

Press release: Troika Statement on South Sudan

The members of the Troika (Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States) recently traveled to Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, South Sudan, and Kenya in support of the efforts of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to urgently convene a High-Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) for the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan.

The Troika remains appalled by the dire economic, security, human rights, and humanitarian crisis being inflicted on the long-suffering people of South Sudan as a result of the conflict that their political leaders have generated and fuelled. The HLRF is a critical opportunity to make urgent progress. All parties have a responsibility to the citizens of this young country to participate constructively and be open to real compromise.

As a first priority, all parties must end hostilities as a sign of commitment to the HLRF – as they have pledged to do. The Government of South Sudan, in particular, must cease its pursuit of military victory and make good on its promise to end all obstruction of humanitarian assistance. The Troika also calls on the armed opposition to end all military activity and lift any barriers to humanitarian access.

The Troika strongly supports the calls that we heard from voices across South Sudan and the region for the HLRF to be inclusive, reflecting the interests of all parties, regions, and groups in South Sudan, including young people and women. The Troika emphasizes that all parties to the conflict must negotiate in good faith and work to amend sections of the Agreement that no longer reflect the reality of conditions in South Sudan, particularly those related to power sharing, timelines, and transitional security arrangements. A key goal for the HLRF should be monitored, effective security arrangements durable enough to stop the conflict, improve the human rights and humanitarian situation, and support a political process that produces an agreed path to viable elections. There must also be clear consequences for those who violate the agreement.

Alongside regional and international partners, the Troika will continue to identify and hold responsible those who work against peace, including through economic and other sanctions. They will also act against those who use their positions to fuel conflict and steal from the South Sudanese people and those who facilitate their illicit financial activities.

Further information

Speech: Secretary of State speech at the 'Solutions to Disability Inclusion' event

I am delighted to be here to mark International Day for Persons with Disabilities in advance of this Sunday.

I want to start by saying a huge thank you to Microsoft for hosting us today and also a big thank to you to BOND Disability and Development group for arranging this event.

Thank you Microsoft for your leadership as well and the example that you are setting.

You recognise that employing people with disabilities is not just the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do.

You recognise the virtuous circle that comes from employing people with disabilities.

The insight they bring to your workforce. Their ideas and entrepreneurial skills. Their drive to raise expectations around what is possible.

And that sends a powerful message.

You are inspiring other organisations and businesses and in turn you are benefitting from the talents and gifts of so many people.

And so it is fitting that the message I have today is delivered under your roof.

I worked with Microsoft in my previous role as Minister of State for Disabled People.

And in handing over the baton to my successor the wonderful Sarah Newton who is down the end I said to the sector that they were not losing a Minister, just gaining another one because I am committed to this agenda.

We need to tackle the extra costs of disability. We need to push money into healthcare and early interventions and use the data from that to stop doing assessments on people. We need to enable people to become economically active. Just because all of that is in our in tray domestically, it doesn't mean we should ignore how we can help the rest of the world raise their game too.

One of the most memorable meetings I had in that role was with a young man who taught coding to people with autism and Tourette's.

He did this in the UK and overseas. When I met him he had just returned from

a trip to Bangladesh. He was eleven years old. Eleven.

He himself had a disability. But he was using his talents uninhibited by physical or mental obstacles.

I often think about what the world will be like when he is older. What will he be doing in the years to come?

I think about his care for others around the world, his hunger to share what he knew with them, and the power of the message he was sending to those around him.

What a force for good he was. And what a force for good he will continue to be, if given more opportunity.

Today the UK Government has launched the Health and Work roadmap, a new plan to transform disability employment over the next ten years. to get one million more disabled people, and people with long term illnesses, into work in the UK.

Its premise is simple: unless every one of our citizens can reach their full potential, our nation never will.

Whatever a person's abilities, whatever their talents, whatever their gifts, all of them have something to offer.

