

News story: UK reaffirms African military commitments after five-nation visit

The Minister for Armed Forces, Mark Lancaster, addresses members of the UK Task Force who are building accommodation and helicopter landing sites for the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Crown Copyright.

The reaffirmation was made by Mark Lancaster following a week-long visit to the continent that took in a wealth of projects in Rwanda, Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia.

Minister for Armed Forces, Mark Lancaster, said:

From tackling terrorist threats in Somalia, to the role we have played alongside our UN partners in South Sudan, I have been extremely proud to see the way Britain's global influence is being exerted to support our partners in east Africa.

At the start of the visit, in Rwanda, Mr Lancaster met with President Paul Kagame, to find out how UK aid – which has helped to lift almost two million people out of poverty since 2005 – can continue to support continued growth and prosperity.

The Minister for Armed Forces, Mark Lancaster, meets the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame. Crown Copyright.

He also paid his respects at a genocide memorial event in Kigali, which marks the start of 100 days of mourning for the hundreds of thousands killed in the mass slaughter of 1994.

The Minister then travelled to Mogadishu to examine the work being done towards the African Union Mission in Somalia, to which the UK is the third-largest donor, tackling the threat posed by Al-Shabaab and rebuilding stability in the country.

During the next leg of the trip, to Kenya, the Minister held talks with Cabinet Secretary for Defence Raychelle Omamo and senior Kenya Defence Force Officers.

He also visited the British Army Training Unit Kenya, where he observed UK troops conduct training, and met the staff of Permanent Joint Headquarters' East Africa Support Node, which provides support to our troops in Somalia and South Sudan.

The Kenyan leg finished with a brief from the British Peace Support Team

(BPST), who coordinate much of the UK's military training with African countries, including work to stop the illegal wildlife trade. The BPST also supports the Women, Peace and Security agenda and helps to counter sexual and gender-based violence on peacekeeping missions.

Whilst in Malakal, South Sudan, he met members of the UK Task Force who are building accommodation and helicopter landing sites for the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), to which the UK has pledged continued assistance until at least April 2020.

In Bentiu, the Minister met personnel operating a UK-run field hospital for UN aid workers, where British medics deal with the complex range of injuries and illnesses that UN operations in this area might face.

After meeting Mr Lancaster, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General David Shearer said:

I admire the way UK troops in the UN mission in South Sudan have integrated themselves and that they are now fully part of the UNMISS team delivering excellent engineering and medical aid and supporting the UNMISS Headquarters too.

In Juba the Minister met with the South Sudanese Minister of Defence Kuol Manyang Juuk where they discussed how peace could be brought to South Sudan and where Mr Lancaster reaffirmed the UK commitment to bringing an end to the violence in the country.

The final leg of the visit, in Ethiopia, included a meeting with the Chief of The Defence Staff, General Samora Younis and a visit to The Ethiopian Peace Support Training Centre.

Each provided an opportunity to reinforce the UK's continued support to the Ethiopian National Defence Forces with training for peacekeeping support operations.

[News story: Minister for Africa discusses economic cooperation in Angola](#)

Minister Baldwin with Angolan female deminers from HALO.

Harriett Baldwin, Minister for Africa at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development met senior ministers of the

new Angolan government between 12-13 April, as well as representatives from business and civil society.

In meetings with the Foreign, Interior, and Economic and Social Development Ministers, Minister Baldwin heard about the government's plans for economic and political reforms and discussed opportunities for UK-Angola economic and security cooperation. She also raised regional issues including the humanitarian crisis in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which she had just seen for herself on a visit to the DRC, and how the UK and Angola can work together to tackle the illegal wildlife trade.

Minister Baldwin said:

The UK is a natural partner for Angola in economic sectors like energy, infrastructure, and agriculture, and I look forward to working with the Angolan government as it implements reforms that will continue to improve the commercial environment, providing ever greater opportunities for both Angolan and UK businesses.

The Minister also attended an event in partnership with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and others to celebrate local initiatives to promote women's empowerment and gender equality, including through improving access to education and employment. Among guests were Angolan female deminers from HALO as well as representatives of the Mines Advisory Group (MAG) programme, two British organisations. Visiting just after international Mine Awareness Day, the Minister stressed the importance of eradicating landmines from the country.

Minister Baldwin said:

The UK continues to support urgent, life-saving demining work in Angola. Not only is the UK expanding our global demining programme into Angola this year, but over Christmas, we also matched pound for pound incredibly generous UK public donations to provide over £400,000 support to MAG. This support alone will keep over 7,000 Angolan women, men, and children safe from the horrors of deadly landmines.

The Minister arrived in Angola following a [visit to the DRC](#) where she announced a further £22 million of lifesaving UK aid for hundreds of thousands of people in desperate need, and pushed for a political solution to help tackle some of the causes of the escalating humanitarian crisis in the country.

Further information

News story: UK announces £2.9m for human rights across the Commonwealth

UK Minister for Human Rights today announces 3 projects to support human rights across the Commonwealth, with particular focus on the South Pacific and small states. This £2.9 million work will support member states, regional organisations and human rights institutions in promoting human rights standards across the Commonwealth, with a focus on equality and adherence to international human rights obligations.

