

Press release: UK Government rallies Commonwealth to unite on marine waste

The Government has announced the end to the sale of plastic straws, drink stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds at the start of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit.

The Prime Minister will also call on all other Commonwealth countries to join in the fight against plastic pollution.

Subject to the consultation, which the Environment Secretary will launch later this year, the Government is prepared to ban the sale of these items in England under plans to protect our rivers and seas and meet our 25 Year Environment Plan ambition to eliminate avoidable plastic waste. This forms part of the wider government waste strategy – including the government's current call for evidence on how we can use the tax system to address single use plastics waste.

In order to eliminate these items from use the Government will work with industry to develop alternatives and ensure there is sufficient time to adapt. It will also propose excluding plastic straws for medical reasons.

Single-use plastic items such as straws, stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds have a significant impact on our environment, both on land and in our seas and rivers when they are either littered or discarded incorrectly after use – with a recent study showing 8.5 billion plastic straws are thrown away each year in the UK.

The announcement comes as the Prime Minister has urged all Commonwealth countries to sign-up to the newly-formed Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance and take action, be this by a ban on microbeads, a commitment to cutting down on single use plastic bags, or other steps to eliminate avoidable plastic waste.

To drive this forward the UK government has committed a £61.4 million package of funding to boost global research and help countries across the Commonwealth stop plastic waste from entering the oceans in the first place.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

Plastic waste is one of the greatest environmental challenges facing the world, which is why protecting the marine environment is central to our agenda at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

The UK government is a world leader on this issue, and the British public have shown passion and energy embracing our plastic bag charge and microbead ban, and today we have put forward ambitious plans to further reduce plastic waste from straws, stirrers and

cotton buds.

Alongside our domestic action, this week we are rallying Commonwealth countries to join us in the fight against marine plastics, with £61.4million funding for global research and to improve waste management in developing countries.

The Commonwealth is a unique organisation, with a huge diversity of wildlife, environments and coastlines. Together we can effect real change so that future generations can enjoy a natural environment that is healthier than we currently find it.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Single-use plastics are a scourge on our seas and lethal to our precious environment and wildlife so it is vital we act now. We have already banned harmful microbeads and cut plastic bag use, and now we want to take action on straws, stirrers and cotton buds to help protect our marine life.

We've already seen a number of retailers, bars and restaurants stepping up to the plate and cutting plastic use, however it's only through government, businesses and the public working together that we will protect our environment for the next generation – we all have a role to play in turning the tide on plastic.

There are over 150 million tonnes of plastic in the world's oceans and every year one million birds and over 100,000 sea mammals die from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste.

Today's announcement is the latest move in the government crackdown on plastic, following the plastic microbeads ban hailed as one of the world's strongest bans, the 5p plastic bag charge – which has led to 9 billion fewer bags distributed, and last month's pledge to introduce a deposit return scheme, or DRS, for single use drinks containers, including bottles and cans. It sits alongside the 25 Year Environment Plan commitment to eliminate avoidable plastic waste. The Treasury has also launched a call for evidence on how charges and changes to the tax system could be used to reduce single use plastics.

[Press release: PM meeting with New](#)

Zealand Prime Minister: 18 April 2018

The Prime Minister held a bilateral meeting with the New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern at Downing Street earlier today.

They agreed the bond between the UK and New Zealand was unique and enduring, based on friendship and shared values, and underpinned by strong security, prosperity and people-to-people links.

The Prime Minister said New Zealand was an indispensable partner for the UK, noting the relationship has always been important, but is arguably even more vital today, given our shared commitment to free trade and protecting the rules-based international system.

The Prime Minister thanked Prime Minister Ardern for New Zealand's support over the attack against the Assad regime, and following the chemical nerve agent attack in Salisbury. They agreed it was essential to reassert the international norm against chemical weapons use.

They agreed that part of reinvigorating the Commonwealth was about fostering more intra-Commonwealth support, and to explore the possibility of working together on development assistance in the Pacific region.

They also discussed the bilateral trade and investment relationship, agreeing that UK-New Zealand trade working group discussions were progressing well and confirming our shared ambition to form a new bilateral UK-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement once we have left the EU. They welcomed the approach agreed at the March European Council to provide continuity during the implementation period for international agreements, which could be swiftly transitioned into new bilateral agreements once the implementation period ends.

Press release: PM meeting with Canadian Prime Minister: 18 April 2018

The Prime Minister held a bilateral meeting with the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at Downing Street earlier today.

They agreed that Canada's G7 Presidency was coming at a crucial time, and would be an opportunity to build on themes discussed at CHOGM and to show the world the value of a multilateral approach.

Prime Minister May thanked Prime Minister Trudeau for Canada's strong support for the UK in response to the use of a nerve agent on the streets of Salisbury.

They agreed the decision by the US, UK and France to take action against the Assad regime's ability to launch chemical weapons attacks was the right thing to do, and necessary to uphold the global prohibition on chemical weapons use. They agreed to continue standing side by side to uphold international norms and the rules which keep us safe.