And it is our job to ensure that they can. To ensure that they thrive, fulfil their ambitions, make their ideas a reality and contribute to their community.

That makes complete sense, doesn't it?

It makes sense not just in the UK, but in every nation on earth.

If we are in the business of helping nations prosper, and if we want them to succeed, then people with disabilities must be central to all that we do.

They are the group most discriminated against in society.

Too often, people with disabilities are forgotten.

Too often, their needs are unfulfilled.

Too often, the opportunities they bring are not fully appreciated.

In many parts of the world, people with disabilities simply don't count.

They are neglected and isolated. They are attacked and abused. They are invisible.

Waldah, a four year-old Ugandan girl with cerebral palsy, became isolated from her family and her wider community because of her disability.

This forced her mother Lucy to hide her away. For Lucy, the strain was too

much. She became depressed and ended up losing her job.

All this because of society's refusal to accept a four year-old girl for who she is.

There are countless stories like this all over the world, and much worse.

Stories of people with disabilities who are denied the love, the support, the education, the healthcare services and the opportunities that they have a right to.

Stories of people with disabilities in developing countries fighting every day just to survive. Their resilience is as impressive as it is humbling.

It is harder, often impossible, for children with disabilities to go to school.

When they grow up, it is more difficult for them to find a way to make a living.

In many instances, they are completely cast out from the rest of society.

And in conflict zones, these problems are compounded.

There are one billion people in the world living with disabilities.

That's more than one in eight of us.

1 in 8 being excluded from the workforce.

Facing discrimination at every turn. Being unrepresented.

Being unable to build a business. Being precluded from bringing your problem solving skills, your insights, and your resilience to bear.

Imagine not having the tools to contribute to your household, your family, the world, and thrive as a human being.

For many, this is the reality. It short-changes humanity. And it must stop.

We need to break down the barriers that people with disabilities face in their everyday lives.

People with disabilities must have the opportunity to fulfil their true potential and to help their countries prosper.

As Secretary of State for International Development, this will be one of my top priorities.

As a department, we will put disability at the heart of everything that we do. We know that we all have a long way to go, but we are determined to get there.

As our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals promises, we will

leave no one behind.

My vision is that people with disabilities are consistently included in, and benefit from, the opportunities that are available to everyone in society.

I want to see a world where people with disabilities can access a quality education, productive employment and the chances in life that they deserve.

I want to eliminate the appalling stigma and discrimination that they face.

I want to ensure that the international system delivers for people with disabilities.

And crucially, when it comes to finding solutions to these challenges, I want to ensure we learn more about what works, where, and why.

Good data is essential.

We must use the power of evidence and reason to ensure that we unearth solutions that don't just do good – but do the most good possible for every penny spent.

And there is a lot to do, but DFID has already made a good start.

UK Aid is crowdsourcing new ways to make societies more inclusive for people with disabilities.

We have supported over 40,000 girls with disabilities, helping them access an education in Kenya and Uganda.

In Bangladesh, we are providing jobs and skills for people with disabilities in the garment industry and in small businesses.

We are also helping people to start their own businesses.

Sok Khoen is a young woman in Cambodia who now owns her own grocery shop thanks to a programme run by ADD International and funded by DFID. She has been steadily growing her business ever since.

Vision for a Nation, a UK-based charity, has distributed innovative adjustable glasses for those with visual impairments in Rwanda. The glasses cost just £1 for patients, and are giving some of the world's poorest people back their sight.

D-Rev, a small business supported by UK Aid through its Amplify programme, is developing and scaling up a ground-breaking low-cost prosthetic knee for young adults in rural Africa and Asia.

Thanks to funding received through the Google Impact Challenge, Bristol-based charity Motivation is exploring how 3D printing can be used to develop and produce tailored mobility solutions for wheelchair users in the developing world.

It is exactly this kind of invention and creativity that UK Aid wants to

encourage.

