

Press release: Patel: Syria progress at risk without new push in 2017

International Development Secretary Priti Patel today warned that international efforts must be redoubled if the much needed humanitarian pledges made at last year's London Syria Conference are to be delivered. Her call came as the UK published the latest data tracking the progress of all major donors against their promises. Following a 2 day visit to Lebanon and Jordan, Ms Patel welcomed the progress made in getting children into school and Syrian refugees into work – the focus of the 2016 Conference.

That includes new training and job opportunities for tens of thousands of Syrian refugees and more than 75,000 children enrolled in schools in Lebanon and Jordan. New funding has also significantly exceeded the \$6 billion total promised for 2016 at the Syria Conference, with \$8 billion allocated last year. International Development Secretary Priti Patel said:

This time last year, the world came together in the face of a relentlessly brutal conflict and agreed to actions that would give hope to Syrian refugees. Alongside the life-saving emergency support UK aid provides we have prioritised opportunities for refugees to work and ensure a generation of Syria children were not denied an education.

I have seen for myself in Lebanon and Jordan how that approach is working. UK aid is saving and transforming lives while giving refugees a reason to remain close to home rather than risking their lives in the crossing to Europe.

But the job is only half done. It is now critical that donors deliver on their long-term funding pledges. The protracted crisis in Syria is the defining humanitarian challenge of our time and history will judge us if the international community does not deliver on the support Syrian refugees and the region needs.

The International Development Secretary made clear that donors and host countries must significantly step up their efforts in 2017 to deliver on promises to create more than one million jobs and to ensure every child affected by the Syria crisis has the chance of an education. She has called for:

- donors to deliver predictable, multi-year funding so host countries can plan their long term response – that means ensuring the 2017 UN appeals are funded, but also providing new loans to support jobs and growth in the region
- governments in the region to work with key international financial institutions and UN agencies to develop a credible pipeline of job-

creating projects

- host countries to complete the reform of their economies to support business creation, remove remaining legislative restrictions on work, and attract investment
- donors, NGOs and education providers to work with regional governments to improve the quality of education through support to teacher training, school management and standards
- more support to non-formal education, so children who have been out of school can catch up quickly before joining formal school
- the international community and host countries to jointly tackle barriers that are stopping children attending school, including child labour and adolescent marriage.

The Syria Conference was held in London on February 4th 2016 and co-hosted by the UK. Over the last year, the UK has pushed other donors to keep pace in responding to the crisis and to deliver on their promises. That includes the publication today of the second edition of the Pledge Tracker Report, produced by the UK and designed to hold donors to account for the financial promises they made at the Syria Conference.

Although the report shows that total funding pledges made at the Syria Conference have been exceeded, it also highlights that more than a fifth of donors have either not delivered on their promises or are spending the money but not reporting back in a co-ordinated way. The Pledge Tracker Report is intended to highlight such failings and bring pressure on non-compliant donors to address them.

Along with new funding exceeding the \$6 billion pledged, other key results in the 12 months since the Syria Conference took place on 4 February 2016 include:

- work permits issued to 37,000 Syrians in Jordan, nearly a tenfold increase in the last year
- an innovative pilot programme with SMEs in Lebanon to deliver jobs for refugees and the poorest Lebanese
- a UK-supported trade deal that will allow Jordanian exporters easier access to the EU market
- more than 75,000 children enrolled in schools in Jordan and Lebanon in 2016, as well as teacher training and an increase in school places
- more than half a million children inside Syria receiving formal primary or secondary education thanks to UK support
- loans and grants to help set up Special Economic Zones and provide refugees with training and job opportunities in Jordan.

Notes to editors

1. The new figures set out in today's report show that both the UK's own pledge of £510 million as well as the total \$6 billion promised by the international community as a whole for 2016 have been exceeded. The UK has spent £550 million and Conference donors have now allocated \$8 billion, \$6.2 billion of which has already been spent. The report can be

seen on the [London Conference website](#).

2. The London Conference on Syria and the region took place on 4 February 2016 and was co-hosted by the UK, along with Germany, Kuwait, Norway and the United Nations. It brought together more than 60 countries and organisations, including 33 heads of state and Governments. In excess of \$12 billion was pledged by the international community – more than has ever been committed for a humanitarian crisis in a single day.
3. Historic ‘Compact’ agreements with Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan aimed to create at least 1.1 million jobs so that refugees have a livelihood closer to home, as well as creating jobs for local people and fuelling economic growth in the region. Refugee hosting countries agreed to ensure that no child missed out on the chance of an education as a result of the conflict, including a pledge to deliver education to all refugee and host community children in countries neighbouring Syria.
4. The UN has launched an \$8 billion appeal to meet humanitarian needs inside Syria and across the region in 2017, highlighting that the conflict in Syria remains one of the world’s biggest humanitarian crises. It is vital that all donors not only fully deliver on their pledges to date, but step up with the new funding needed for 2017.

