

Rampling: Tough economic times, UK continues support

During his fourth visit to Baalbek, British Ambassador Chris Rampling toured ongoing UK funded projects, and inaugurated new ones, underlining the UK's unswerving support to Baalbek and its surrounding areas.

Accompanied by Governor Bashir Khodr, Ambassador Rampling attended the Lebanese Enterprise and Employment Programme's 'UK Support To Baalbek' event for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) at the Palmyra hotel, where he also announced the launch of a new mobile tourism application for Baalbek. Both projects – funded by UK aid – are aimed at creating economic opportunities and jobs, and boosting tourism to the City of the Sun, and the surrounding areas.

Under the UK-Lebanon Year of Education 2020 launched in October 2019, Ambassador Rampling visited Al Bashaer High School run by Al Mabarrat Association to see the impact of UK support designed to raise the quality of education delivered to students. The British Council has been supporting Al Mabarrat through the Connecting Classrooms programme since 2009.

Received by Col Salman Salman, Ambassador Rampling visited Four Land Border Regiment and a Forward Operating Base in Baalbek and saw how UK support to the Lebanese Army is securing the borders with Syria, as the sole legitimate defenders of Lebanon. Since 2019, Lebanon had complete authority over its border with Syria. UK support to the Lebanese Army since 2011 has reached over \$92 million.

At the end of his visit, Ambassador Rampling said:

I am pleased to be in Baalbek again, my fourth visit since I arrived, a testimony of the importance we place to support the city and surrounding areas. Baalbek represents a breadth of our UK aid programmes: through education, supporting the economy, boosting tourism and above all security which is key to the success of all our projects.

The UK recognises the deep economic challenges facing local businesses and municipalities here in Baalbek and across Lebanon. We recognise the need for urgent action by the Government of Lebanon to address urgent and mounting economic pressures. We know the economic challenges are stark, and we recognise the burden of refugees that Lebanese communities continue to bear. Since 2014, UK aid's contribution to the Baalbek-Hermel region has been over \$3.5 million, reaching over 125,000 beneficiaries.

We are here to deliver more. Today we are investing further in Baalbek and surrounding areas, through the Lebanon Enterprise and Employment Programme to introduce grants to SMEs, the backbone of Lebanon' economy and crucial to the country's economic recovery. We are keen to work more closely with its residents to improve access to services, and to create further job opportunities.

I'm also delighted to launch with Governor Bashir Khodr a new mobile tourism application for Baalbek to further support the economy, boost tourism to this spectacular city, and encourage more tourists whether from Lebanon or abroad to learn about its remarkable history. The new app can be downloaded by Android users, and will be available on the Apple Store in due course.

We will continue to support Lebanon through our programmes that have achieved a great deal reaching over \$250 million in 2019 – in security, prosperity, education and stability.