That is why we will be matching pound-for-pound donations to Motivation's Ready, Willing and Able appeal, launching this Sunday.

It will help reinforce the British public's efforts to help people with disabilities live with dignity, earn a living and create lasting opportunities for themselves.

These inspiring organisations are leading the way. Now we must all match their ambition and entrepreneurial spirit.

We must also expand the circle of people working in this area, and build a wider and even more ambitious movement for change.

That's why today I am proud to announce that the UK Government will host its first ever Global Disability Summit in London this summer.

We will work with disabled people's organisations, governments, companies and charities to find creative and lasting ways to help transform the lives of all people living with disabilities around the world.

And crucially, we will work with the International Disability Alliance to ensure that people with disabilities are at the centre of this work. – from its planning and focus, right through to delivery.

At the Summit, we will need to tackle the big questions.

How can we help people with disabilities build a livelihood in the world's poorest countries?

How can we make proven solutions available as widely as they are needed?

How can we all – governments, businesses and civil society around the world –share our experiences?

How can we make use of the new opportunities that technology brings?

And how can we challenge discrimination and stigma, so that people with disabilities live with dignity, and become the leaders we need them to be?

I am asking these questions to you. All of you.

DFID wants to hear from you.

We must all share our best ideas, and put them to the test. Then we must share what we learn.

It is vital that we harness the smartest solutions from every sector – from government and business through to civil society and academia.

As well as getting the basics right for all people with disabilities – access to healthcare, livelihoods, a good education and freedom from fear and violence – I know that technology will be at the heart of many solutions that

we create.

Thanks to technology, we have opportunities that previous generations did not.

We have the power to eradicate poverty.

To enable a person to participate fully in society.

To overcome barriers.

To be connected.

To be empowered.

Technology reduces our costs, extends our reach, and helps us realise our dreams.

It will take this, and all of us, to ensure that people with disabilities are at the heart of all we do in development.

It will take ingenuity and creativity.

And it will take resolve.

At DFID, we are resolved.

I believe in the power of aid to tackle the problems we face – to end disease, hunger and extreme poverty.

And when it comes to supporting people with disabilities, I believe they must have the freedom and opportunities they need to thrive.

There is a long way to go for us all. But with the work the UK is doing, we are beginning to fulfil the promise to leave no one behind.

I now call on others to follow suit. Governments, companies and civil society must join us, and step up their commitments.

Together, we will ensure that all people with disabilities fulfil their potential.

Unless they do, humanity will not.

Thank you.

[Speech: Helen Stephenson CBE speech at](#)

the Charity Law Association's Annual Conference

It's been four months since I started at the Commission. During that time, I've met and listened to staff in the Commission's four offices, visited trustees, staff and beneficiaries of charities ranging from small community groups to some of the largest organisations on our register – and I've had conversations with colleagues from umbrella bodies and across government.

The one, overwhelming impression these early encounters have made on me is that the charity sector is more crucial to our way of life as a country than – despite my background in the sector – I had fully appreciated. Charities are in every community, whether they be geographical communities, or communities of faith, interest, identity or culture.

They operate at the micro level – providing a village hall, for example – and they perform crucial national functions. And indeed some of the charities we regulate have an impact at global level. It is simply not possible to imagine our national life without them.

Compared to the size of that sector, and its value to our country, the Commission as regulator is a tiny player. But our role is vital. We have important statutory objectives as set out by Parliament that protect and promote the integrity of charity, and beyond that, we have a unique convening power that allows us to positively influence the way in which charities contribute to our society or respond to events.

Our role in bringing together charities and government following the Grenfell Tower disaster, for example, is having a tangible impact on the lives of those affected by that tragedy. We also play an important role in helping government make a success of its priorities – in housing, health, education, security.

I have been hugely impressed by the professionalism and dedication of the Commission's staff at all levels. The 300-odd officials that make up the Commission are doing a world-class job in regulating charities expertly and effectively according to risk and in furtherance of public trust.

