

[Press release: Foreign Secretary's 2017 Easter message](#)

Easter is a time of hope and new life for all Christians. This year my thoughts are with all those facing persecution and denied the right to worship freely, particularly Christians in the Middle East – and especially those who suffered in the terrible attacks on Palm Sunday in Egypt.

The UK will continue to stand with our international friends and partners as strong advocates for freedom of religion or belief for all. We must work to spread the mutual respect, tolerance and understanding of different faiths which bind us together as a global community and build a better, more peaceful world.

I send all Christians my warm wishes for a happy and peaceful holiday.

[News story: Easter 2017: Theresa May's message](#)

Easter is a moment to reflect and an important time for Christians and others to gather together with families and friends.

This year, after a period of intense debate over the right future for our country, there is a sense that people are coming together and uniting behind the opportunities that lie ahead.

For at heart, this country is one great union of people and nations with a proud history and a bright future. And as we face the opportunities ahead of us – the opportunities that stem from our decision to leave the European Union and embrace the world – our shared interests, our shared ambitions, and above all our shared values can, and must, bring us together.

This Easter I think of those values that we share – values that I learnt in my own childhood, growing up in a vicarage. Values of compassion, community, citizenship. The sense of obligation we have to one another.

These are values we all hold in common, and values that are visibly lived out everyday by Christians, as well as by people of other faiths or none.

I think of those who go out of their way to visit the sick or bereaved, providing comfort and guidance to many in our country at some of the most difficult moments in their lives. I think of the sacrifices and service of aid workers who put themselves in harm's way to bring much-needed relief in

war-torn parts of the world.

We should celebrate all these contributions and others like them, and the difference they make in our society and around the world.

In doing so, we should be confident about the role that Christianity has to play in the lives of people in our country.

And we should treasure the strong tradition that we have in this country of religious tolerance and freedom of speech.

We must continue to ensure that people feel able to speak about their faith, and that absolutely includes their faith in Christ. We must be mindful of Christians and religious minorities around the world who do not enjoy these same freedoms, but who practise their religion in secret and often in fear.

And we must do more to stand up for the freedom of people of all religions to practice their beliefs openly and in peace and safety.

So this Easter, whatever our faith, let us come together as a nation confident in our values, and united in our commitment to fulfil the obligations that we have to one another.

Let us work together to build that brighter future we want for our country. And let us together build a stronger, fairer Britain that truly does work for everyone. And let me wish you all a very happy Easter.

Press release: UK to protect 200 million people from tropical diseases

The UK will protect over 200 million people from the pain and disfigurement caused by treatable tropical diseases, International Development Secretary Priti Patel announced today.

Neglected Tropical Diseases, such as trachoma, Guinea worm and river blindness, are avoidable infections but can deform, disable, blind and even kill if left untreated. They affect over a billion people in the poorest and most marginalised communities in the world, stopping children going to school and parents going to work – costing developing economies billions of dollars every year in lost productivity and reducing overall global prosperity.

Britain is already leading the way in fighting these diseases, and will more than double its support over the next 5 years. This will mean a billion treatments for people at risk in the developing world as part of an international push to eliminate and eradicate these ailments for good.

The UK's total support package will:

- wipe out Guinea worm, which is transmitted through dirty water
- eliminate visceral leishmaniasis in Asia, a parasitic disease caused by infected sand-flies which destroy the internal organs
- prevent up to 400,000 cases of blindness caused by trachoma, the leading cause of infectious blindness in the world
- prevent tens of thousands of cases of disability caused by lymphatic filariasis, a mosquito-transmitted disease which can cause severe swelling of the lower limbs

The UK will also build on the great work done by our world-class universities, pharma companies and NGOs tackling Neglected Tropical Diseases by investing in pioneering research to drive the development of drugs that will control or eliminate them.

International Development Secretary Priti Patel said:

These diseases belong to the last century. They cause unimaginable suffering and pain to some of the world's poorest people, forcing them into a deeper cycle of poverty with no way out. Yet they are treatable.

The UK's support will protect over 200 million people from a future blighted by tropical disease and represents a huge leap towards ending this scourge.

Through our commitment, through our leading NGOs and pharma companies, through our world-class universities and researchers, Global Britain will continue to play a leading role in this fight. These diseases have been named 'neglected' for a reason, but I'm not prepared for them to be neglected any longer.

The doubling in UK funding announced today cements Britain's commitment ahead of the WHO conference in Geneva next week where the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, governments, NGOs, multilateral organisations and the private sector will come together in an effort to relegate Neglected Tropical Diseases to the history books.

Notes to editors

The UK will invest a total of £360 million on implementation programmes to tackle NTDs between 2017-2018 and 2021-22.

The £360 million breaks down as follows:

- £205 million of new support from 2017/18 to 2021/22

- £55 million for the next two years which forms part of an existing UK commitment made at the London Declaration in 2012
- £100 million allocated from the Ross Fund portfolio

The Ross Fund Portfolio is a £1 billion programme, which brings together UK Government investments to tackle the world's deadliest infectious diseases by developing, testing and delivering a range of new products (including vaccines, drugs and diagnostics).

