

# **Press release: Minister for the Middle East visits the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel**

On his first visit to the region since being re-appointed as an Foreign & Commonwealth Office Minister, Mr Burt laid a wreath at a Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery in Gaza and heard from Gazans about current humanitarian challenges, before visiting Susiya village in Area C of the West Bank and Hebron to understand recent developments on the ground. While in Ramallah Mr Burt met with a number of representatives from the Palestinian Authority including Foreign Minister Malki and reaffirmed the UK's commitment to the working with the Palestinian leadership to achieve a two-state solution.

## **Summary of Minister Burt's visit to the West Bank and Gaza**

### UK commitment to Middle East peace

Speaking after his visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territories Minister Burt said:

I was delighted to return to the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) following my re-appointment to the Foreign Office as Minister of State for the Middle East.

I came to see and hear what has changed since my last official visit in 2013 and to reaffirm the UK's strong support for a two-state solution to secure peace and prosperity for both Palestinians and Israelis.

I am grateful for the hospitality and warmth shown to me across the OPTs, in Gaza, Susiya, Hebron, Jerusalem and Ramallah, and for very constructive meetings with Foreign Minister Malki, Finance Minister Bishara, Education Minister Saidam and PLO Chief Negotiator Erekat.

The UK will continue to support efforts to improve conditions on the ground for ordinary people and to enable negotiations to resume. I look forward to working with the parties and the wider international community, including the UN and the US, to make progress in the months ahead.

Minister Burt then travelled to Jerusalem and met a number of government officials and political figures to discuss wide-ranging issues affecting the UK's relations with Israel. He emphasised the UK's strong relationship with Israel and its commitment to the Middle East Peace Process.

He also attended the launch ceremony of El Al Airlines' first Boeing 787

Dreamliner plane at Ben Gurion Airport. El Al's new fleet of Dreamliners is equipped with British-made Rolls Royce engines, a result of the biggest-ever trade deal between the 2 countries, signed in 2016. Mr Burt went on to meet young tech developers and see first-hand how a London-based initiative, the free coding school Founders & Coders, is expanding to Israel through a successful branch in the city of Nazareth.

## **Minister Burt attends the launch of El Al Airlines Dreamliner plane**

### [UK Israel trade and tech partnership](#)

Speaking in Tel Aviv Minister Burt said:

The UK is a great friend of Israel and during this visit I have reaffirmed the UK's commitment to peace and stability in the Middle East. We will continue to work with and support those in Israel and beyond who want to achieve a viable solution.

We have a longstanding relationship with Israel and I have witnessed first-hand the strength of this partnership in many areas from trade and investment to technology and innovation. This relationship will continue to grow and benefit both of our nations.

---

## [News story: Co-operatives to save money thanks to change in audit requirements](#)

The government is [consulting](#) on proposals to increase the thresholds at which co-operatives, mutually-owned businesses that are run by and for their members, and community benefit societies operated for the benefit of the community, have to produce a full audit report.

Currently co-operatives with a turnover of less than £5.6 million and assets of less than £2.8 million can choose not to appoint an auditor. The government is proposing to increase the turnover and asset thresholds to £10.2 million and £5.1 million respectively.

This will mean that over 70% of co-operatives in the UK will no longer have to undertake a full audit, levelling the playing field between co-operatives and companies of the same size.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Stephen Barclay, said:

From the dairy farm that provides milk to the local community, to the brewery owned by 10 friends who all have a passion for ale, we want to see co-operatives and community benefit societies across the UK thrive and grow.

That's why we're reducing onerous administrative burdens on these societies, saving them money and freeing them up to concentrate on what matters the most – the needs of their members and communities.

Ed Mayo, Secretary General of Co-operatives UK, said:

We are pleased government has heeded calls to remove this unnecessary extra burden on co-operative and community businesses. This is a great example of the practical steps government can take to support the UK's co-operative sector, which plays a key role in fostering a more inclusive economy.

In order to take advantage of this change co-operatives must have passed a resolution to dis-apply the requirement to produce a full audit report through their members, and the society must not be on the list of exempted societies, such as credit unions.

There are 7,000 co-operatives in the UK, working in all parts of the economy. Together they contribute more than £34.1 billion to the British economy, with over 17.5 million people owning the UK's co-operatives.

Co-operatives range in size and activity. The largest co-operative is the Co-operative group which is the UK's fifth biggest food retailer and has more than 2,500 stores. Other examples include football clubs, dairy farms, social care providers and renewable energy providers.

Over the past 3 years the government has modernised the laws governing co-operatives and community benefit societies and made it easier for them to raise capital by increasing the limit of withdrawable share capital that an individual can invest from £20,000 to £100,000.

---

## [News story: Lorry technology trials could slash fuel costs and congestion](#)

Lorries on motorways are a step closer to accelerating, braking and steering in sync through wireless technology, thanks to [£8.1 million government funding for trials announced today](#) (25 August 2017).

The 'platooning' trials will see up to 3 heavy goods vehicles, travelling in convoy, with acceleration and braking controlled by the lead vehicle. All lorries in the platoon will always have a driver ready to take control at any time.

If successful, this technology could have major benefits for motorists and businesses in the UK. A row of lorries driving closer together could see the front truck pushing the air out of the way, making the vehicles in the convoy more efficient, lowering emissions and improving air quality.

Transport Minister Paul Maynard said:

We are investing in technology that will improve people's lives.

Advances such as lorry platooning could benefit businesses through cheaper fuel bills and other road users thanks to lower emissions and less congestion.

But first we must make sure the technology is safe and works well on our roads, and that's why we are investing in these trials.

