

# British High Commission brings the Great Debate to Islamabad

The regional round in Islamabad followed previous rounds in Lahore, Quetta and Peshawar. The competition featured 27 students from universities across Islamabad and Rawalpindi. At the end of an intense competition, Fatima Ishtiaq from International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIUI) and Hamna Amir from National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) were declared the winner and runner-up respectively.

The GREAT Debate competition is taking place from December 2019 to March 2020 in six cities across Pakistan.

Fouzia Younis, Director of Communication at the British High Commission said:

The British High Commission has always played an important role in strengthening the educational links between the UK and Pakistan. The UK is committed to supporting Pakistan, especially its youth, in exploring and showcasing their creativity and talent.

Now in its fifth successful year, the GREAT Debate competition offers a unique experience to students to hone their craft of how to make a case, the gift of persuasion and reasoning an argument. These skills are essential traits to possess for future leaders and opinion formers.

I look forward to seeing the winner and runner-up do well in the final.

University students across Pakistan who are interested in debating and taking part in the GREAT Debate competition can register immediately by registering on [Great Debate website](#)

This is the fifth annual edition of the British High Commission's GREAT Debate competition. Since 2015, the competition has taken place across 15 universities and 12 cities in Pakistan. The previous winners of the GREAT Debate competition have included: Gaudhan Aslam from Forman Christian College in Lahore, Taha Ahmed from Aga Khan University in Karachi, Mohiba Ahmed and Haris Ali Virk from Government College University in Lahore.

## **Further information**

The GREAT Debate is a debating competition for university students. There will be six events – in six different cities (Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta and Faisalabad) involving students from leading universities across Pakistan – and the winner and runner-up of each round will compete in the grand final in Islamabad.

The regional rounds have taken place in Lahore, Quetta, Peshawar and Islamabad. The upcoming regional rounds are in Faisalabad and Karachi at the end of January and early February.

The winner and runner-up of the overall competition will receive a scholarship reward to contribute towards their tuition fees.

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### **Notes to editors**

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## **[ECITB: annual priorities letter 2019 to 2020](#)**

[unable to retrieve full-text content]Letter from Michelle Donelan to the chair of the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board.

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## **[CITB: annual priorities letter 2019 to 2020](#)**

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## **[The human cost of military escalation](#)**

## in Syria

Mr President, we are appalled by the significant escalation in the Syrian regime and Russian violence in Idlib. We remain deeply disappointed that the ceasefire of 12 January barely lasted a couple of days.

The human cost of this military escalation is awful. Since 1 December, over 140 civilians have been killed by Russia and the regime. Since 29 April, over 1,500 civilians have been killed in northwest Syria, with roughly half of all casualties being women and children. Over 358,000 people have been displaced as a result of the escalation of violence. And the United Nations is now anticipating the possible further displacement of another 500,000 people in frontline areas.

Mr President, the population density within this ever-reducing pocket is already greater than in Gaza. The humanitarian system is overwhelmed. These innocent civilians are in urgent need of food, shelter, water, health and winterisation assistance. But we continue to see airstrikes and shelling on civilian infrastructure. I remind all parties, including those around this table, yet again of their obligation to comply with international humanitarian law.

On 11 January alone, 26 communities in Idlib were affected by airstrikes; targets included schools, hospitals and camps for internally displaced people. As recently as three days ago, an airstrike disabled al-Eman Hospital in Sarjah. Having repeatedly called for scrutiny of such attacks, we welcome again the Secretary-General's Board of Inquiry, which is investigating some of the past attacks in Idlib. And we call on the Secretary-General to make the findings public. And let me restate our call for a full cessation of hostilities and a recommitment to the de-escalation agreement.

Now, Mr President, while all eyes are on the north-west, we must not neglect those in other parts of the country who are deliberately being denied humanitarian assistance. As we all know, because of the decision by China and Russia to veto a humanitarian resolution, the United Nations can no longer use the border crossings into the north-east and south of Syria.

The Russian ambassador argued, Mr President, that the crossing in north-east Syria was not needed because humanitarian assistance could be provided from Damascus. However, the truth is that the regime is not providing these people with the aid that they require or allowing the United Nations to do so.

