

Press release: Foreign Secretary visits Yemen to bolster support for UN peace process

Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt has visited Yemen as part of a wider tour of the Gulf.

News story: Defence Secretary announces £11million boost to chemical defences

On the eve of the Salisbury Novichok poisoning anniversary, the Defence Secretary has allocated £11million of additional funding to bolster the UK's response to chemical attacks.

News story: Defence Secretary announces £11million boost to chemical defences

The range of measures announced by the Defence Secretary include:

- Developing plans to deploy drones and robots into potentially hazardous areas, putting personnel in less danger and identifying threats faster.
- Boosting the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory's ability to analyse substances, by investing in new technical capabilities.
- Keeping the UK at the forefront of medical advances to combat the effects of chemical agents.

The decision means the UK will remain a global leader in Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) defence. Around the world, there is evidence of these threats increasing and it is vital the UK can meet them.

Last year, the Syrian regime launched chemical attacks on its own people, which led to the UK striking several weapons facilities alongside American

and French partners. At home, the UK has seen the longest chemical clean-up in living memory, in Salisbury and Amesbury.

Unmanned vehicles will conduct more testing and identification, decreasing the risk posed to humans through contact with nerve agents. This capability will be developed over the coming years.

The funding will increase the speed and accuracy with which the potential origins of substances can be analysed, helping the authorities identifying attackers faster and improving public safety.

It will also allow faster decontamination and recovery of vehicles and assets, as well as improvements to counter radiological and nuclear threats.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

After the Novichok attack in Salisbury a year ago, the nation turned to the Armed Forces and expert scientists. From the investigation to the clean-up, the military and everyone involved in the operation have worked tirelessly to decontaminate the streets of Salisbury.

Britain and its allies have also demonstrated that they will take a stand against the use of chemical weapons, from the sanctions enforced on Russia following the reckless use of Novichok to the strikes against the chemicals used by Syrian regime.

We recognise we need resilience to face evolving threats which is why we have invested £11million into ensuring we have a world-leading capability.

Standing Joint Commander (UK) Lieutenant General Tyrone Urch said

The decontamination work in Salisbury and Amesbury over the last 12 months has been a complex and daunting challenge for the Armed Forces.

All of the personnel involved demonstrated adaptability, professionalism, resilience and courage; they have been absolutely first-class and lived up to their world-leading reputation. This investment will allow us to further improve our expertise and, most importantly, keep the public safe.

This funding will be available in the new financial year and invested

straight into programmes that will benefit DSTL scientists and the Armed Forces. It is in addition to the £48million announced by the Defence Secretary last year to develop a new Chemical Weapons Defence Centre.

Press release: World Wildlife Day: A helping hand to turtles and mangroves

Government-funded projects to protect the world's turtles and mangroves have been praised by the Environment Minister on World Wildlife Day.

Today (Sunday 3 March) marks [United Nations World Wildlife Day](#). The theme for this year is 'Life below water: for people and planet'.

One of the key animals whose plight is being highlighted is the turtle, targeted for their eggs, meat and shells. Turtles have also suffered from habitat loss due to construction on coastlines.

The UK Government's [Darwin Initiative](#) has supported the work of Flora and Fauna International to help these important sea creatures. One such project to protect leatherback and hawksbill turtles in Nicaragua has achieved a significant reduction in the illegal harvesting of their eggs.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

World Wildlife Day is a chance to celebrate the wonderful individuals and organisations in coastal communities around the globe who are dedicated to protecting our flora and fauna.

I am pleased to see this successful work to protect turtles in Nicaragua. The Darwin Initiative is critical in supporting this type of international conservation project.

The UK is also a global leader in providing support and finance to help coastal communities protect and enhance vital resources, such as mangroves. This overseas support is critical to delivering on our ambition to be the first generation to leave our environment in a better state than we found it.

[Flora & Fauna International](#) has been working to protect marine turtles in Nicaragua for 15 years and a key part of that work has been ensuring local communities are central to conservation initiatives.

The most recent project received £385,617 from the UK Government's [Darwin Initiative](#) in 2017 and has been achieving significant success for young turtle hatchlings.

Joanna Elliot, Senior Director, Conservation Partnerships, [Fauna & Flora International](#) said:

In Nicaragua we have worked with our community partners to bring about a 95% reduction in the number of turtle eggs that are illegally harvested and ensured more than 190,000 leatherback and hawksbill hatchlings have begun their ocean lives that otherwise would have been lost.

Support from the Darwin Initiative has been critical in helping us find a solution that has not only benefitted biodiversity but also directly improved the lives and livelihoods of local people through jobs and business opportunities in tourism and related sectors.

A video of the project helping turtles in Nicaragua is available to view [here](#).

2019 marks the Government's Year of Green Action, a year-long drive to help people to connect with, protect and enhance nature.

The Darwin Initiative is a grants scheme that helps to protect biodiversity and the natural environment around the globe. These projects reflect the UK Government's [25 Year Environment Plan](#) commitments to protect the marine environment, to secure the benefits of biodiversity for the poorest communities and to help prevent the extinction of species.

Blue Forests

In 2016, the UK Government funded the establishment of the 'Blue Forests' initiative run by British organisation [Blue Ventures](#). The aim of the project is to reduce deforestation of mangroves habitat, create new sustainable livelihoods, support community health and women's empowerment and increase climate resilience in coastal communities.

This initiative has been funded through the UK's [International Climate Finance](#) programme and plays a crucial role in addressing the global challenge of Climate Change.

So far, Blue Ventures has worked with over 6,000 coastal people, empowering local management of 160,000 hectares (ha) of mangrove forests at six different sites across three countries, and partner villages have replanted 652,000 mangrove trees.

Dr Alasdair Harris, Executive Director, [Blue Ventures Conservation](#), said:

World Wildlife Day is a rallying reminder of the foundational importance of our planet's biodiversity to all life on Earth. Wildlife underpins all life, and its loss imperils our own future.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the mangrove forests of the

tropical Indian and Pacific oceans. These so-called blue forests protect shorelines, absorb atmospheric carbon dioxide, and form the foundation of fisheries and marine ecosystems that underpin coastal economies for hundreds of millions of people.

Defra's work is on the frontline of efforts to reverse mangrove loss – innovating scalable approaches to conservation that deliver meaningful benefits to people and nature.

Projects like these are illustrative of the 'win-win' approach encouraging sustainable livelihoods whilst conserving some of the world's iconic and endangered species and landscapes, which benefits us all.

Press release: World Wildlife Day: A helping hand to turtles and mangroves

UN World Wildlife Day celebrates the best of conservation action around the globe including two UK Government supported projects