

# RAF delivers UK aid to Turkey for Syrians in crisis

The UK Government has delivered vital humanitarian aid to the Turkey-Syria border, which will provide much-needed relief and protection for Syrians amid the worsening humanitarian crisis in Idlib.

An RAF C-17 carrying 37 tonnes of UK aid landed in Hatay, Turkey, yesterday afternoon. The supplies on board include tents to provide life-saving shelter, hygiene kits, blankets, water purification tablets, cooking equipment and lanterns for around 300 families who have been forced to flee their homes and seek safety in harsh conditions.

This comes as schools, nurseries and hospitals are targeted by Syrian regime bombing.

The aid flight is in addition to £89 million of UK aid for Syria – announced last week – to help protect victims of violence, which included tents, thermal blankets, clothing, food, clean water and medical supplies, among other measures.

The aid supplies are being distributed in the worst affected areas including Idlib in north west Syria, with the cooperation of the Turkish Red Crescent.

It comes as Defence Secretary Ben Wallace visited Ankara today to hold talks with his Turkish counterpart, Hulusi Akar, to discuss how the UK can further support Turkey, and those Syrians in desperate need. This follows the Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab's meeting with his Turkish counterparts in Ankara last week to discuss the continuing violence in Syria and the UK's support to the crisis.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

The people of Idlib have suffered enormously during this conflict and these crucial supplies delivered by our military will provide shelter for hundreds of families in desperate need.

We stand in solidarity with Turkey after the losses they have suffered, and the UK will do what we can to offer support.

For the sake of both nations, the wider region and security across the entire globe, the ceasefire in Idlib must continue to be respected.

International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

It is a tragedy that almost a million people – mostly women and

children – have been forced to flee their homes in the past 100 days as the ruthless Assad regime and its Russian backers relentlessly bombed their homes and killed their families.

Too many innocent people are struggling to survive in freezing conditions without a roof over their head.

Through UK aid, delivered by our world-class troops, the British people are helping to save lives, boost regional security and stop the cruel suffering of defenceless Syrians in this warzone.

The UK is one of the largest bilateral donors to the Syria crisis, providing more than £3.1 billion to trusted partners in Syria and the region since 2011. From day one, we have been at the forefront of the humanitarian response providing more than 28 million food rations, 19 million medical check-ups and 12 million vaccines across Syria and the region.

The UK has also helped more than 140,000 people to get clean drinking water and provided psychosocial support to almost 28,000 people, including over 1,000 children.

Turkey is the largest refugee hosting country in the world. Working with our European partners, the UK has helped to support the education of more than 635,000 Syrian refugee children in Turkey and provided over 8 million primary healthcare consultations for the most vulnerable Syrian refugees to help alleviate pressure on Turkish communities and maintain regional security.

During his visit to the country, Mr Wallace will also meet other members of the Turkish government and lay a wreath at the Anitkabir Mausoleum, paying his respects to the founder of The Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

ENDS

### **Notes to editors:**

- Images of the aid delivery are available from [www.defenceimagery.mod.uk](http://www.defenceimagery.mod.uk)
- Last week, DFID announced £89 million of UK aid to protect victims of violence as the Syrian regime increases attacks in Idlib:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-aid-protects-victims-of-violence-as-s-syrian-regime-increases-attacks-in-idlib>
- For more information, please contact the Ministry of Defence press office on 020 7218 7907 or the Department for International Development press office on 020 7023 0600.

---

## **[US to lift ban on UK beef exports](#)**

British beef could soon be sold in the US, creating £66 million worth of

export opportunities for British farmers over the next five years.

The US has this week agreed equivalence of standards on the UK's disease control measures following a three-week inspection last summer. It means beef can soon be shipped to the US.

It comes after an ongoing process of negotiations between the UK government, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board and industry groups.

**International Trade Secretary, Liz Truss said:**

It is great news that the US has reopened the market to British beef. This is a win for our farmers and I look forward to seeing high-quality British beef enjoyed on tables across the US very soon.