So my early impressions and experiences of both the Commission and the charities we regulate have been overwhelmingly positive, and encouraging. And I see my principal job in the years ahead as being to continue to steer the Commission along the steady path that my predecessor, with the board, set for the organisation.

There are two areas, however, that I will be seeking to address, together with our board, in the years ahead.

First, I believe the Commission must develop and improve its services to trustees. It must continue to become easier to do business with us, we must

be more available and accessible with advice and guidance for individual trustees. Charity trustees are, after all, overwhelmingly volunteers who are well-intentioned and passionate about the causes they espouse for the public benefit.

The public needs a regulator that can call out bad practice, but to secure the continued success of the charity sector we also need a regulator that is able to help trustees get it right. We need to recognise trusteeship as a national treasure that we must look after, grow, enable into the future.

Second, I am struck by the significant pressures on the Commission's finances. Our resources, set against the continued increase in demand on our services, are becoming more tightly stretched every day. For example, applications to register as a charity have increased by 40% over the past four years, whilst our resources in real terms have halved since 2007.

If we are to continue to prioritise the issues and cases presenting the highest risks to charities and to public trust – which I believe is right – then by logical conclusion our ability to deal with lower risk work will decline. The service we provide to charities could become slower. Charities may have to wait longer to be registered, to have our consent to modernise or adapt to the changing needs of their beneficiaries.

I am making the case to government for transition funding to help us bridge the gap between our funding and the significant increase in demand on our services. But, in the context of continued pressures on public finances, these two insights; that the Commission must do more to support trustees, and that our current funding settlement does not allow that – lead me to one longer-term conclusion. Namely that we must start a sensible, open debate about larger charities making a modest contribution to the cost of aspects of their regulation.

This is not a new idea, incidentally. There has been provision in primary legislation since 1993. It is also accepted practice across other parts of society that regulated communities make a contribution to their regulators. Indeed, I believe we are one of the very few, if not the only, regulator who does not charge for at least some of its services.

So I am working with my teams, and the board, to draw up proposals for such a system, which I hope we will consult on next year. This work is at an early stage, but our current thinking is that in order to improve our existing services and develop new services for trustees, we would need to raise in the region of £7million annually from the largest 2,000 charities on our register.

I am realistic about the timescales involved in developing a system for charging charities. Doing so will require legislation, and Brexit means that Parliamentary time is limited. And whilst I expect the debate with the sector on this to be heated, it is one I believe we need to have.

Charities in this country fulfil a significant role in society, and I want to ensure that the Charity Commission has the resources it needs to promote

public trust and confidence in this vital sector.

Charitable endeavour is at the heart of our society: giving generously of our time and money and helping others is, at its simplest form, what the word charity embodies. It is, I believe what makes us distinct as a nation, has shaped our history and is what continues to make our nation both resilient and innovative.

From supporting medical research, to caring for the most vulnerable, and preserving our national heritage – reliance on the charity sector is growing.

The role of the Charity Commission at the heart of that ecosystem of charities, the state and the public, is to ensure trust and confidence in the sector stays strong. We are an enabler – enabling charities to retain the trust of the public and the state through ensuring they stay within the law and enabling them to be well governed. And we perform the vital function of holding to account the small proportion of trustees who do not behave as the law, and the public, expect.

The Commission's role I lead therefore involves a fine balance. Charities are neither our friends to be let off the hook, nor foes to be fought. We are their regulator, and at registration, in filing their annual return, when using our digital services and our guidance, they are our customers, who rightly expect a smooth, professional service.

The Commission is far down a journey of transformation, I believe whilst the work is far from complete, we are now an organisation that has not only been able to demonstrate that it can transform, but that it can continue to transform to meet the needs of the sector.

We have made vast improvement to our digital services, which makes doing business with the Commission much easier.

