

Scottish Secretary thanks military for coronavirus support

THIS terrible pandemic has forced people apart but it has also brought us together. People from all corners of the UK have shown a shared determination to beat the virus.

We have changed our way of life completely, even though it has brought difficulty, distress and discomfort. We are staying at home, we are protecting the NHS and we are saving lives.

As we enter our fifth week of these difficult times, I'd like to put on record again my thanks to our NHS and everyone working in it. Our NHS has always embodied the values of compassion and togetherness that we share across the UK. In our country's greatest time of need, it is there for all of us. Care workers across the country are also going the extra mile to keep those they look after safe.

Out of our immense gratitude for these heroic front line staff, a heart-warming new national tradition has begun – our Thursday night Clap for Carers. I feel great pride to see such public support for our health service and the care workers we rely on.

There are countless other critical workers up and down the country, working in difficult circumstances in to keep us fed, to keep the lights on, to keep essential transport running and to keep our streets clean.

These are not the only heroes, of course. There is another group of men and woman I'd like to make a special point of thanking: our Armed Forces.

No-one who watched his presentation in Downing Street on Wednesday could fail to have been impressed by the words of General Sir Nick Carter, Chief of the Defence Staff.

He outlined how up to 3,000 personnel were now actively engaged in the battle against coronavirus across the UK, with 20,000 on standby.

"This is a truly national endeavour," he said. "Our Armed Forces are drawn from every part of the UK and much of the Commonwealth and they take great pride of serving the communities they are part of."

I know we are equally proud of them.

The work they are doing here is quite extraordinary. The General, a man with more than forty years of distinguished service to his country, could not have been clearer – he had never seen the Armed Forces face a bigger logistical challenge.

Nowhere can that incredible effort be seen more clearly than here in Scotland.

The military are distributing medical equipment to hospitals around the country, assisted with the new testing facilities in Glasgow, and transported vital equipment to set up our new testing megalab in Glasgow – the launch of which I was privileged to attend (albeit virtually via by Skype) – on Wednesday.

The Royal Airforce stands ready to airlift critically ill patients from Scotland's most remote communities. Working hand-in-hand with the Scottish Ambulance Service, life-saving RAF missions have been flown to carry patients from Arran, Orkney and Shetland to hospitals on the mainland.

Scotland is now covered by three Puma helicopters deployed to Kinloss in Moray. They will act as air ambulances, taking ambulance service paramedics to patients across Scotland and then carrying them safely to hospital. This has already begun as on Wednesday, a RAF Puma helicopter based at Kinloss has supported the NHS in Scotland with the first transfer of a critically ill patient from the Isle of Arran.

Behind the scenes, officers are working with each of Scotland's 14 health boards. And a team of planning specialists are now embedded in the Scottish Government's emergency co-ordination centre at St Andrew's House in Edinburgh.

Support here it is part of a huge operation across the UK and beyond.

Military experts are at the heart of the UK Government helping to fight the battle against online disinformation and they are assisting the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in their efforts to repatriate UK citizens struggling to return to their loved ones from abroad.

The Armed Forces have become an essential part of our response to the coronavirus outbreak and I know everyone in Scotland will join me in saluting their dedication, skill and courage.

Like many of you, I'll be at my front door again on Thursday to clap for our carers. But I'll also be thinking proudly of the men and women of our Armed Forces – and I'll add an extra round of applause for the great work they are doing for us all.

[**Saudi Arabia extends ceasefire in Yemen: Foreign Secretary statement**](#)

News story

Dominic Raab urges the Government of Yemen and the Houthis to immediately

cease all hostilities in Yemen and engage with UN proposals.



On Friday 24 April, Saudi Arabia announced an extension of its unilateral ceasefire in Yemen, first announced on 8 April, for one month.

The UK supports the call from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on 25 March for all parties in Yemen to immediately cease hostilities and do everything possible to counter a potential coronavirus outbreak. The UK welcomes the positive response to the UN and Saudi ceasefire initiatives by the Government of Yemen and calls on the Houthis to reciprocate. The UK urges both sides to respond positively to UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths' proposals, which offer the best chance for the peace that Yemenis need so urgently.

