

Press release: UK aid pledges “vital lifeline” for Syrians

UK pledges aid for Syrians to deliver food and clean drinking water, medical care, vaccinations, and education for children

News story: New funding to research health impact of climate change

Health Minister Nicola Blackwood has announced up to £56 million funding for research into the biggest challenges facing public health.

Climate change leads to more extremes of hot and cold weather, which can have a serious impact on the health of the nation. Pollution can cause chronic conditions such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, as well as lung cancer, leading to reduced life expectancy.

Universities in England are invited to apply to be selected to partner with Public Health England (PHE) to form the next wave of Health Protection Research Units (HPRUs) funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR).

An open competition will be held to select the most promising research proposals from academics. They will be funded from April 2020 to March 2025.

The current HPRUs played a central role in responding to major events including the Novichok, Ebola and overseas terror incidents. In 2017 to 2018, the HPRUs were involved in 413 studies and 514 peer review publications. They supported a total of 254 PhD students and secured £50 million funding from other sources.

Projects funded by earlier rounds of funding include:

- helping to screen British nationals caught up in overseas terror attacks for mental health conditions and offering treatment when appropriate
- developing a way to quickly screen people who believed they had been affected by the nerve agent incident in Salisbury in March 2018. This involved using biomarker data to determine within minutes whether a person had been infected

- developing a tool using genomics to diagnose tuberculosis more quickly and accurately. The device allows researchers to predict the resistance and transmissibility of the disease by analysing its genome automatically. It has been adopted by PHE and is the first example of genomic-based diagnostic service in routine use worldwide

Health Minister Nicola Blackwood said:

From the eradication of smallpox, record low smoking rates and ever-increasing life expectancy, the UK's public health record is a roll call of successes which have saved the lives of millions.

Air pollution can have a devastating impact on our health and is a key issue that we need to tackle through research. We've just seen the warmest February day on record and we have a duty to the public to consider the health challenges climate change brings.

All of our successes to date would have been impossible without world-leading research conducted by some of the best minds at outstanding research hubs up and down the country.

This new investment, as part of our [Long Term Plan for the NHS](#), will unlock further solutions to some of the biggest challenges facing the health and care system over the next 5 years, aiming to drastically improve all of our lives.

Professor Paul Cosford, PHE Medical Director, said:

The NIHR Health Protection Research Units are a globally unique and hugely successful initiative. Having access to the best available, most reliable evidence is critical in supporting PHE's mission to protect the public, and the work of the HPRUs has had a key role to play.

We look forward to working closely with university colleagues to craft research programmes that will have a positive impact on the nation's health over the next 5 years and beyond.

Professor Chris Whitty, NIHR lead and Chief Scientific Adviser for the Department of Health and Social Care, said:

Tackling threats to public health like air pollution and antimicrobial resistance relies on cutting-edge research and up-to-date evidence. The new NIHR Health Protection Research Units will lead the way in producing the evidence needed to inform policy and safeguard public health, as well as building research capacity in this important field so that we can tackle the challenges of the

future.

Speech: We call for an end to the use of sexual violence in South Sudan

Thank you, Madam President and thank you SRSB Shearer and Ms. Jial for your briefings.

Today, on International Women's Day, I'd like to focus on the devastating impact that the conflict in South Sudan has had on women and girls. In five years of fighting, the conflict has claimed nearly 400,000 lives, driven 4.3 million people from their homes and 1.4 million to the edge of famine. And as we have heard from you today, Ms. Jial, it is often women and girls who have borne the brunt of the violence. Women, including those in their 60s and girls as young as eight, have been subjected to brutal acts of rape and sexual assault. Yet despite the depth of the horror, time and time again perpetrators are not held to account. This impunity drives the cycle of violence.

Despite the signing of a Peace Agreement in September and the welcome reduction in political violence, there has been a concerning uptick in intercommunal violence and sexual violence.

We are particularly concerned by the recent UN reports warning of the normalisation and persistence of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by fighters from all sides including armed militia groups that have been mobilised and used by the parties in recent offensives and frequently, directly or indirectly, encouraged by Commanders. Despite calls for the Government of South Sudan to take action to identify those responsible and hold them to account, this has not happened. Instead, in some instances, the organisations that provide support to the victims have come under attack by the Government.

We cannot accept these brutal acts committed against mothers, sisters and daughters and we cannot allow impunity to persist. So on this day above all, and on each and every day, in order to support a lasting peace we call for an end to the pernicious use of sexual violence and the culture of impunity in South Sudan. We call on the Government to uphold its responsibilities to protect civilians, and to thoroughly investigate all instances of sexual violence and bring those responsible for these crimes to justice. And we must all support organisations to help survivors as Ms. Jial has suggested and continue to exert pressure for accountability, whether through national courts, the Hybrid Court, or through international sanctions.