To manage the increasing numbers, income and impact of charities – the Commission must continue to change – last year 167k charities were regulated by around 300 of my staff. We regulated £74 billion income, and received almost 100,000 letters, calls and emails.

We are increasingly becoming a risk-led regulator. And we know that risk-based regulation is good for the regulator as it is good for charities.

For this we expect more from larger charities, and less from those smaller charities whose trustees are also their charities only staff, executives and fundraising team.

We recently consulted on our annual return for 2018 – to review the key information that we collect and display from charities, the changes we're proposing are the most significant since 2013 and are intended to reduce the amount of information that smaller charities have to supply each year and target more detailed questions tailored to each charity.

The annual return is a key regulatory tool that is used for two main purposes; it enables the Commission to collect information about charities

that it can use to identify issues of concern, either in specific charities or areas of broader risk across the charity sector. It is also the principal source of much of the information that is displayed on the Register of Charities – a key driver to allow the public and donors to find out more information about the charities they are interested in or support.

Ensuring we collect the right information, in a way that is simple for charities to understand, is absolutely vital. Whilst this information is an essential regulatory tool for the Commission, this is also the main way that the charity register is populated – and with almost 12 million views of the public register per year, and many organisations across the sector relying on its accurate data – this is an essential tool for more than just the regulator. So we will continue to improve digital services – to make doing business with Commission easier.

Good charity governance will continue to be a priority for the Commission.

We know that poor governance is at the heart of abuse and mismanagement and we will continue to intervene where it's gone wrong. For example the recent case of the Manchester New Moston Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses – and I was very proud that the Commission's investigation led to better safeguarding procedures and internal disciplinary processes in the charity.

But I also want us to continue to share good practice. Trustees' Week earlier this month was a great opportunity to share the amazing work by over 700,000 charity trustees who are often unseen and largely unrewarded financially, and you will have no doubt seen the many positive example of coverage that received – to not only recognise the sterling effort of existing trustees, but also inspire a new generation of them to come forward and embrace these roles.

For this to happen we need to continue to change – and charities need to continue to change.

The recently released trustee awareness – 'Taken on Trust' report, highlights some interesting facts that we all must pay attention to. Most positively – trustees value their role despite the significant demands on their time and expertise. And volunteering benefits individuals' well-being.

A recent study published in the British Medical Journal demonstrated that people who reported volunteering at least once per week scored higher on a test that measured happiness and wellbeing levels.

But in Trustee boards – the Trustees Awareness report highlighted a lack of diversity in many cases, showing us that trustees do not always reflect the communities that charities serve, and are often disproportionately older, white and male.

This by no means discredits the huge impact that our current trustees have and I don't want those of you who fit into that category to feel in anyway underappreciated. However since the research highlights how much trustees enjoy their role, and we know that volunteering benefits individuals, why

would we not try to open this up to a much broader pool of skills and backgrounds?

Trusteeship is valuable experience that charities can offer to groups currently underrepresented on boards. I would personally like to see many more young people come forward and benefit from the driving seat of social change that trusteeship can offer.

Very often, trustees are recruited informally, from within trustees' existing network, even in larger charities – meaning this lack of diversity is perpetuated over time. And charities are missing out on the widest range of skills, experience and perspective at board level. Particularly from younger people where the experience of trusteeship will also be invaluable to them.

A diverse board can bolster a charity's resilience and give it the best chance of fulfilling its purposes into the future. And how can we challenge our thinking, without refreshed experience and opinions?

And you – the CLA and its members play a very important role this. Charities and their trustees do not naturally come with all the required skills...research from the trustee awareness report I mentioned previously showed that the take up of formal support and advice was low, and trustees report lacking relevant legal, digital, fundraising, marketing and campaigning skills at board level.

The support you give to improving governance is essential to a well-run sector.