The Transport Research Laboratory will carry out the trial, with funding provided by the Department for Transport and Highways England. It follows a government-funded feasibility study which recommended a trial to examine the benefits and viability of platooning.

Jim O'Sullivan, Highways England Chief Executive, said:

We are pleased to be supporting the government's ambition for the UK to be a global leader for innovation.

The trial has the potential to demonstrate how greater automation of vehicles – in this instance, HGVs – can deliver improvements in safety, better journeys for road users and reduction in vehicle emissions.

Investing in this research shows we care about those using our roads, the economy and the environment, and safety will be integral as we take forward this work with TRL.

The trial will be carried out in 3 phases, with the first focusing on the potential for platooning on the UK's major roads. Initial test track based research will help decide details such as distance between vehicles and on

which roads the tests could take place.

Trials are expected on major roads by the end of 2018. Each phase of the testing will only begin when there is robust evidence that it can be done safely.

Similar trials have already been successfully carried out in Europe and the United States.

Rob Wallis, Chief Executive, TRL said:

The UK has an unprecedented opportunity to lead the world in trialling connected vehicle platoons in a real-world environment.

TRL and its consortium of leading international partners, have the practical and technical knowledge gained from previous projects to understand what is required to put a connected vehicle platoon on to UK roads safely.

The team are now taking that expertise and uniquely applying it within live traffic operations.

---

## **Press release: Defence Secretary salutes Scots troops who keep us safe at home and abroad**

Visiting Glencorse Barracks, Penicuik, Sir Michael Fallon met 2 SCOTS (2nd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland) where he praised the contribution the troops would make to helping keep the UK safe and highlighted how the range of their recent and forthcoming deployments “spanned continents” contributing to security “at home and abroad”.

In Iraq on OP SHADER, 2 SCOTS’ non-combat role will strengthen the Iraqi Security Forces as they fight to remove Daesh. They will provide the latest training in urban combat, marksmanship and countering improvised explosive devices.

Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, said:

The men and women of our Scottish-based Armed Forces perform a pivotal role in keeping the people of this country, and our allies, safe.

From Afghanistan to South Sudan to Cyprus as well as recent deployments in the UK, the strength and versatility of 2 SCOTS allows them to operate in varied roles that span continents and project UK influence across the globe.

The men and women who serve here today can be proud of the valuable contribution they make to our security both at home and abroad.

In May 2017, 2 SCOTS personnel deployed on Op TEMPERER to guard key infrastructure sites in order to release 166 civilian Ministry of Defence Police and Civil Nuclear Constabulary firearms officers in Scotland. This was part of the wider UK response which freed an additional 1,000 armed civilian police officers to help protect the UK public, following the Manchester Arena terrorist attack.

Troops from 2 SCOTS will shortly also deploy on two United Nations' missions: joining comrades from the Scots Dragoon Guards in Cyprus over the next few weeks, and deploying on Op TRENTON in South Sudan in 2018 to protect the UN forces building hospitals and other new infrastructure.

Previously, 2 SCOTS deployed on NATO's Op TORAL peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan for nine months in 2015-16 where they helped develop the professionalism of the officer cadre passing through the Afghan National Army's Officer Academy, and protected UK and allied troops in Kabul.

2 SCOTS will again be part of the UK Standby Battalion in 2018, contributing to an additional force of 2,800 military personnel to support civilian police forces, should they request it.

2 SCOTS are a light role infantry battalion based in Penicuik comprised of 414 Scottish infantry soldiers and 35 officers, supported by 53 Army personnel from other regiments and battalions.

---

## **Press release: Foreign Secretary visits Benghazi as part of drive to support Libyan political process**

During his visit the Foreign Secretary met Field Marshall Heftar, the Head of the Libyan National Army, as well as members of the House of Representatives representing Benghazi.

This was the first visit by a UK government minister to Benghazi since 2011 and the first time that the Foreign Secretary has met Field Marshall Heftar. It reflects UK efforts to reach out across Libya to persuade all parties to engage in the political process and work together to bring peace and stability to Libya.

Libya is likely to feature high on the international agenda during the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) week in September. Ahead of UNGA the Foreign Secretary will be working intensively with key partners to galvanise international support for a renewed effort to break the political deadlock in Libya and the UK will be at the forefront of efforts to support the new UN Special Representative, Ghassan Salamé to revitalise the political process.

Speaking from Benghazi, the Foreign Secretary said:

A secure and stable Libya, better able to deal with the threat from terrorism and the challenge of migration, is firmly in the UK interests.

The Libyan people need a stable state that can meet their fundamental economic and security needs. That requires all sides to compromise and work together. Only a united Libya can defeat the terrorists and smuggling networks who are exploiting the instability.

That's why we are reaching out to all sides in Libya in support of the United Nations work to amend the Libyan Political Agreement so that it delivers for all Libyans.

Field Marshall Heftar has a role to play in the political process. I urged him to adhere to the commitments he made during recent meetings in Paris, to respect a ceasefire, and to work with Mr Salamé in order to amend the Libyan Political Agreement.

Ultimately it will be for Libyans to decide what an acceptable compromise looks like. I have encouraged all sides to resolve their differences by dialogue, not conflict, and to respect international human rights law.

The Foreign Secretary's visit to Benghazi follows [meetings in Tripoli yesterday](#) with Prime Minister Fayyez Al-Serraj, the President of Libya's High State Council Abdurrahman Swehli and a visit to Misrata to meet with political leaders there. The Foreign Secretary met the President of the House of Representatives, Agila Salah, in Tobruk during [his last visit to Libya in May](#).

In Benghazi the Foreign Secretary also met with representatives from the Benghazi Free Zone and discussed opportunities for UK companies to help stabilise Libya. The project is designed to help diversify the city's economy and is already being supported by UK companies.