We are also providing life-saving UK aid to help those in desperate need and to mitigate the dreadful prospect of coronavirus exacerbating Yemen's dire humanitarian crisis.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

This is another important step towards the permanent ceasefire Yemenis need.

The Government of Yemen and the Houthis must immediately cease all hostilities and engage constructively with the UN's proposals. This is a precious opportunity for peace in Yemen and should not be wasted.

Further information

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Clinical trial approved to help the NHS treat COVID-19 patients using plasma

- A clinical trial has been given approval to determine if plasma donated by patients who have recovered from COVID-19 can help those battling the illness
- If effective, a scaled-up national programme will deliver up to 10,000 units of convalescent plasma per week to the NHS
- This would provide enough convalescent plasma to treat 5,000 patients each week

Up to 5,000 severely ill patients with COVID-19 could soon be treated each week with plasma from those who have recovered from the illness as part of a new approach to treating the virus.

The national randomised clinical trial will help to determine if plasma collected from donors who have recovered from COVID-19, known as 'convalescent plasma', is an effective treatment for patients who are severely unwell with the illness. Plasma from recovered COVID-19 patients can be transfused to patients who are struggling to produce their own antibodies against the virus.

In parallel with the trial, the government is scaling up the national programme for collecting plasma so the treatment can be widely rolled out if it is shown to be effective. The collection of plasma would be ramped up over April and May to deliver up to 10,000 units of plasma to the NHS every week, enough to treat 5,000 COVID-19 patients per week.

Matt Hancock, Health and Social Care Secretary, said:

This global pandemic is the biggest public health emergency this generation has faced and we are doing absolutely everything we can to beat it.

The UK has world-leading life sciences and research sectors and I have every hope this treatment will be a major milestone in our fight against this disease.

Hundreds of people are participating in national trials already for potential treatments and the scaling up of convalescent plasma collection means thousands could potentially benefit from it in the future.

Professor Jonathan Van Tam, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, said:

The UK is leading the world's largest trials to find a treatment for COVID-19, with over 7,000 people so far involved testing a range of medicines; we hope to add convalescent plasma to this list shortly.

Convalescent plasma has been used as an effective treatment for emerging infections in the past, and this step forward underpins our science-backed approach to fighting this virus.

Dr Gail Miflin, Chief Medical Officer, NHS Blood and Transplant, said:

As well as continuing to collect enough blood throughout this outbreak, we are also heavily involved in the national research response including major trials of this potential treatment.

We are rapidly building our capability to collect plasma so that we can quickly move into supplying hospitals at scale, should the proposed trial demonstrate patient benefit.

Northern Ireland Health Minister, Robin Swann MLA, said:

Two of the greatest strengths of the UK as we face this emergency are our world-leading health research capacity and the selflessness of our citizens.

The Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service and the wider Health and Social Care family are working with their colleagues across the UK to progress and participate in clinical trials on COVID-19.

Minister for Public Health in Scotland, Joe FitzPatrick, said:

The potential for convalescent plasma to aid those suffering from COVID-19 has to be confirmed through clinical trials. I am delighted to see the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service (SNBTS) and Scottish donors will be playing a key part.

The wellbeing of donors, recipients and staff is a priority so there are strict conditions to protect everyone participating in the trial.

It is also important to recognise that this means that not everyone who recovers from Covid-19 will be able to donate.

Welsh Government Health Minister, Vaughan Gething, said:

I'm very pleased to see clinical trials are now underway and to see

Wales sharing expertise with the other UK nations on this programme. It has the potential to significantly improve patient recovery and save lives.

Plasma taken from recovered patients contains antibodies that recognise the virus and can reduce its growth. We will be using plasma from patients at least 28 days after recovery as by that time, antibody levels will have increased.