But I do not just want to focus on the disproportionate impact of the

conflict on women and girls. It is also important to focus on the crucial role women have to play in delivering a sustainable peace. The United Kingdom has consistently pressed for greater inclusion of women in political and peace processes, and we welcome the contributions of brave civil society actors, including those present today. We welcomed the commitments made in the September Peace Agreement to at least 35% executive representation. But this has not yet translated into action, and we call on the parties to deliver on their promises. Not for some abstract concept of quotas, but because we know that when women meaningfully participate in peace processes, the resulting agreement is more likely to last.

We are grateful that Ms. Jial has been able to join us today. Civil society has played a vital role in the peace process by representing the views and voices of the people of South Sudan, and we support your call for greater engagement with these communities. We are therefore concerned that the space for civil society continues to shrink, and we encourage all parties to engage in open dialogue with civil society organisations, particularly those representing women.

Finally, it is important to register that this Secretary-General's report is the last 90-day report before the May transition date envisaged in the September Peace Agreement. We welcome the progress made to date and reductions in overall violence as set out by SRSF Shearer. The UK remains committed to supporting those working towards peace. But like the SRSF, we are concerned by the lack of progress on some of the most difficult issues alongside increases in intercommunal and sexual violence.

Conflict is the main driver of South Sudan's man-made humanitarian and protection crisis. Peace is the only solution. It is vital that the Security Council, the region, and the parties to the conflict do not allow this loss of momentum to persist and to destroy the hope of progress that September's agreement brought. We urge all parties to bring renewed momentum to ensure the deal is implemented in full. We must work together or risk failing to deliver a future free of violence, for the people, including women and girls, of South Sudan.

Speech: PM: We can deliver the change you voted for

In the Summer of 2016, people in Grimsby voted for change.

You voted to leave the European Union and take back control of our borders, laws, money and trade.

You voted to leave the Common Fisheries Policy which has failed this famous fishing town, like so many of Britain's coastal communities. And you voted

for real improvements in your local area, as part of a country that truly works for everyone.

Almost three years on, I know many of you are fed up that instead of delivering this mandate for change, Parliament remains deadlocked debating it. I share that frustration. It is profoundly wrong that having given the decision to you, and having been elected to Parliament in 2017 on manifestos overwhelmingly committed to leaving with a deal, the question of whether your MPs will deliver on that referendum is still hanging in the balance.

That is why the Meaningful Vote next Tuesday is such a critical moment. MPs will have to decide whether to back the Brexit deal – or to reject it.

Back it, and the UK will leave the European Union. Reject it and we do not know what the consequences will be. We may not leave the EU for many months; we may leave without the protections that the deal provides; or we may never leave at all.

The deal before Parliament next week ends free movement, ends our vast payments to the EU and ends the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in the UK.

It enables a harbour like Grimsby , the largest by tonnage in the UK, to expand its operation as we strike free trade deals with countries all over the world. It frees our farmers from the Common Agricultural Policy and means restoring full sovereign control of our waters so we can decide as an independent coastal state who fishes in them.

Backing the deal on Tuesday also helps address many of the concerns held by those who voted to remain. A close economic partnership will be good for our economy, protecting jobs and investment. A close security partnership will help keep us safe from crime and terrorism.

While leaving with a deal will help keep our United Kingdom together, whereas polling shows that support for both Scottish independence and a united Ireland would increase if we leave without a deal.

Last month, MPs made clear they could get behind the deal provided there were legally binding changes to the Northern Ireland backstop. Since then we have been working around the clock to secure an improved deal. We have also created further protections for workers' rights, including proposals for a single labour market enforcement body.

If MPs reject the deal on Tuesday, then on Wednesday they will have to decide whether to leave with no deal on 29 March.

If, as previous votes suggest, Parliament rejects that, the second choice will be to delay Brexit. The prolonged uncertainty would threaten jobs and investment and it would mean months more arguing about Brexit when we should be focusing on the other issues people in Grimsby care about like our NHS, schools, policing and housing.

I want us to move on and build a better more prosperous future in a way that

I believe can unite “leave” and “remain” voters alike.

I want us to build on Greater Grimsby’s Town Deal – the first of its kind in the UK and an inspiration for the £1.6 billion Stronger Towns Fund we launched this week – delivering a stronger and more diverse local economy, with improved housing and education.