The UK spend on NTD implementation between 2012 and 2016 averaged almost £30 million per year. This new investment will more than double the average annual spend on NTD implementation.

Research

In addition to the spend on implementation outlined above, the UK will invest the following in research and development for new technologies to fight NTDS with allocations also from the Ross Fund portfolio: £48m to the Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative, £30m to the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics and £10m to the Coalition for Operational Research on Neglected Tropical Diseases. These research programmes will support the development of drugs and diagnostics for Neglected Tropical Diseases and provide evidence to improve the delivery of NTD programmes.

[News story: HMS Sutherland escorts two Russian warships past UK coastline](#)

The Type 23 frigate located the two Russian ships in the early hours of Friday morning [14 Apr 17] as they sailed through the North Sea towards the Dover Straits.

The Steregushchiy-class corvettes, Soobrazitelny and Boiky, were joined later in the afternoon by a Russian support tanker and an ocean-going tug.

HMS Sutherland will continue to monitor the movements of the ships as they pass close to UK territorial waters today.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

HMS Sutherland is carefully marking these Russian ships as they pass close to UK waters. The Royal Navy maintains a vigilant watch and is always ready to keep Britain safe.

Royal Navy sailors on the Plymouth-based frigate keep watch on every movement of the ships, using state-of-the-art radars to track the course and speed of the ships as they pass close to the UK.

HMS Sutherland is escorting the Russian ships. Crown Copyright.

Commander Andrew Canale, the Commanding Officer of HMS Sutherland, said:

As one of the Royal Navy's high readiness units, HMS Sutherland is required to escort warships that approach the UK and this task is considered routine business for us.

It is vitally important the Royal Navy demonstrates its presence and commitment to the integrity of UK territorial waters as we work around the clock to secure the seas of our island nation.

As a high-readiness unit, HMS Sutherland may be called upon at any time to help prevent arms trafficking, people smuggling, conduct counter-terrorism operations, maritime search and rescue, or escort duties like those it is undertaking today.

[News story: £22.7 Million awarded to support older veterans](#)

The money will help organisations across the country to continue the invaluable work they do to support older veterans, which includes providing access to health care and carers, support with using the internet, and offering general advice.

Defence Minister Mark Lancaster said:

Our veterans have given so much for their country, and the Aged Veterans Fund is a way of us thanking our older veterans and ensuring they are cared for in later life.

One of the awards, totalling almost £4 million, went to Poppyscotland who manage 14 projects under its Unforgotten Forces programme, which provides wellbeing improvements to homes, helps to prevent veterans from feeling isolated, and support to those who suffer hearing problems.

Mark Bibbey Chief Executive at Poppyscotland said:

We want people to understand that key organisations in the area of support provision have joined forces to provide a more holistic provision for aged veterans. If a veteran is engaged with one organisation, for example, they can immediately be referred to another – or multiple consortium members if required. The essence is strength in numbers and we want the identity of our consortium to reflect this.

Age UK received £4.4 million for its Joining Forces scheme, which gives up to 12 weeks of tailored support for older veterans across the country, providing information and advice, practical support at home, access to social events and digital technology, and opportunities to become more active.

Steve Hampson, Head of Innovation & Programmes at Age UK said:

Joining Forces allows us to build on the work we already do across the country with older veterans and to reach out to those who may need more support. The grant means we can develop and test our services, and learn more about how best to support older veterans to get more out of later life. Our work has at its core what older people want to achieve for themselves.

£4.8 million was awarded to the Legion Healthy Living Portfolio, led by The Royal British Legion, to promote healthy living through a number of ways including local activities, research to improve services, and the training of specialist staff.

Steve Baynes, Head of Grants and Social Policy at The Royal British Legion said:

This grant will help the Legion continue its work with a network of charities, supporting the Armed Forces community through thick and thin. In particular, the grant will enable us and our partners to focus on achieving lasting social change for aged veterans. The veterans to benefit will be from a range of communities, including those who are at risk of becoming socially isolated, struggling with their physical or mental health, with hearing loss or in residential care. Many of the projects will also benefit carers and family members of those who Served, and some are research-oriented so that we, as a society, are better informed of current and emerging needs.

The ten charities to receive the awards are Age UK, Poppyscotland, The Royal British Legion, the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association, Cornwall Rural Community Charity, Rural Action Yorkshire, St Johns and Red Cross Defence Medical Welfare Service, Age Cymru, Seafarers UK, and Hospice UK.

The Aged Veterans Fund which was set up in 2015, had a total of £30 million

of LIBOR funds available to support older veterans.

It is designed to support non-core health, wellbeing, and social care needs for older veterans (born before 1 January 1950), including surviving Second World War veterans, those who undertook National Service, and other voluntary enlisted veterans who may need some focused support in relation to their health and social care needs.

This final round of awards comes after the Aged Veterans Fund initially granted £6.6 million to eight organisations in 2016.