NHS Blood and Transplant will contact people in England who have recovered from confirmed COVID-19 infection and could be a possible plasma donor, and the plasma will be collected at their centres. Blood will be taken from donors from one arm, which is circulated through a machine that separates out the plasma, and returned into the other arm. The process takes about 45 minutes and provides 2 units of plasma per donation, which can also be frozen and stored ahead for any future need.

Convalescent plasma was used as an effective treatment during the SARS outbreak.

If people have a confirmed positive test result and they are willing to donate, they can also provide details to us through [NHSBT's website](#).

- DHSC is working in collaboration with NHS Blood and Transplant and the other UK blood services, Public Health England and NHS Digital to deliver the programme.
- Ongoing national clinical trial as part of REMAP-CAP – with the possibility of another trial later on if the results of the first trial are shown effective will investigate whether transfusions may improve a patient's speed of recovery and chances of survival.
- We will be prioritising donors who are best placed to help so there may be a short delay in responding to some people.

[Communities Secretary welcomes response to his call for parks to open](#)

- More than 340 parks and green spaces reopen across the country in the last week
- Communities Secretary stresses that people must continue to follow guidance on social distancing

He welcomed the reopening of parks across the country following his request at last Saturday's Downing Street press conference, while stressing that people must continue to observe social distancing.

Parks reopened in the last week include around 340 parks and green spaces in East Devon, Central Park in Boston, Lincolnshire, Himley Park in Dudley, West Midlands, and Cusworth Park in Doncaster.

A survey by the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces has shown that of 90% of Friends of Parks groups, which help maintain parks across the UK, have reported that all parks in their area remain open, while in areas with some closures they report that 90% of local parks are open.

Last weekend, the Communities Secretary called for more parks to be reopened to the public for the health of the nation while ensuring people continue to observe social distancing guidelines. He also asked councils to keep open or reopen cemeteries and graveyards, for people to be able to seek solace at the gravesides of those they love.

Communities Secretary, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

While the virus does not discriminate, we know that the lockdown is much harder for people who don't have a lot of living space, a garden, or anywhere for their children to run around. People need parks.

I'm grateful for the work of councils who have ensured, ahead of this weekend, that most parks across England are now open and cemeteries and graveyards in their area are also open for visitors. We'll continue to work closely with them to try to get the remaining parks open soon, wherever possible.

Importantly, I want to stress that we must all continue to play our part in the national fight against coronavirus by continuing to observe social distancing when we exercise in parks.

Chair of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces, Dave Morris, said:

We welcome the government's public recognition of the continuing vital importance of parks for the health and wellbeing of all our communities.

As the voice of the movement of over 7,000 local Friends of Parks groups we have been aware of widespread calls throughout the entire country for weeks for clarity on this matter."

Chair of the Parks Alliance, Matthew Bradbury, said:

We welcome the Minister's announcement and encourage councils to work with the government to keep parks open. It is well proven that parks provide considerable health and wellbeing benefits to all that use them.

During this crisis parks are enabling people to stay healthy across the country whilst following the government's guidance on social distancing. For those without gardens local parks have never been more important.

Under [government guidance](#) to help fight coronavirus, people should only leave the house for very limited purposes, including taking one form of exercise, like running or walking. People should also only use open spaces near their home wherever possible, to avoid unnecessary travel.

Most councils have kept parks open while adapting to keep people safe by taking extra precautions like putting up signs to help people keep two metres apart while they take their daily exercise.

Local Government Minister Simon Clarke MP has also [written to councils](#) this week about ensuring people have access to parks and cemeteries.

The government is updating its guidance to make it clear that burial grounds and cemeteries, grounds surrounding crematoria and gardens of remembrance may remain open.