The UK's farming industry will benefit from a free trade agreement with the US because we can create wider opportunities for farmers locked out of the largest consumer market on the planet. A stronger trading relationship is a win-win for both sides.

The government is expected to begin negotiating a UK-US free trade agreement this month, which will help to create even more opportunities for British businesses.

---

## [Worldwide search launched to enhance digital services](#)

Our digital services are accessed billions of times each year, by people all over the world. It's important that they're accessible and meet the needs of as many different users as possible.

To make sure our services are accessible, we want to increase the number of people on our user research panel.

The panel works to make sure that our services can be used by everyone, including people with accessibility needs.

1 in 5 people in the UK have a disability. This could be visual, hearing, motor or cognitive (affecting memory and thinking). But accessibility does not only apply to people with disabilities. All users will have different needs at different times and in different circumstances.

User research panel members do not need to be from the UK. We're able to carry out remote research with people from all over the world.

Sarah Combstock, a User Researcher at Companies House, says:

The digital services we provide at Companies House are well-used, and we have high rates of customer satisfaction.

We're passionate about ensuring that our research when we develop these services is as inclusive as possible. Our role is to represent the user, so it's vitally important that we understand their needs.

That's why we need as many people as possible to help us by joining our user research panel. Panel members will get a unique opportunity to help us understand how we can build and design services that are as user-friendly and intuitive as possible.

---

## [Lewes couple who befriended and robbed disabled man in his own home jailed for longer](#)

A couple who robbed a disabled man in his own home, after one of them befriended him, have had their sentences increased following intervention by the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.

Kirsty Norris, 31, met the victim, 57, eighteen months before the planned attack. The victim believed that Norris was his friend, and showed her kindness by providing her with food and company.

The victim is a vulnerable person, who is disabled and suffers from serious medical conditions. The authorities had moved him to a new address after he became the target of attacks in his original home town.

On the morning of 16 October 2018, the victim saw Norris and invited her to his flat for a meal. Inside the victim's home, Norris phoned her boyfriend, signalling the pre-planned attack.

Her boyfriend, David Mercer, 25, then came to the victim's door, claiming to be from the council. When the victim refused to let him in, Mercer punched him multiple times in the face and neck. The offender then stole his Christmas savings and bank card before fleeing.

Throughout the attack, Norris feigned surprise and pretended to help the

victim but he soon realised that he had been betrayed. Norris then left the victim's flat to find her boyfriend.

Once reunited, the offenders immediately made several purchases which were captured on CCTV footage.

The offenders were arrested at their home on Thursday 25th October.

Norris and Mercer originally appeared at Lewes Crown Court in October 2019 and were sentenced for robbery and five counts of fraud. They were both sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment, suspended for 2 years, with a rehabilitation activity requirement for a maximum of 35 days.

Today, following the Solicitor General's intervention, the Court of Appeal has increased their sentences to 3 years' immediate imprisonment.

Commenting on the increase, the Solicitor General said:

"This was a brutal, targeted attack against a vulnerable individual, who had already suffered abuse for his disabilities. The victim was betrayed and attacked and suffers psychological trauma as a result. It is only right that the Court of Appeal has agreed to increase the sentences to reflect this long-lasting harm."

---

## [Addressing suicides among veterans and serving personnel](#)

Mr Speaker, following an internal review commissioned by my Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, I wish to make a statement about serving and former members of the Armed Forces ending their own lives. Speaking publicly about suicide requires a balance between risking similar episodes and ensuring that I follow through on the Prime Minister's intent to ensure that every serving or former member of the Armed Forces knows exactly where to turn in times of acute need.

I am very aware of how it feels to be a service family, particularly a spouse or relative of someone who feels they have nowhere to turn, or that Ministers are indifferent to the situation. It is this that has led me to make this statement to the House.

Suicide is almost never due to a single factor and some reasons are impossible to identify. However, the facts on suicide in the Armed Forces remain broadly consistent. Current data shows you are significantly less likely to take your own life if you are in the Armed Forces. The rates are about 8 in 100,000 compared to around 17 in 100,000 in the equivalent male population in the United Kingdom. But we are not complacent and I accept

Governments have not acted fast enough to update our data and understanding of military suicide.

