

Press release: UK announces £18 million to help world's poorest through trade

Some of the world's poorest countries will get vital support to help their citizens trade their way out of poverty, thanks to new financing from the UK.

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox will announce the £18 million funding at the World Trade Organization's (WTO) largest ever [Ministerial Conference in Argentina](#) today.

He will also commit the UK's support for a Gender Declaration by WTO members, which will seek to ensure that women have equal access to the benefits of global trade.

The £18 million funding from the Department for International Development will help 51 of the world's poorest countries produce products fit for export, trade more easily across borders and access untapped new markets which have the potential to create thousands of jobs and lift their citizens out of poverty.

It comes as the UK sets out its vision for open and inclusive global trade which benefits businesses, consumers and developing countries. This will be central to the UK's new independent trade policy as it leaves the EU and becomes an independent member of the WTO.

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox said:

Trade has been one of the greatest liberators of the world's poor. Over the last few decades whole countries have been transformed thanks to global trade, bringing jobs and prosperity to millions.

As we prepare to leave the EU, we can move forward with more purpose, supporting developing countries to transform their economies through trade and resisting attempts to put up barriers to the open and free trade which has already benefited millions worldwide.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

No country can escape the crushing cycle of poverty without sustained, inclusive growth, which is why the UK is helping the world's poorest countries harness the potential of international trade, creating jobs and increasing prosperity for millions.

This new UK aid support will help people in countries across Africa

and Asia identify products they can sell, make them fit for export and access untapped new markets. This will enable producers – many of whom are poor women – to earn an income, support their country's economy and help create Britain's trading partners of the future.

£16 million of the funding will go to the WTO's [Enhanced Integrated Framework \(EIF\) programme](#), which helps governments and businesses build the capacity, infrastructure and policies needed to successfully export and trade.

The programme has to date helped 35,000 women get a regular income through trade. The UK has supported the programme since 2008, and is the only country to announce increased funding at the WTO conference this week.

UK funding is already helping Zambian farmers harness the country's huge export potential for honey, building the supply chains and regulatory compliance needed to export abroad.

A further £2 million will go to the WTO's [Standards and Trade Development Facility](#) which helps developing countries meet international agricultural standards, enabling them to export more produce.

Creating a trade policy which reduces gender inequality and supports women to export will also have a big impact. The McKinsey Institute estimates that closing the global gender gap could boost the world economy by [\\$12 trillion by 2025](#), boosting economies around the world including the UK.

Speech: Foreign Secretary statement on his visit to Oman, Iran and the UAE

Mr Speaker, with your permission I will make a statement on my visit to the Middle East, from where I returned this morning.

This is a crucial time in the region: on the one hand we have a moment of hope, with scores of countries having come together to break the corrosive grip of Daesh on Iraq and Syria.

Britain's armed forces have played a proud role in a military campaign that has freed millions – and Iraq's government declared on Saturday that all of its territory had been liberated.

During her successful visit to Iraq last month, my Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister thanked the British servicemen and women who have helped to bring about the territorial defeat of Daesh.

In Jordan, she reaffirmed Britain's absolute commitment to the peace and stability of one of our closest allies in the region.

But the setbacks inflicted upon Daesh have coincided with a dangerous escalation of the war in Yemen, where one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world is now unfolding.

This morning, I returned from my first bilateral visit as Foreign Secretary to Oman, the UAE and Iran. My aim was to take forward Britain's response – diplomatically and economically – to the crisis in Yemen.

The Government strongly believes that the only way of bringing this tragic conflict to an end is through a political solution.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos of Oman – whom I met in Muscat last Friday – entirely shared this analysis.

The Sultan and I discussed in detail the tragedy in Yemen, with which Oman shares a 180-mile border.

The Sultan and I also agreed on the importance of settling the dispute between Qatar and its neighbours and I was pleased to see that the summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council went ahead in Kuwait last week.

From Muscat I travelled to Tehran where I met Iran's senior leadership including President Rouhani, Vice-President Salehi and the foreign minister, Javad Zarif.

I was frank about the subjects where our countries have differences of interest and approach, but our talks were constructive nonetheless. The latest chapter of Britain's relations with Iran opened with the achievement of the nuclear deal, the JCPOA, in July 2015.

In every meeting, I stressed how the UK attaches the utmost importance to preserving this agreement.

For the JCPOA to survive, Iran must continue to restrict its nuclear programme in accordance with the deal – and the International Atomic Energy Agency has verified Iran's compliance so far – and other parties must keep their side of the bargain by helping the Iranian people to enjoy the economic benefits of re-engagement with the world.

The House knows of Iran's disruptive role in conflicts across the region, including in Syria and Yemen.

