safest option, if you can, and it's the one that protects those of us who do need to be on the site.

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[Government to publish paper on group-based offending](#)

The Home Secretary has announced that the government will publish a paper into group-based child sexual exploitation in order to better understand the characteristics of group-based offending and help deliver justice for victims.

The paper, to be published later this year, will outline the insights gained from this work and focus on how agencies can learn lessons from the past to tackle group-based offending and safeguard vulnerable children.

The Home Office will set up an external reference group of experts to review the research before its publication.

The work was commissioned by the previous Home Secretary to better understand the scale and nature of group-based child sexual exploitation, including the characteristics of offenders, victims and the context in which these crimes are committed.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Victims of these sickening child sex abuse groups have told me how they were let down by the state in the name of political correctness.

What happened to these children remains one of the biggest stains on our country's conscience. It is shameful.

I am determined to deliver justice for victims and ensure something like this can never happen again.

The Home Office continues to support and drive improvements in the police response to child sexual abuse, which will be discussed at the virtual Hidden Harms Summit on Thursday.

The event will bring together government, law enforcement and the charity sector to work together to protect vulnerable people during the lockdown, including children at risk of sexual abuse.

Last September, the government announced an additional £30 million to take down the worst offenders and safeguard victims.

The Home Office will shortly publish the first of its kind cross-government Child Sexual Abuse Strategy to improve the UK's response to tackling this abhorrent crime.

It will set out how we will work across all agencies – including government, law enforcement, safeguarding and industry – to stop offenders in their tracks, and to help victims and survivors rebuild their lives.

[UK Government and Prince of Wales urge](#)

workers to pick fruit and veg for Britain

Press release

Scotland Secretary Alister Jack welcomes the move to save the Scottish strawberry



Strawberry farm in Aberdeen

The UK Government and [Prince of Wales](#) have urged students and furloughed workers to apply for seasonal farm work.

As part of efforts to support British farmers and growers to recruit workers throughout the harvest period, the UK Government launched the [Pick for Britain](#) website in partnership with industry to help match up available opportunities with local jobseekers.

Scotland Secretary Alister Jack said:

Many of Scotland's farms, in particular our soft fruit growers, rely on seasonal labour. As we near peak harvest time I urge jobseekers to sign up for this crucial work at the Pick for Britain website or the GOV.UK Find a job platform.

I am in no doubt British workers and students will seize the opportunity to feed the UK and help the economy in these most challenging of times. Together, the UK Government, industry and workers will save the Scottish strawberry and our other delicious produce.

The UK Government has already confirmed that those who have been furloughed from their jobs due to the coronavirus and who are contractually allowed to

work for another employer can take on this seasonal work while continuing to receive 80% of their salary from the government.

Interested parties should continue to check the Pick for Britain website regularly as it will continue to be updated with new opportunities as the demand for fruit and vegetable pickers grows over the coming months.

British workers will continue to have the opportunity to make some extra money and help to feed the nation right up until the autumn months.

Industry best practice guidance is available for growers to help ensure workers are safe and protected in their roles during the pandemic.

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