And it's not just the Northeast. Communities in former opposition-held territory, such as Eastern Ghouta and Eastern Aleppo, do not receive regular needs-based quality humanitarian assistance. The Syrian regime believes these communities are not aligned with its own politics, and so it punishes them for their perceived disloyalty by preventing them from receiving food and medicine. Russia and China, having acted to prevent life-saving aid reaching those in need, should now act to ensure aid can be delivered. And we look to the United Nations, including through the Secretary-General's report coming

in February, to highlight these gaps and challenges in the humanitarian response, and help us to find a solution so that aid can be delivered where it is needed.

The United Kingdom has long supported the provision of humanitarian aid to all of Syria, including the parts under the control of the Syrian authorities. Indeed, the United Kingdom has contributed over \$4 billion since 2012.

I note, Mr President, that 60% of all contributions to the United Nations Humanitarian Response Plan in 2019 came from the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany. But it is incumbent upon us to ensure aid is provided on a principled basis and is getting to those who most need it wherever they may be.

Mr President, the United Kingdom is grateful for the United Nations' continued work to find a solution for the people of Rukban in what remain extremely challenging conditions. More needs to be done in order to ensure the safety of the remaining residents in Rukban and those who have been leaving to seek shelter elsewhere. There has been no humanitarian assistance to Rukban since the end of September, and then we were only able to provide one month's worth of supplies. We are also concerned about the fate of some who have left the camp voluntarily. The United Nations must have permanent and open-ended access to shelters in Homs and the final destination points of Rukban's internally-displaced persons. This will ensure adequate monitoring and reporting on conditions, particularly on protection and human rights issues. And we would welcome the UN incorporating this into their regular reporting and keeping the council apprised.

Mr President, in conclusion, the humanitarian situation in Syria remains, as Mark Lowcock said, dire and deteriorating. The situation in Idlib is particularly worrying as Russia and the regime bombed civilians in the area. I hope Council colleagues will join me in calling for an immediate ceasefire there, that they will reiterate the importance of cross-border aid and that they will call on the regime and those allied to them to let the UN do its job: to save lives, Mr President.

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## **Housing Secretary confirms £1 billion of finance to support small and medium sized builders**

- Housing Secretary gives green light to £1 billion in finance to support small and medium sized builders

- Loans from banks to help local builders deliver new homes in areas across England
- Partnership between government and UK finance industry will help level up the regions in England

Millions of pounds in new loans will be paid out to support small and medium sized firms get building, the Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP has announced today (29 January 2020).

The £1 billion guarantee scheme set-up by the government ensures enough credit is available to allow smaller housebuilders to enter the market.

In an announcement to Parliament the Housing Secretary confirmed the British Business Bank's ENABLE Build Programme will shortly begin guaranteeing millions in new loans for local, independent construction businesses to deliver new homes.

Local builders will be able secure loans from participating banks to help the government deliver its commitment of at least a million new homes in the next five years.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said

Small housebuilders are vital to building the homes this country needs but too often struggle to access affordable finance.

Today I am giving the green light to a scheme that will help to fix this. Supporting £1 billion of new loans so that local builders can kickstart building, level up the country and turbocharge the housing sector.

Housing Minister Rt Hon Esther McVey MP added:

When it comes to building houses, we mean business – this fund will give everyday lenders the confidence needed to do deals with smaller builders which get shovels in the ground.

Today I have given the green light to £1 billion in loans to boost local builders, so they can deliver the homes our communities need across England.

Reinald de Monchy, Managing Director, Guarantee and Wholesale, British Business Bank said:

The ENABLE Build programme is a great example of using a cross-

government approach to tackle an important, complex issue.

Working in partnership with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and Homes England to address both access to finance and the UK housing shortage, the ENABLE Build programme will allow us to build on our ENABLE Guarantee's success in supporting smaller housebuilders that have traditionally struggled to access the funding they need.

Since the scheme opened for applications in May 2019, the government has received interest from specialist and mainstream lenders – including high street banks – which want to be involved in this innovative scheme to deliver homes.

Following the credit crunch in 2008 figures show that only 1,737 small to medium size builders operate in England, with more needed to help respond to the demand for new homes.

The information published in the House of Commons sets out when the ENABLE Build scheme will start to provide the guarantee finance and how lenders and house builders can get involved.

The Housing Minister has laid a [written ministerial statement](#) setting out more details about the Government's ENABLE Build scheme.

The ENABLE Build programme was announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the 2018 Autumn Budget. It opened to applications from lenders in [May 2019](#).