In addition, you are an important partner with us at the Charity Commission, and I want that partnership to continue to grow:

- I hope will continue a positive relationship;
- sharing a common interest;
- sometimes perhaps not always agreeing;
- but ultimately to protect the law and public trust and confidence in the sector

The strength of our continued liaison engagement with the CLA, will continue, led by our Director of Legal Services, Kenneth Dibble.

We also very much appreciate as I know our charities do, the pro bono work which many CLA firms do for their charity clients around governance and regulation – which we support and hope to see continued.

So finally, whilst we know that public trust and confidence in charities has taken a knock over the last few years, I don't think this undermines the value of the charitable sector in society. People continue to give their time and money and this has not abated – but they are no longer willing to mindlessly believe that everything with the label charity on it is good.

They expect the same, if not higher, standards than other areas of public life. Our job at the Commission, is to play our part in maintaining the public's confidence and trust in the charities. My aim is that we will

continue to this by:

- regulating robustly, in order to tackle abuse and mismanagement;
- supporting charities with increased access to digital services, guidance and direction; and
- sharing good practice wherever possible.

Press release: Real progress on Brexit talks says First Secretary

First Secretary of State Damian Green MP said today that real progress is now being made in the Brexit talks between the UK and Scottish governments.

He was speaking after the latest bilateral talks in Edinburgh with the Scottish Secretary David Mundell MP and Scottish Government Ministers John Swinney MSP and Michael Russell MSP. The discussions are to ensure that the necessary arrangements are in place under the EU (Withdrawal) Bill for distributing powers returned from the European Union and identifying where common frameworks will be required.

Damian Green said:

We have come a long way in a few months. The two governments are now making real progress in ensuring that all parts of the UK are ready for the extra powers that are coming back from the EU to the UK.

We all accept that UK frameworks will be required in certain areas to protect the vital advantages of the UK domestic market. Ministers and civil servants on both sides are now getting into the deep detail of how we put in place the best arrangements for the day we leave the EU. I am confident we can keep up this momentum and have a successful Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) with all the devolved administrations in London next month.

The UK and Scottish Government ministers met in Edinburgh in August, then again in London on 25 September, where they discussed a set of principles to guide the discussions. These principles were agreed at a meeting of JMC (EN) on 16 October, and the Prime Minister and First Minister held a constructive meeting on 14 November.

Press release: Minister Steve Baker continues regional engagement on EU exit

The Minister began with a tour of Pasta Foods Ltd – a successful dried pasta and healthy snack manufacturer in Norfolk – where he was pleased to hear the company's optimism for the opportunities created by our exit from the EU.

He later co-hosted an EU-exit roundtable in Great Yarmouth alongside the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Sajid Javid, attended by stakeholders and prominent businesses including Norfolk County Council, Peel Ports, Proserv, and Bernard Matthews.

The Minister heard about the opportunities and challenges that the UK's exit from the EU could pose to the region and how stakeholders and businesses are preparing.

Minister for Exiting the EU, Steve Baker said:

We remain absolutely committed to achieving an ambitious Brexit deal that works, not only for Norfolk, and the East of England, but for every region in the UK.

Hearing from businesses and stakeholders across a region that voted decisively to leave the EU, was not only informative but also hugely valuable, and I was struck by their optimism for the future.

As we proceed through the negotiations we will go on hearing from stakeholders, to ensure that our discussions are informed by the views of every region of the UK, and each sector of our economy.

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Sajid Javid said:

Today's visit is an important part of my ongoing discussions with local authorities and their partners as the UK prepares to leave the EU.

I was delighted to see first-hand the excellent work local authorities, LEPs and businesses are doing to promote growth and skills in Great Yarmouth and the East of England.

It was great to see the enthusiasm from local leaders who want to make our exit from the EU a success for the communities they serve.

I want to understand the challenges and opportunities they may face in the coming months and years and I am committed to doing everything possible to support them.

In recent months the Government has stepped up its engagement with businesses across the UK to ensure the voices of British businesses are heard and reflected throughout the exit process.