And I want us to build on yesterday’s Offshore Wind Sector Deal, which will help Grimsby continue to develop as one of Europe’s leading centres for off-shore wind.

To achieve this will require the support of those who, like me, voted to remain but believe in honouring the decision the British people took and believe leaving with a good deal is much better than leaving with no deal.

And it will require the support of those who voted to leave, but who accept that compromise is necessary if we are to bring our country back together.

By coming together and backing the deal next week, we can deliver the change you voted for. We can build the stronger communities which must be the real legacy of the vote to leave. We can stand as one united country ready to face the future together and we can make a success of it.

This was originally published in the Grimsby Telegraph.

Speech: Lord Ahmad speech marking International Women’s Day 2019

Your Royal Highness, your Excellency, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is a huge honour and great privilege for me to be here today. I offer my sincere thanks to Her Royal Highness, The Countess of Wessex for your support and indeed for acting as our process host today.

Even more importantly, I thank you for associating yourself with what you rightly describe as “the cause” of Women, Peace and Security.

It is undoubtedly a truly worthy cause, and one in which the United Kingdom is proud to be take a leading role.

So I am equally delighted, your Royal Highness that you have agreed to become a champion for it. Your established international profile, your insights as I’ve already found invaluable, in helping amplify the voices of women peacebuilders around the world.

And therefore I look forward to working closely with you – starting with a very busy two days we’ve got planned in New York next week.

I am also delighted and pleased that we will be joined there by Visaka, who has just shared her moving testimony with us today.

If I may Visaka, as I said to you before we entered this hall – your courage, your inspiration, your determination and leadership is an inspiration to us all. If I may, I was particularly struck by how you were not satisfied with peacebuilding on your own doorstep, as you said the conflict came to your doorstep: but you wanted to share your experiences with others around the world.

And I know that your work, your inspiration across the globe through networks, alliances and sisterhoods, with a few brothers thrown in as well, sharing your experience, courage and strength. We are pleased we are lending this experience to the Women Mediators across the Commonwealth Initiative, which the UK is delighted to be supporting.

2020 Anniversary

Voices like yours, and the voices of many here today and beyond, will be crucial in determining what we collectively seek to achieve in the lead-up to the twentieth anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 18 months' time.

Quite rightly, the people driving the agenda are those with first-hand experience, primary experience of understanding conflict.

If our troubled world is to enjoy lasting peace, it is vital that women have the agency, that their voices are heard and there is a real gender perspective which is integrated not into partially our work, into all our work.

If I may now, more than ever before, the world needs women to lend their insights, their experience and valuable perspectives to efforts to tackle conflict.

Support for Peacebuilding

There are across the world so many women around the world who like Visaka, have the motivation, skills and tenacity to help build sustainable peace, and indeed bring stability and prosperity across different communities.

I have had the great honour, indeed privilege to have met some incredibly inspiring women on my travels, working to bring peace in some of the most challenging, the world's most hostile environments. Indeed some of them we welcome here today. May I take this opportunity again to salute your courage, your energy, your inspiration, and example and indeed determination in seeking peace across the globe.

Each and every one of you are living proof that no woman needs to be 'given' a voice. You have a voice. What matters is that voice is heard, and that the world listens to what you have to say.

That is why we must use all the tools at our disposal to identify these incredible women, give them greater profile, and amplify their voices, so that they can put their unique qualities to work by engaging meaningfully in peacebuilding.

And that is why your Royal Highness, I welcome your voice to this cause. It will be a voice which will be an inspiration to so many across the globe.

Conclusion

To conclude if I may – I wish to thank you once again your Royal Highness for agreeing to champion the work and joining with these courageous women from across the globe. Bringing your convening power and personal passion and determination which I've already seen, will be inspirational for us all. And I also thank all of you, many of you I've worked with on this important agenda for your collaboration, your commitment, at times in the early months your persuasion and utmost dedication to the cause of Women Peace and Security. And I'm proud that I'm part of that cause.

To finish though, it is our collective responsibility it is our common duty to ensure that we all do our part to ensure Women's voices are heard. I know, as we've already seen, Her Royal Highness, The Countess of Wessex I myself as a Minister responsible in Her Majesty's Government and the Prime Minister's Special Representative for preventing sexual violence. The whole of her majesty's government, our country, the United Kingdom are all committed to this goal. Indeed, each and every one of us in this room and beyond are committed to achieving virtuous and noble goals in this cause. So my final point is this, let us all work together, collaboratively and collectively and let's go ahead and deliver it.