- The government's priority is to save lives and the best way to protect yourself and others from illness is to stay at home. However, exercise is still important for people's physical and mental wellbeing, for the government has said people can leave their homes for exercise once a day.
 - People should follow guidance to stay local and use open spaces near to their home where possible, avoiding unnecessary travel. You should only go outside alone or with members of your own household and should always keep at least two metres apart from anyone outside your household.
 - Gatherings of more than two in parks or other public spaces have been banned and the police will enforce this. Dog walkers should also walk their dogs on a lead in areas used by other people.
 - The survey by the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces can be [viewed online](#)
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Tackling COVID-19 and transitioning to peace in Sudan

Thank you, Mr President, and let me begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Lacroix and for their briefings. Let me also reiterate the United Kingdom's condemnation of the attack and the attempted assassination on Prime Minister Hamdok.

Mr President, regrettably, Sudan, as with many parts of the world, is experiencing COVID-19, which comes on top of an already difficult socio-economic and humanitarian situation. On behalf of the United Kingdom, I want to send today a message of solidarity and support to the Government and people of Sudan in their efforts to respond to COVID-19 and mitigate its effects. As part of the United Kingdom's \$1 billion commitment since the COVID-19 outbreak began, we have given \$6 million to the UN COVID-19 response plan for Sudan.

Mr President, one of the brightest spots on this Council's agenda has been the beginning of Sudan's transition to a democratic and peaceful nation. There has been much progress in the years since the removal of former President Bashir. And we encourage all Sudanese parties, as well as the international community, to remain fully committed behind Sudan to the successful implementation of the constitutional declaration, even during the challenges presented by COVID-19. And let me at this point particularly commend the positive role that the African Union has played and continues to play in Sudan's political transition.

Mr President, the Government of Sudan and a number of armed movements have been engaging in talks for comprehensive peace across Sudan. That commitment to peace is promising, as is the positive response to the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire by the parties to the Juba peace talks. But we now need to see all sides – in particular, the armed movements – engage constructively, immediately and without preconditions to conclude swiftly the negotiations on a comprehensive peace agreement. We call on them to do so.

Mr President, despite the positive progress has been made in Sudan, we remain concerned by the security situation in Darfur, which continues to be undermined by ongoing conflict in Jebel Marra, increasing levels of inter-communal violence and civilian displacement. Just this week, there were reports of an attack on a village in central Darfur, in which civilians were apparently killed and wounded, 70 homes burned down, and approximately 155 households displaced. The approximately 1.8 million internally displaced persons in Darfur remain particularly vulnerable to human rights violations and abuses. We cannot ignore the considerable challenges which remain in Darfur on and over the protection of civilians.

The United Kingdom fully supports the Government of Sudan's request for a new, whole of Sudan UN mission that can provide support across the full range of issues related to the transition. We believe that this Council should

support this request and a relationship between Sudan and the United Nations, underpinned by national ownership, partnership and collaboration. We should be ready to move quickly in response to Sudan's declared needs. As Rosemary DiCarlo said today, the situation is dire.

We understand that the Government of Sudan would like the United Nations to support capacity-building, and we in the United Kingdom think that within this, there should be a role for capacity-building, training and mentoring also of police forces. In the time it takes to implement such capacity-building, we must ensure that a security vacuum does not fall and undermine efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace in Darfur, as well as the overall political transition in Sudan. And in a spirit of the new relationship between Sudan and the United Nations, we firmly believe that the new mission can and should be a partner to the Government of Sudan in responding to the ongoing protection of civilians' challenges in Darfur, particularly in the IDP camps. So I'd like to ask Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his assessment of the protection of civilians needs and risks in Darfur and the current capacity of the Government of Sudan to assume full responsibility for protection of civilians in Darfur. I would also be grateful if he could provide information on the type of deployment that would be required for the new mission to provide support to the government of Sudan on protection of civilians.

Let me also say we've taken note of the measures taken by the United Nations concerning peacekeeping, in particular the pause on rotations. And we understand the impact that this and, as Under-Secretary-General Lacroix also mentioned, around climatic conditions. We understand the impact that these will have on the timings of the planned drawdown of UNAMID.

Mr President, let me conclude by once again reaffirming the United Kingdom's support for the government and people of Sudan in their endeavours for a peaceful, stable, prosperous and democratic future. We look forward to working with our colleagues in the Council to play our part in supporting those efforts.

Thank you very much.