I am aware that we are currently experiencing a higher instance of suicide in a cohort who served at a specific time in Afghanistan. Some people want to make suicide about numbers; but suicide is not a number. One is too many and in my view any suicide is an individual tragedy for yes that person, for their family of course, but also the military as an institution. I must however challenge a false narrative that veteran suicide is an 'epidemic' or that professional clinical services are not there; they are. Such comments risk harming others by wrongly fuelling a perception that help is not there when it is.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, I wanted to outline to the House what I am doing about it. I am committed to providing better support for individuals in mental distress. To learning why suicide happens and what more can be done to stop an individual reaching the decision to end their life. I meet with families, widows and experts to understand when or if we could or should have intervened in those crucial weeks and months before an individual takes their own life. Even if sometimes the answer is tragically nothing.

Alongside this we are aiming to reduce suicide risk through tackling stigma, education and providing access to mental and physical health support. Armed Forces personnel now undergo "through life" psychological resilience training enabling them to recognise and manage mental ill-health in themselves and their colleagues. This actively encourages help seeking at an early stage.

But Mr Speaker, data is key to understanding what more needs to happen.

The MOD track all suicides for serving personnel and annually publishes data on Coroner confirmed suicides. What this tells us is that we are seeing more deaths in recent years but still well below levels observed in the 1990s, unlike in the 1990s this is not predominantly an untrained young Army male issue but it is predominantly a male issue, and in older age groups which reflects the trends in wider UK society.

A review in 2018 saw the implementation of new suicide prevention measures across Defence and a Defence Suicide Registry will capture information related to in-Service suicide across the Services.

For veterans the Office for Veterans' Affairs is funding the next stage of a long-term study of nearly 30,000 veterans who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Started in 2003 and led by the world's leading experts at Kings College, this provides data which better ensures better policy decisions about veterans in Government. Defence and health together will fund Manchester University to examine the 12 months leading up to veterans who have taken their own lives in the last five years.

A new Veteran mortality study will show the incidence of suicide among veterans who served since 2001, alongside other causes of death. I am expanding this study so that it provides, for the first-time a near real-time surveillance capability, ensuring we can respond quickly to any new cluster

of events. The first report will be published later this year.

More importantly a shift is underway in the provision of veterans Mental Health support; help is out there. For many years, I and others, have called for this Nation to realise her responsibilities towards those who have served. That strategic change is happening.

It is the NHS in England and Devolved Administrations that delivers veterans' healthcare. Over the years our service charities have shouldered much of this, underpinned by the generosity of the public. This is changing and I commend the NHS' efforts to provide services, including those bespoke for veterans, some of which the NHS commission the charity sector to provide. It has transformed its Armed Forces provision. A clear clinical pathway exists for veterans' mental health services in England with the Transition Intervention and Liaison Service and Complex Treatment Service. I have worked with the NHS and Ministerial colleagues recently to accelerate the introduction of a new High Intensity Service for those in the most acute need, following the challenges faced by Combat Stress.

These services mean the State is now leading the way in supporting our veterans, through a range of partnerships which include the third sector and others. The help is there and we all need to be better at encouraging our family, friends and colleagues to seek it.

As a veteran you will have experiences, training, friendships, highs and lows like no other profession. Some may feel far from those times, challenged by the reality of resuming civilian life after intensive and unique experiences. I am ensuring the help is there to make this transition successfully.

I care and this Government cares. Record investment, reinforced through additional funding for veterans' mental health in the Budget yesterday. A strategic shift from reliance on the third sector to the State finally realising her responsibilities. Ensuring this country is the best place to be a veteran and everyone knows where to get help. This Prime Minister will accept nothing less. Having shared those battlefields with you, I have staked my personal reputation on it.

But it requires everyone to play a role: speak out, reach out; look after yourselves and each other.

And never ever give up.

I commend this statement to the House.