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon announced a new £1.8 million project to help improve the capacity of Pacific Commonwealth countries to deliver human rights.

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon said:

Human rights are the bedrock of successful societies and a fundamental Commonwealth value. The Commonwealth is at its strongest when we share our expertise and experiences through our network.

Smaller countries face significant challenges in establishing and maintaining their human rights institutions. This new funding will offer valuable support to our nine Pacific Commonwealth partners as they strive to strengthen their national institutions.

The funding will support human rights institutions to meet international standards and help improve governance. Women, young people, persons with disabilities, and other minority groups will all benefit. The Pacific Commonwealth Equality Project will run over the 2 years that the UK is Chair in Office of the Commonwealth (2018 to 2020). The South Pacific countries are Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

Lord Ahmad also announced £0.6 million to support the Commonwealth's 31 small states. The Commonwealth small states grouping includes lower income countries and small island developing states (SIDS).

Head of the Commonwealth's Human Rights Unit Karen McKenzie, said:

The UK contribution will give impetus to the Commonwealth's work with small states in Geneva, strengthening their voices in international human rights discourse. Ultimately, it will translate into better understanding and implementation of human rights promotion and protection for all citizens.

Lord Ahmad also announced £0.5 million funding to support the UK's Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) as it takes over the role of the Chair of the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (CFNHRI) for the next 2 years.

[News story: Foreign Secretary announces £1.6m for women in conflict mediation](#)

Championing girls' education to promote global stability will be at the heart of UK foreign policy to positively transform the lives of women and girls in conflict.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by conflict but they are also key to its resolution.

The Network of Women Mediators, will train women from across the Commonwealth with the practical skills to play an active role in resolving conflict worldwide. Today the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson has committed £1.6m UK support to fund this groundbreaking work.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

Conflict affects whole communities, but the fact is women and girls often bear the brunt. Girls are twice as likely to be out of school as boys, and more likely to experience gender-based violence.

This year one of my main focuses will be to ensure that girls in the poorest countries in the world receive at least 12 years of quality education because this is the single most powerful spur to development and progress.

To end wars, build sustainable and lasting peace and create stable societies, women around the world must be able to participate in peace processes. Today's £1.6 million will empower women across the Commonwealth to rightfully take their seat at the negotiating table.

Commonwealth women who take part in the programme will work across the globe to help resolve conflict. They will also support and train up women outside the Commonwealth to enter mediation and peace processes and work with grassroots organisations to empower women mediators amplifying the impact of UK funding.

Despite making up over half of the population, too few women's voices are heard when peace agreements are being drawn up. Between 1992 and 2017 only two per cent of mediators, and five per cent of witnesses and signatories to major peace processes were women. However, evidence shows that when women are a part of peace agreements they are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years.

Further information

[Press release: People urged to have their say on A303 Stonehenge upgrade](#)

Around 1,300 people attended a total of 14 public information events since consultation launched on 8 February, and this is the last chance for people to give their views on proposals to dual the 8-mile section of the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down.

Consultation on the proposals for the Highways England scheme was extended after two information events were curtailed by the severe weather of last month.

The rescheduled events were held at Mere and Salisbury last week, but consultation continues until 23 April, and anyone who would still like to comment can do so by [visiting the scheme consultation page](#). The scheme to improve the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down includes plans for a 1.9-mile long tunnel past Stonehenge, a free-flowing dual carriageway and a much-needed bypass north of Winterbourne Stoke.

During the statutory consultation process, Highways England has exhibited more detailed plans and engaged with local communities, road users, local authorities, stakeholders and heritage groups.

Derek Parody, Project Director for Highways England, said:

We have enjoyed the opportunity to share our more detailed plans, and we are delighted with the response so far.

We would like to remind people that consultation on plans to relieve congestion on the A303 past Stonehenge is still ongoing and the feedback we receive from everyone is really important in helping us to finalise our designs.

The consultation website is still live and we would urge anyone who would like to comment on the proposals to do so before consultation ends on 23 April.

During this consultation period, representatives of Highways England have also met up with a delegation from UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

The aim of the three-day fact-finding mission was to explain how the designs of the proposed tunnel will bring together the World Heritage Site landscape currently split by the A303.

Since the last UNESCO visit early last year and the announcement of the preferred route for the scheme in September, Highways England has continued to work with heritage groups including Historic England, English Heritage, the National Trust, and experts in the field, including the Stonehenge Scientific Committee – a body of leading independent archaeologists – to ensure a new route is built sensitively to the World Heritage Site. The route was carefully chosen to avoid monuments and barrow groups, and Highways England's modified plans also included moving the position of the western entrance to the tunnel to avoid conflicting with the Winter Solstice alignment.

Mr Parody said:

We were grateful to the representatives from UNESCO/ICOMOS who took time to be with us on a three-day visit to understand the scheme we are proposing. It was an excellent opportunity for us to explain how we responded to their previous recommendations and how the scheme is developing.

We look forward to the panel's report in due course, which will help us further refine the scheme, as well as to all the feedback from all interested parties during the current public consultation.

Following consultation, the scheme will then progress through the formal planning process later this year. Subject to statutory approval, construction is planned to start in 2021.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.