Our discussions on these subjects were frank and constructive though neither I nor my Iranian counterparts would claim that we reached agreement on all issues.

If we are to resolve the conflict in Yemen, then Houthi rebels must stop firing missiles at Saudi Arabia and the House will recall that King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh – Saudi Arabia's equivalent of Heathrow – was the target of a ballistic missile launched from Yemen on 4th November.

I pressed my Iranian counterparts to use their influence to ensure that these indiscriminate and dangerous attacks come to an end.

On bilateral issues, my first priority was the plight of the dual nationals behind bars.

I urged their release on humanitarian grounds where there is cause to do so.

These are complex cases involving individuals considered by Iran to be their own citizens – and I do not wish to raise false hopes.

But my meetings in Tehran were worthwhile and while I do not believe it would serve the interests of the individuals concerned or their loved ones to provide a running commentary, the House can be assured that the Government will leave no stone unturned in our efforts to secure their release.

I also raised with Mr Zarif the official harassment of journalists working for BBC Persian and their families inside Iran.

I brought up Iran's wider human rights record, including how the regime executes more of its own citizens per capita than almost any other country in the world.

But where it is possible to be positive in our relations with Iran – for instance by encouraging scientific, educational and cultural exchanges – we should be ready to do so.

I then travelled to Abu Dhabi for talks yesterday with the leaders of the UAE, focusing on the war in Yemen, we agreed on the importance of restoring full humanitarian and commercial access to the port of Hodeidah, which handles over 80 per cent of Yemen's food imports.

We also agreed on the need to revive the political process, bearing in mind that the killing of the former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, by the Houthis may cause the conflict to become even more fragmented.

And we discussed how best to address the missile threat from Yemen, welcoming the United Nations investigation into the origin of the weapons that have been launched.

Our concern for the unspeakable suffering in Yemen should not blind us to the reality that resolving a conflict of this scale and complexity will take time and persistence – and success is far from guaranteed – but it is only by engagement with all the regional powers, including Iran, and it is only by mobilising Britain's unique array of friendships in the Middle East that we stand any chance of making headway.

I am determined to press on with the task, mindful of the human tragedy in Yemen, and I shall be meeting my Gulf and American colleagues again early in the New Year.

I commend this statement to the House.

Press release: Home Secretary announces new national economic crime centre to tackle high level fraud and money laundering

The Home Secretary Amber Rudd has announced plans to tackle economic crime to help stop criminal gangs exploiting the vulnerable and profiting from fraud, money laundering and corruption.

She announced a package of measures – including new laws and an enhanced operational response – to crack down on money laundering that allows ruthless gangs to profit from their crimes and fraud, the most common offence in the UK that is estimated to cost every household £255 a year.

A new national economic crime centre within the National Crime Agency (NCA) will task and coordinate the national response to economic crime, backed by greater intelligence and analytical capabilities. It will draw on expertise from across government, law enforcement and criminal justice agencies, as well as new resources provided by the private sector.

To further improve the coordination of the law enforcement response, new legislation will allow the NCA to directly task the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) to investigate the worst offenders. The SFO will continue to act as an independent organisation, supporting the multi-agency response led by the NCA.

The Home Secretary will personally chair a new economic crime strategic board to drive action. It will convene the relevant ministers from across government to agree strategic priorities and to ensure the right resources are allocated across our law enforcement agencies to tackle economic crime.

Home Secretary, Amber Rudd said:

There is a myth that there are no real victims of economic crime, but I have seen first-hand how it can ruin people's lives. It is not a victimless crime and so it's vital we tackle these offences that can leave innocent people destitute, cost the country billions every year, and allow gangs to profit from serious and violent crimes.

The measures we have announced today will significantly improve our ability to tackle the most serious cases of economic crime by ensuring our agencies have the tools and investment they need to investigate, prosecute and confiscate criminal assets.

Rest assured we will pursue all those seeking to move, use and hide the proceeds of crime.

In addition, the government has published its [anti-corruption strategy](#) which sets out the government's anti-corruption priorities, both domestic and international, and establishes an ambitious, long-term framework for tackling corruption up to 2022.

The government's 6 priorities under the strategy are:

- reducing the insider threat in high risk domestic sectors such as borders and ports
- reducing corruption in public procurement and grants
- promoting integrity across the public and private sectors
- strengthening the integrity of the UK as an international financial centre
- improving the business environment globally
- working with other countries to combat corruption

To complement this, the Prime Minister has announced the appointment of John Penrose MP as the new anti-corruption champion. In his role, John Penrose will be responsible for challenging and supporting the government in implementing the strategy, as well as promoting the UK's response to corruption both domestically and internationally.

Anti-corruption champion, John Penrose MP said:

Corruption destabilises governments and economies, taking money away from developing nations to support the luxury lifestyles of ruthless criminals.