[Press release: PM congratulates the Queen on her Sapphire Jubilee](#)

From:

First published:

6 February 2017

Part of:

Prime Minister Theresa May, on behalf of the nation, congratulated Her Majesty the Queen on her 65-year reign.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

Today’s Sapphire Jubilee marks yet another remarkable milestone for our remarkable Queen.

I know the nation will join with me today in celebrating and giving

thanks for the lifetime of service Her Majesty the Queen has given to our country and to the Commonwealth. It is a testament to her selfless devotion to the nation that she is not marking becoming the first monarch to reign for 65 years with any special celebration, but instead getting on with the job to which she has dedicated her life.

She has truly been an inspiration to all of us and I am proud, on behalf of the nation, to offer our humble thanks and congratulations on celebrating her Sapphire Jubilee.

'Together We're Stronger'

6 February 2017

Scottish Labour is to hold its annual conference in Perth this month, unveiling the theme **'Together We're Stronger'**.

Leader Kezia Dugdale will welcome UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, London Mayor Sadiq Khan, UK Labour deputy leader Tom Watson and other high-profile speakers to the Fair City.

To attend the conference, click [here](#).

As part of the 'Together We're Stronger' theme, Scottish Labour will firmly oppose the SNP's divisive plans for a second independence referendum and the austerity of the Tories and the SNP that is dividing communities.

The conference will be held in Perth Concert Hall between February 24 and 26.

Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said:

"I'm delighted that Scottish Labour is returning to Perth this year for our annual conference.

"We always receive a great welcome, and the hundreds of Labour delegates attending will help to boost the local economy. I look forward to welcoming Jeremy Corbyn, Sadiq Khan, Tom Watson and our other speakers to the city.

"The last few years have been among the most dramatic in UK political history. The full implications for our country may not be known for some time, however one thing is clear now more than ever – people need a strong Scottish Labour Party focused on growing our economy, investing in public services and giving everybody a fair chance in life.

"Our country is divided enough, which is why Scottish Labour will firmly oppose the SNP's reckless plans for a second independence referendum.

Together, our country can be stronger.”

UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said:

“I will be bringing a message that only a Labour government would hand back wealth and control to people and communities.

“That only a Labour Government would put the public back into our economy, fix our rigged economy and break the grip of vested interests to help the many not the few.

“That only a Labour Government would redistribute power and wealth and shrink the gap in income and wealth, making sure the corporations and the richest pay their fair share of taxes.

“And that only a Labour Government would end the race to the bottom in the jobs market and guarantee education and employment rights for all.”

London Mayor Sadiq Khan said:

“I’m very much looking forward to visiting Perth for Scottish Labour’s annual conference.

“I’m working to grow the relationship between London and the great Scottish cities such as Perth, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen. London and Scotland share many of the same challenges following the Brexit vote.

“Kezia Dugdale has set out a welcome and ambitious vision for our United Kingdom. As Mayor of London, I am forging a new cross-party consensus on further devolution to the UK capital.

“As in Scotland, this is about protecting jobs, wealth and prosperity. Londoners should have more control over how taxes raised in our city are spent.

“The entire country will benefit from this – if we increase investment, London and the UK will grow.”

[Press release: HMRC wins ‘alternative money’ lap dance case](#)

From:

First published:

6 February 2017

Wiltonpark LTD faces a tax bill estimated at more than half a million pounds.

Wiltonpark LTD, owner of five London-based 'gentlemen's clubs' branded 'Secrets', has lost its tax battle with HM Revenue and Customs and now faces a tax bill estimated at more than half a million pounds.

Wiltonpark issued vouchers to their customers to pay the dancers and the club then charged the self-employed dancers a 20% fee to cash-in the 'Secrets' branded 'money'. The club argued that the fee charged didn't attract VAT as they were simply holding the money safely on the dancers' behalf – HMRC disagreed.

The Court of Appeal has agreed with HMRC that the club's income from charging dancers for redeeming the vouchers is in fact taxable.

Jim Harra, Director General, Customer Strategy and Tax Design, HMRC, said:

HMRC always intervenes when it seems to us that tax due under the law is not being paid. This is a prime example. Our work ensures that everyone pays the tax due, creating a level playing field for all businesses.

We're investigating clubs who use similar schemes and there's a potential tax liability running into the millions at stake – money that is needed to pay for the UK's vital public services.

1. Please find a link to the judgement which outlines the technicalities in relation to this case [here](#)
2. HMRC believed this business model sidestepped VAT payments due on the redemption fees charged. The clubs argued that the charge amounted to keeping the money secure for the dancers and therefore was exempt for VAT purposes.
3. However, the Court of appeal case ruled against the clubs and agreed with HMRC that the charges the club put on the dancers who redeemed the vouchers was taxable.
4. Follow HMRC's Press Office on Twitter [@HMRCpressoffice](#)
5. HMRC's [Flickr channel](#)

[Speech: British High Commissioner's speech at the launch of the African Science Academy](#)

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be with you today to mark the

official launch of the African Science Academy in Ghana.

