

E3 and Netherlands Foreign Ministers Statement on World Press Freedom Day

Press release

Joint Statement by Dutch Foreign Minister Blok, French Foreign Minister Le Drian, German Foreign Minister Maas and British Foreign Secretary Raab ahead of tomorrow's World Press Freedom Day.



Today, we celebrate the crucial role journalists play around the world. This year's theme "Journalism without fear or favour" emphasises the importance of taking action to secure independent journalism as a prerequisite for a functioning democracy.

World Press Freedom Day is the opportunity to voice our support for journalists to continue providing the public with reliable, quality information – a task that has not only become more important but also much more difficult since the COVID-19 outbreak.

We must oppose all attempts by any state to use the pandemic to adopt restrictions on press freedom, silence debate, abuse journalists or spread misinformation. It is deeply concerning to see that across the world, publications are contracting and closing and journalists being made redundant because of falling revenues.

Especially in these times, we depend on independent, fact-based and reliable journalism. A free press is crucial for a comprehensive response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Only by keeping the public informed can we prevent a further spread of COVID-19.

We therefore support the UN Secretary-General's call on governments, as well as media and technology companies to counter misinformation with free, accurate, clear and evidence-based information and to avoid excessive efforts that could result in censorship of protected speech. We reiterate our support for the Information and Democracy Partnership and the Media Freedom Coalition.

We urge governments not to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to restrict press freedom and to protect journalists from harassment, threats, detention or censorship so that information can be disseminated without suppression.

We commend journalists for their important work and will continue to stand up for them and campaign for world press freedom.

Published 2 May 2020

[Top-up to local business grant funds scheme](#)

News story

A discretionary fund has been set up to accommodate certain small businesses previously outside the scope of the business grant funds scheme.



The Business Secretary Alok Sharma and Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government, Simon Clarke spoke to local authorities in England yesterday to set out that up to £617 million would be made available.

This is an additional 5% uplift to the £12.33 billion funding previously announced for the Small Business Grants Fund (SBGF) and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants Fund (RHLGF), so up to £617 million. We will confirm the exact amount for each local authority next week.

This additional fund is aimed at small businesses with ongoing fixed property-related costs. We are asking local authorities to prioritise businesses in shared spaces, regular market traders, small charity properties that would meet the criteria for Small Business Rates Relief, and bed and breakfasts that pay council tax rather than business rates. But local authorities may choose to make payments to other businesses based on local economic need. The allocation of funding will be at the discretion of local

authorities.

Businesses must be small, under 50 employees, and they must also be able to demonstrate that they have seen a significant drop of income due to Coronavirus restriction measures.

There will be three levels of grant payments. The maximum will be £25,000. There will also be grants of £10,000. local authorities will have discretion to make payments of any amount under £10,000. It will be for councils to adapt this approach to local circumstances.

Further guidance for local authorities will be set out shortly.

As of 27 April, over £7.5 billion has been paid out to over 614,000 business properties via the SBGF and RHLGF schemes. This is over 61% of the grant funding allocated to local authorities.

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[Bounce Back Loan Scheme: letter from the Chancellor to lenders](#)

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

[Charter flight from Jamaica for British travellers seeking to return to the UK](#)

News story

Around 140 British travellers will be able to get home from Jamaica on a

charter flight organised by the Government in partnership with the travel company TUI.



Around 140 British travellers will be able to get home from Jamaica on a charter flight organised by the Government in partnership with the travel company TUI.

The UK chartered TUI Airways flight will depart from Kingston Norman Manley International airport, to London Heathrow on 7 May 2020.

British travellers in Jamaica wishing to return on this flight should visit [FCO Travel Advice Jamaica Return to the UK](#) page for further information on how to register. Priority is initially being given to vulnerable passengers including those over 70 and others who have medical requirements. Where possible, the FCO will bring back Jamaicans who have Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK and who have lived in the UK in the last year.