I am thrilled to have been appointed as the government's anti-corruption champion, and am looking forward to furthering the work that has already been done in rooting out corruption and securing the UK's prosperity.

World Anti-Corruption Day on 9 December highlighted the impact that corruption can have on countries and businesses across the globe and the need for governments to take action to stamp out corruption.

The cost of corruption worldwide is estimated to be more than 2 per cent of global GDP and the World Bank estimates that over \$1 trillion paid in bribes each year.

At the recent Global Forum on Asset Recovery, co-hosted by the UK and the US, more than 250 participants from 29 countries committed to a renewed effort to trace, recover and return stolen assets.

The government has also renewed its commitment to introduce an overseas companies beneficial ownership register, which is being developed by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

It will mean that overseas companies that own or buy property in the UK, or participate in central government procurement, will be required to provide

details of their ultimate owners. This will reduce the opportunities for criminals to use shell companies to launder their illicitly gained wealth in London property, and make it easier for law enforcement to track and act on criminal funds.

Further commitments were also made to seize criminal assets. A new working group will be established, which will include the NCA, the police (including devolved forces), Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) to use the powers within the Criminal Finances Act for forfeiture of criminal money.

To provide a more targeted, intelligence-led focus on high risk economic crime, the government will also reform the suspicious activity reports regime, making the necessary legislative, operational and technical changes required.

Finally, the Law Commission will undertake a review of the law on confiscation in the Proceeds of Crime Act with the aim of improving the process by which confiscation orders are made and optimise the enforcement of them.

[Press release: Environment Agency's Christmas stocking for Berkshire anglers](#)

Updated: Photos updated.

The Environment Agency is delivering an early Christmas gift to anglers in Berkshire this week, when it carries out a Christmas stocking of young adult fish into the River Cut at Jocks Lane recreation ground in Bracknell.

Thousands of fish, including roach, dace and chub, will be added to the river's existing fish population this Thursday, 14 December. This will provide an immediate boost to numbers, which will be multiplied many times over when the new arrivals settle into their new homes and begin to produce offspring.

Stuart Keable, a fisheries officer for the Environment Agency, said:

We carry out a number of fish stockings every year. Sometimes it is to help fish populations recover when they've suffered from a pollution incident, or through flooding, which can push large numbers of fish downstream, and many never return.

The River Cut has suffered from recurrent pollution near Jocks Lane recreation ground in 2017, where uncontaminated water from a large proportion of Bracknell drains into the Cut. Environment Agency officers have been working closely with Thames Water, which manages the surface water network, to investigate the source of the pollution. The partnership has also resulted in pollution-prevention visits to nearby industrial estates, where officers advised businesses on oil and chemical storage compliance, hazardous waste disposal and the risk to streams and rivers.

Rachel Brown, an Environment Agency team leader in east Berkshire, said:

The Environment Agency has responded to a number of incidents on the River Cut this year, reported to us through our incident hotline. We have been working with Thames Water to find why the river was polluted, whilst also reducing the impact to the environment. We have carried out pollution-prevention visits at the nearby industrial estates, to raise awareness of the surface water drainage network and correct disposal of waste. Information provided by the public is vital in helping us with these ongoing investigations, and we urge anyone witnessing an environmental pollution to call our 24-hour incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

Christmas is a good time to introduce the fish into rivers, as it enables them to acclimatise to their new surroundings, ahead of their spawning season in the spring. Fish also play a critical role in sustaining a river's finely-balanced eco-system, so the wider natural environment will also get a festive boost.



Environment Agency vehicle with oxygenated tanks for transporting live fish.

Stuart Keable added:

The River Cut has undergone some fantastic enhancements recently. We've done a lot of that ourselves, but we increasingly work with local angling clubs, Bracknell Town Council, community groups and volunteers to get bigger and better results. The council has already installed 10 fishing platforms on the upstream section of the river at Jocks Lane, which will eventually see a wheelchair ramp installed for disabled access to this area. These improvements were made through the Angling Trust's Angling Improvement Fund.

Through the Environment Agency's Fisheries Improvement Programme, we have started on some major habitat improvement work in the river itself. In November, we installed the first of 10 marginal berms to provide a more diverse habitat for fish, insects, birds and plants, as well as push silt out of the system. This work will be ongoing throughout the winter. The collective contribution from our various partners to the wellbeing of the river has been immense.

The fish are being brought to site in oxygenated tanks from their birthplace and home for the last 12-18 months, the Environment Agency's own Calverton Fish Farm in Nottingham. Funded through rod licence fees, Calverton produces some 450,000 coarse fish each year which are used to help the vitality and diversity of fish populations in rivers, lakes and ponds throughout England.

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