Every single person here has, in some way, contributed to the success of this moment. I think you will agree with me when I say that the young women of the African Science Academy (ASA) are simply brilliant. They are intelligent, articulate, and passionate about the development of their continent. I cannot wait to see what they go on to achieve; and how they inspire other young women to achieve similar things through their example.

I first heard about plans to create the African Science Academy when I met Dr. Tom Ilube in 2015. Tom was visiting as part of a delegation with the Lord Mayor of London. I was struck by his vision and determination to launch Africa's first STEM school for girls. I was equally impressed to learn how quickly his ambitious idea became a reality. Last year, Tom was named the most influential black British person, largely due to his work in education and philanthropy. This exceptional school exists because of his imagination and impressive resolve.

You can feel that something special is happening here. To the pioneering 24 girls of ASA, you must be so very proud of yourselves. All of you took a leap of faith when you decided to join a brand-new school, particularly those who moved countries to do so, perhaps leaving home for the first time. From your academic excellence to your outstanding confidence, you are all role-models. Role models for your siblings, your peers, and for the millions of young girls across the continent who fight for their right for a quality education. ASA students – you are also the future. You have shown yourself to be ambassadors for girls studying science. You are the future engineers, computer scientists, professors and astronauts of this exciting continent. And you are part of the future in reducing machoism, misogyny, discrimination and prejudice against women – that is, by men against women.

To develop, African leaders need to prioritise and invest in a strong educational infrastructure. Africa has the youngest population in the world, with over 200 million people aged between 15 to 24. We need our young people to be equipped with skills relevant to the technological era. It is the youth who will develop the solutions to the development issues of our countries. From climate change to agriculture; from software development to finding life-changing cures – a knowledge of technology and the sciences is crucial.

Next week, the United Nations will celebrate the International Day of Women and Girls in Science to promote female inclusion and participation in the sciences. Internationally, there is a strong gender imbalance in the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Girls and women continue to face unique and significant barriers in accessing STEM education, such as gendered discrimination and lack of encouragement. ASA aims to bridge this gap in Africa by providing gifted girls with access to new opportunities and an excellent pre-university education. ASA is leading the way in its efforts to prepare girls to compete and achieve in a male-dominated world. And that is the key – no country, no society can ever hope to develop fully or to realise all its potential if it systemically discriminates against half of its population.

Indeed, we know that women and girls typically make up just over half of most national populations, including here on the African continent. Improving the lives of girls and women is also a key priority for the UK government. In 2016, the UK Department for International Development launched a new initiative: Leave No Girl Behind, to deliver quality education to disadvantaged girls. We believe that access to a good education, in a safe environment, significantly improves the life chances of girls.

Through DFID, right here in Ghana, we have a Complementary Basic Education programme designed to help children who have dropped out of, or who never enrolled in, primary school to have a second chance at gaining those vital literacy and numeracy skills. So far, that programme has enabled over 150,000 children, half of them girls, to have a second chance at education; and well over 90% of those have both completed that programme and transferred back into mainstream education.

A second DFID Ghana programme is called Girls' Participatory Approaches to Student Access or G-PASS which addresses the household economic challenge, particularly in Ghana's poorest northern regions, of putting girls through secondary school, by providing an incentive and scholarship package for vulnerable girls in the 75 most deprived districts of Ghana, while helping Colleges of Education to improve the quality of teaching they receive. So far, over 87,000 girls have received such scholarship packages, with over 70,000 of them completing Junior High School and over 16,000 Senior High School, representing a significant cadre of educated girls and young women in this country's most disadvantaged areas.

We are proud of that work, and proud, too, to see private initiatives like ASA bear fruit. We are happy to be a supporter of ASA and the brilliant work that is happening here. Proud that Ghana is the country where this wonderful project is located. And proud that ASA students are completing the gold-standard Cambridge International A-Levels, representing the potential of British qualifications to stretch the minds of Africa's best and brightest.

ASA was built by an incredible team, and so much hard work has gone into making it a success. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage companies and individuals to support the development of ASA, whether financially or through in-kind support. We all want to see ASA grow from strength to strength. With your help, ASA can build a large 21st century campus and offer scholarships to hundreds of bright girls who might benefit from this opportunity. Such feats do not happen by magic. It requires the power of people and the collaboration of partners invested in girls' education and Africa at large.

I would also encourage ASA to share its experience with other schools and educational organisations. You are doing things differently and nurturing a new generation of empowered young women. Share your stories with others. Inspire other schools to encourage girls to pursue subjects like physics and computing. Amplify the voices of your students, who will be the change-makers of tomorrow. We want to hear their voice.

Thank you again for inviting me as guest of honour to this special occasion.

Congratulations to the Founder, Dr Tom Ilube; Headteacher, Ms Efua Adabie; the staff and students at ASA; and all of ASA's committed supporters. In a few years, ASA will have a strong alumni network of hundreds of young women who will be leaders in their fields of expertise. Good luck to you all on this ambitious and worthy endeavour.