They agreed the bilateral trade and investment relationship would continue to go from strength to strength, welcoming the approach agreed at the March European Council to provide continuity during the implementation period for international agreements such as CETA, which should be swiftly transitioned to form a new bilateral arrangement between the UK and Canada once the implementation period has ended.

Prime Minister Trudeau said he believed that, post-Brexit, the UK and Canada Governments would be able to move in rapid fashion towards a new trade deal that will be particularly beneficial to both countries.

Speech: Humanitarian situation in Syria

Before I start may I make a request to the Secretariat? It would be very helpful I think for the Council to have either a briefing or a brief account of where the OPCW, FFM and the UNDSS currently are and what their forward plans are and if there has been any delay in their getting into Douma an account of what has caused that delay. So if it were possible to have that within the next 24 hours Mr President, I would be very grateful.

Turning to the issue before us in this session, I'd like to join others in thanking the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing.

It's a pity that some speakers have used today's account of the humanitarian situation to make political points and I recall Mr. President, an English philosopher Edmund Burke who said; "It's generally a popular error to imagine that the loudest complainers for the public are those who are most anxious for its welfare." And I think that might apply rather too much today.

We're talking about Resolution 2401. I don't have the full compendium of the British government's activities on the humanitarian side in Syria but I can say that in 2017 we gave a \$160 million to the UN appeal and in 2018 we are giving \$138 million. This compares to \$5.5 million in 2017 from Russia and as far as I know zero in 2018. We are one of the top three donors to the Syrian humanitarian response plan and we are the second largest bilateral donor to the humanitarian response in Syria since 2011.

To date we have committed \$3.5 billion dollars in response to the Syria crisis and this Mr. President, is the United Kingdom's largest ever response

to a single humanitarian crisis. We encourage all of us to do what we can to support the UN appeals and we too will be playing an active role in the Brussels conference which is to come.

Turning to Raqqa Mr. President, we welcomed the first U.N. assessment mission. The United Kingdom continues to provide humanitarian support to Raqqa and surrounding areas. Last October, we stepped up our support to north-east Syria and this was to restock hospitals and mobile surgical units. It was to provide a 145,000 medical consultations and 31,000 relief kits. This included cooking equipment and blankets and we helped improve access to clean water for 15,000 people. We are also contributing to the clearance of mines and explosives in Raqqa and we are looking at ways to provide additional support to mine clearance across Syria.

Turning to Rukban, I would like to take the opportunity to commend the government of Jordan for providing humanitarian access to the population including a distribution of essential aid and this was in January 2018. We commend the efforts of the UN humanitarian agencies who have been negotiating access from Damascus.

I would like to emphasize the right to displaced civilians in Rukban, in the so-called Berm, to protection and sustained humanitarian services and distributions. Whether these are cross-line and cross border and this is in accordance with humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law.

We urge the Regime and its backers to facilitate access for the UN and humanitarian partners to deliver desperately needed assistance to the estimated 70,000-80,000 people in Duoma and all those remaining in the Eastern Ghouta. Like other speakers Mr President, we too are concerned about the poor conditions in these camps and sites where people from Eastern Ghouta there have fled.

We look forward to a position where they can have freedom of movement and where they can be allowed to return home. In the meantime, they must be protected against regime reprisals and we have in consultations Mr President, in an earlier stage asked for more attention to be given by the UN but also by the Syrian government to giving visas to UN staff who can go in and help form a protection function.

Mr President, I had intended to speak about the political resolution and next steps but the French Ambassador has laid this out very clearly and I have nothing to add to that but to say, I wholeheartedly support what he said and I think we call on all members of the Council to rally to the notion that we should use what has happened as an opportunity to get the political process back on track.

We want to have a very good discussion of possible ways to do so. As our retreat in Sweden where we will have the benefit of a Secretary-General as well. Mr President, in closing let me end with one of Edmund Burke's more famous pleas; "All that is needed for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Mr. President, we can all do something and I hope we will use the next days wisely.

Thank you.

News story: Foreign Secretary commits £4m to democracy in the Commonwealth

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has committed £4 million to support democratic accountability in parliaments across 18 Commonwealth developing countries.

The new funding will support work with democratic institutions such as national parliaments and local authorities to help improve transparency and foster more stable, democratic societies. The programme will focus on how institutions are accountable and inclusive of all their citizens, and on driving efforts to widen participation by women, minorities and other underrepresented groups.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

Britain is a champion of democracy and human rights across the world.

This £4 million will bring together experiences from across the Commonwealth, making democratic institutions more accountable and more inclusive.

Standing up for democracy and human rights is not only the right thing to do, robust democracies are essential to prosperity and help create a safer, more stable and progressive world.

The Inclusive and Accountable Democracy programme will set out guidelines on how parliaments can strengthen their processes. The two-year programme will cover Commonwealth developing countries across Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

Safeguarding, promoting and defending human rights internationally is an important UK priority. This announcement follows Mr Johnson's £1 million commitment in November, to support and protect journalists and media professionals in countries where press freedom is under threat.

In addition to the Inclusive and Accountable Democracy programme the UK's Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy supports crucial frontline work across the globe.

Notes to editor:

- The programme will be managed by the FCO through a consortium led by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, partnering with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's UK Branch and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum.

Further information