

News story: British troops continue support to UN South Sudan mission

Armed Forces Minister Mike Penning yesterday visited Bentiu and Malakal, where UK military personnel are deployed, and met those carrying out engineering tasks in support of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

With around 100 already in country, Royal Engineers are carrying out building tasks in preparation for the main deployment of nearly 400 troops over the coming months – making this one of the UK's largest operational deployments across the globe.

UK personnel are carrying out engineering tasks at the UN's camps in both Malakal and Bentiu to enhance UNMISS's efforts, and as more British troops arrive in South Sudan, focus will move to Bentiu where a temporary field hospital will be set up, followed by a permanent hospital.

Minister of State for the Armed Forces Mike Penning said:

The UN is working hard to protect civilians and promote stability in South Sudan, and the UK continues to support this important effort.

This will be the UK's single largest deployment to a UN mission with almost 400 of our troops carrying out vital engineering tasks on the ground and a number of key roles within the UN headquarters.

This permanent field hospital will support over 1,000 UN peacekeepers and staff, enabling them to continue working to improve conditions in South Sudan.



Armed Forces Minister Mike Penning arrives in South Sudan

Engineering tasks carried out by UK personnel could include a helicopter landing site in Malakal, facilities to improve water supply, drainage to prevent flooding. In addition to engineering and medical support, the UK also has a small number of staff officers in UNMISS's headquarters in Juba.

Lt Col Jason Ainley, Commanding Officer Royal Engineers said:

We are very proud to be part of UNMISS. We look forward to continued work with our military and civilian colleagues to support the mission, which aims to improve conditions for the people of South Sudan.

My engineers are working in a tough operating environment to ensure our mission will be a success.

As part of his visit the Armed Forces Minister also met Lt Col Ainley in Juba, as well as Defence Minister Kuol Manyang Juuk, and UN Special Representative David Shearer.

British military support in South Sudan follows a commitment made in 2015 by the then Prime Minister to double the UK's commitment to global peacekeeping initiatives, including by deploying troops to South Sudan and Somalia.

Alongside the UK-hosted Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial in London in September, these contributions underline the UK's leading role in support to

peacekeeping operations.



Mike Penning visits UK personnel in South Sudan

More widely, the UK Government has committed life-saving support to tackle the humanitarian crisis in South Sudan, including matching pound for pound public donations up to £10 million to the Disaster Emergency Committee's East Africa Crisis Appeal.

The Government also recently announcement that £100m will be spent on life-saving support in South Sudan in 2017/18, including:

- Food for over 500,000 people;
- Life-saving nutritional support to more than 27,500 children;
- Safe drinking water for over 300,000 people;
- Emergency health services for over 100,000 people;
- Livelihood support for over 650,000 people;
- Vaccinations for over 200,000 livestock.

[Press release: Innovative moveable weirs now in place](#)

The first phase of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme has reached a major milestone as all three moveable weir gates have now been successfully put in place at Knostrop Weir on the River Aire.

Costing in the region of £50million, the scheme is being led by Leeds City Council in partnership with the Environment Agency.

The final stages of the work at Knostrop include the removal of the remaining cofferdam ahead of it becoming a fully operational flood defence later in May.

The three gates have been constructed as part of an innovative approach using moveable weirs, which can be lowered in flood conditions to reduce river levels and the threat of flooding. This is the first time that moveable weirs are being used in the UK for a flood defence.

The weirs can be lowered, and raised, by deflating and inflating 'bladders' fabricated from a bullet proof neoprene material under each gate, which act like giant air filled pillows.

The first of the weir gates at Knostrop Weir has already been tested. Later this month the cofferdam structure, which was installed to allow a dry working area in the river for the construction of the weir gate, will be flooded with water and the sheet piles then removed.

New fish and eel passes are also being constructed at Knostrop. The structures consist of a number of shallow trays which the fish and eels can swim and jump up, allowing them to migrate upstream. The previous stone weir was approximately three metres high and a barrier to fish and eels moving up the River Aire.

Moveable weirs are also being constructed further upstream at Crown Point in the city centre, where the installation of the first of two weir gates has been completed. Last month, reinforced concrete works were finished which meant the bladders and gates could be fixed in place prior to testing.

Now this gate has been installed and tested, the cofferdam has been flooded and the sheet piles are being removed to allow for work to begin on the final weir gate adjacent to Fearn's Island.

The Leader of Leeds City Council, Cllr Judith Blake, recently visited both sites to see first hand how the weirs will be reducing the risk of flooding to the city.

Leader of Leeds City Council Councillor Judith Blake said:

It was fascinating to see the new flood scheme up close and especially to see the amazing technology and engineering involved in putting these moveable weirs in place to control the flow of the River Aire.

It is such a simple idea but it is fantastic to see Leeds at the cutting-edge of the field using the latest technology in this way.

The value of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme in terms of the reassurance it will offer residents and businesses over the coming years and decades is incalculable, so we very much look forward to seeing phase one complete later this year while we continue to make the strongest possible case for further significant measures to help protect all our communities threatened by flood-risk across the city as soon as possible.

Work on flood defence walls in the Holbeck area are also still underway. Temporary traffic management remains in place and will do so until September 2017. The traffic management has been coordinated with the Bridgewater Place wind baffle scheme in an effort to minimise disruption.

The site works for Phase 1 of the Leeds Flood Alleviation scheme commenced in January 2015 and are due to be completed this summer. It is one of the largest river flood defences in the country. When complete, it will provide an increased level of protection from flooding from the River Aire and Hol Beck for residents and businesses in the city centre. The scheme also includes defences at Woodlesford.

Further information on Phase 1 of the scheme can be found at www.leeds.gov.uk/fas.

Work on phase 2 of the project is currently underway to develop a proposal for how to increase the standard of protection in Leeds including areas such as Kirkstall and Stourton.

[Green Party: Theresa May must raise war crime allegations during Saudi](#)

[Arabia visit](#)



3 April 2017

The Green Party has called on Theresa May to raise allegations of war crimes in Yemen when she visits Saudi Arabia this week [1].

Jonathan Bartley, Green Party co-leader, said:

“It is deeply disturbing to see the prime minister cosyng up to an oppressive regime in an attempt to get a trade deal after Brexit. Saudi Arabia has an appalling human rights record and we should not be exposing ourselves to a dependent relationship with a country that was accused of killing civilians as recently as last month [2].

“The Met police are currently investigating Saudi Arabia for war crimes in Yemen and Theresa May must raise the allegations during her visit.

“We have repeatedly called on the Government to stop selling arms to Saudi Arabia. If there’s any chance UK weapons were used to violate international law and human rights, we must stop supplying them immediately.”

Notes:

1. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/theresa-calls-closer-uk-ties-10146879>
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/02/met-police-examine-allegations-saudi-arabia-war-crimes-yemen>

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[Diane Abbott response to announcement that bail terms will now generally be limited to 28 days](#)

Diane Abbott MP, Labour’s Shadow Home Secretary, speaking in response to the announcement that bail terms will now generally be limited to 28 days, said:

“This is a welcome move, which ought to end open-ended bail periods for all but exceptional cases.

“But in general this Government has been cutting access to justice, with new tribunal fees and deep cuts to legal aid. Recent laws have also reduced the privacy of citizens. This change to bail is a move in the right direction, but most Government policy is going the opposite way.”

Putting new devolved powers to good use

The more decisions about Scotland that are being taken in Scotland – and the fewer taken by the Tories in Westminster – the better.