Minister for the Caribbean, Baroness Sugg said:

This is our latest flight from the Caribbean. By partnering with TUI Airways, we are going to get around 140 British travellers home from Jamaica to be with their families at this challenging time. Our staff in Jamaica will continue to make sure any Brits not on these flights get the support they need.

Asif Ahmad, High Commissioner to Jamaica, said:

This flight will help British travellers stuck in Jamaica to get back to the UK. I encourage all those with an interest to register now as it is unlikely that there will be any further charter flights. I'd also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Jamaican authorities for enabling us to get people home during this crisis.

This follows UK Government flights announced from the Bahamas, Cuba, and Guyana. British missions in the Caribbean have now helped over 11,000 British travellers return to the UK via commercial routes, including over 4,000 from Jamaica.

The flight is being organised in partnership with TUI who are using the outbound leg from the UK to Jamaica to help crew from their cruise ships to get back to the Caribbean. This is enabling us to offer a cost-effective approach to get more British travellers home.

The UK Government is working with the airline industry and host governments across the world to bring back British travellers to the UK as part of the plan announced by Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on 30 March – with up to £75 million available for special charter flights to priority countries, focused on helping the most vulnerable travellers.

NOTES TO EDITORS

- The charter flights are for British travellers who normally reside in the UK, as well as their direct dependents. Jamaican citizens with appropriate residency rights will be included. A number of seats will be reserved for those deemed vulnerable.
- To book flights and register their details, British travellers should check the [FCO Travel Advice pages](#).
- Those who are eligible to fly will be sent information on getting to airports and flight itineraries directly when their seat is confirmed.
- Details regarding luggage allowance, flight costs and carriers will be available on the booking portal.
- The British High Commission continues to provide consular support to any British travellers who remain in Jamaica.
- Guidance on how to book onto a government charter flight back to the UK can be found [here](#).

Published 1 May 2020

[RAF Typhoons begin NATO Air Policing mission in Lithuania](#)

News story

Royal Air Force Typhoon jets will be in Lithuania for the summer, patrolling and protecting NATO airspace.



An RAF Typhoon FGR-4 from RAF Lossiemouth arrives at Siauliai Air Base in Lithuania

The aircraft from RAF Lossiemouth in northern Scotland will be stationed at the Siauliai Air Base in Lithuania for the UK's latest contribution to the NATO Baltic Air Policing mission.

Alongside F-18 fighters from the Spanish Air Force, the RAF Typhoons will fly over Baltic skies to deter any threats to NATO Allies' airspace. They will safely monitor and investigate any aircraft flying near Lithuanian airspace with transponders switched off or without a flight plan.

Around 150 RAF personnel – together forming 135 Expeditionary Air Wing – have deployed to Lithuania for the mission. All necessary measures have been taken to ensure that both UK and Lithuanian mandated COVID-19 precautions have been followed. The deployment, known as Operation Azotize, is a core defence task that the RAF is able to complete without impacting the military's ongoing support to the UK Government's COVID-19 response.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Britain's adversaries will not let Covid-19 stop them threatening our citizens and allies. It is for that reason the UK Armed Forces continue their operations at home and abroad – ensuring the collective defence of NATO and our national security.

This summer's deployment is the latest example of the UK's enduring and active commitment to Euro-Atlantic security, the bedrock of which is the NATO Alliance.

In nearby Estonia, over 800 British Army personnel stand sentinel on NATO's eastern flank as the lead of the country's NATO enhanced Forward Presence multinational battlegroup.

Last summer the RAF also deployed to Estonia for Baltic Air Policing, where Typhoons from RAF Coningsby conducted a total of 21 interceptions of 56 Russian aircraft over the course of four months. Previous RAF contributions to the mission occurred in 2016 in Estonia and 2014 in Lithuania.

Additionally, the RAF supported NATO Southern Air Policing in Romania in 2018 and NATO Icelandic Air Policing last year.

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