

Press release: Penny Mordaunt announces UK aid commitment to protect civilians, aid workers and hospitals targeted by the Asad regime

Women and children are evacuated from eastern Ghouta, Syria, March 2018.
Picture: UNICEF/Omar Sanadiki

The UK will provide lifesaving emergency medical support and help protect medical facilities and brave humanitarian workers that are being deliberately targeted with bombs and chemical weapons by the Asad regime, the International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt will say in Brussels today (Wednesday 25 April).

UK aid will help to train thousands of doctors and nurses to deliver trauma care in the most extreme conflict zones and to immediately respond to attacks, including how to remove shrapnel and treat blast injuries, burns and wounds from mortar fire. It will also provide essential medical supplies such as sutures, oxygen, blood and anaesthetics.

UK support aims to keep medical facilities open and we are providing blast proofing materials and sandbags to reinforce underground medical facilities and limit the damage from attacks.

Ms Mordaunt announced that the UK will provide at least £450 million this year to alleviate the extreme suffering in Syria, as well as providing vital support to millions of Syrian refugees sheltering in neighbouring countries.

With at least 30,000 people currently injured every month in Syria, it is expected that around a quarter of this UK aid support in Syria will be spent on healthcare next year.

Speaking at the Brussels conference on 'Supporting the Future of Syria and the region', Ms Mordaunt is expected to say:

It is clear the Syrian Regime and its backers, Russia and Iran, will attempt to block every diplomatic effort to hold the regime accountable for these reprehensible and illegal tactics.

Syria is now one of the most dangerous places on earth for aid workers and medical staff. Medical facilities and schools have been deliberately targeted, aid has been blocked to starve communities into submission, and rape and sexual violence have been deployed as routine weapons of war.

Today's pledge of UK aid support will help keep medical facilities

open in the face of relentless attacks so doctors and nurses can save the lives of innocent Syrians, as well as helping the millions of Syrian refugees sheltering in neighbouring countries. But today can't only be about pledges of money and we cannot allow anyone to turn their backs on the global rules and standards that keep us all safe.

We're calling for an immediate ceasefire and safe access so that brave aid workers and medical staff can do their jobs without fear of attack. This year, we must go beyond commitments. We must see concrete actions, which lead to greater protection for civilians and aid workers and work together to put Syria on a path towards peace.

It is estimated that at least 478 health facilities have been attacked or destroyed and at least 830 health workers have been killed in Syria since the conflict began in 2011.

There has been an increase in the number of health facilities in Syria targeted in the first months of 2018, with 36 facilities attacked in February alone.

Last year UK aid supported more than 175 health facilities, with more than 11,000 trained healthcare workers that delivered 2.2 million consultations.

On top of this, UK support has provided specialist training and equipment to respond to chemical weapons attacks, as well as providing personal protective equipment for frontline aid workers and 20,000 ampules of antidote to treat the effects of some chemical agents.

The UK will continue to use our position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and on the Human Rights Council to support resolutions that seek to protect civilians and humanitarian workers, as well as calling for existing resolutions to be observed by the regime and its backers.

With 5.6 million Syrian refugees sheltering in neighbouring countries, the UK aid commitment announced today will also provide support in Jordan and Lebanon so that Syrian refugees can remain close to home until they are one day able to return safely. On top of this, the UK will provide additional support for refugees in Turkey.

Notes for Editors

1. The International Development Secretary has committed to provide at least £450 million for Syria and the region in 2018 and £300 million in 2019. This brings the total amount that the UK has committed in humanitarian funding to the Syria region to £2.71 billion, up from £2.46 billion. The UK's pledge for 2018 includes £200 million of new money for the crisis, and our pledge for 2019 includes £50 million of new money.

2. In addition, the International Development Secretary also confirmed that the UK will pay its part of the second round of the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT2).
3. The UK is a leading donor in the humanitarian response. To date, we have committed over £2.71 billion in humanitarian funding to the region.
4. UK aid has already delivered over 27 million food rations, 10 million relief packages, 10 million vaccines and 12 million health consultations for those in need in Syria.
5. For security reasons, we cannot disclose the specific areas that our partners work in.
6. For more information on the UK's humanitarian response to the Syria crisis, visit:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/factsheet-the-uks-humanitarian-aid-response-to-the-syria-crisis>

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[News story: Britain bites back in the fight against loan sharks](#)

[Britain bites back in the fight against loan sharks](#)

Loan sharks face a fresh crackdown today (25 April), with more funding to tackle unlawful lending, and an increase in the amount of money seized from loan sharks to support those most vulnerable to their nasty tactics.

- over £5.5 million will be spent to fund the fight against loan sharks, helping to investigate and prosecute illegal lenders, and support their victims
- £100,000 of money already seized from loan sharks will also be spent to encourage people in England at risk of being targeted by loan sharks to join a credit union, helping them to access a safer form of finance and get their lives back on track
- and for the first time in Northern Ireland a new education project will be created to raise awareness of the dangers of loan sharks and to support vulnerable communities

John Glen, Economic Secretary to the Treasury said:

These nasty lenders are nothing more than lowlife crooks taking hard-earned cash from the pockets of the most vulnerable. Over 300,000 people are in debt to illegal money lenders in the Britain and they need to know that we're on their side. That's why we're taking the fight to the loan sharks and spending more than ever to support their victims.

In total, £5.67 million of funding will be provided to Britain's Illegal Money Lending Teams (IMLT) and bodies in Northern Ireland to tackle illegal lending – a 16% increase compared to the previous year. The money will be used to investigate and prosecute illegal lenders, and to support those who have been the victim of a loan shark.

Since the Illegal Money Lending Team was established in England in 2004, they've made over 380 prosecutions, leading to 328 years' worth of sentences, and have written off over £73 million of illegal debt, helping over 28,000 people to escape the jaws of the loan sharks. Similar teams operate in Scotland and Wales.

In Northern Ireland, the Consumer Council will lead its first ever education and awareness campaign to help prevent the most vulnerable from being bitten by loan sharks, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) will get funding for a specialised officer who will lead on illegal lending within the Paramilitary Crime Task Force.

Tony Quigley, Head of the England Illegal Money Lending Team, said:

Loan sharks are a blight on society and prey on vulnerable people who struggle to make ends meet. These criminals use callous methods to enforce repayment and victims are often subjected to threats, intimidation and violence. We will not tolerate this sort of criminal activity in our country and loan sharks who are caught flouting the law will be pursued and prosecuted.

It is important for people to realise that alternatives to borrowing from loan sharks are available if you are in financial difficulty. Loan sharks are never the answer and we strongly support credit unions who can provide a safe and legal alternative. If you have been affected by illegal money lending, please call our confidential hotline on 0300 555 2222.

[Press release: Government champions](#)

innovation in bid to build well-designed homes

- Ministers to call for closer links between government and industry to deliver well-designed homes.
- Industry summit to promote quality design to help deliver new homes and fix the broken housing market.

Ministers will today (25 April 2018) call on industry to embrace the latest innovations to make sure we are building the good quality homes that our country needs.

As part of the government's focus on fixing the broken housing market and its ambition of delivering 300,000 new homes in England by the mid-2020s, it's essential that the quality and design of new housing is addressed. This can help secure support from communities for new homes, and make sure we have good quality homes that people can feel proud living in and next-door to.

Recent research shows that more than 7 out of 10 people would support new residential development if buildings are well-designed and in keeping with their local area.

Action to boost innovative approaches for well-designed new homes include:

£1 billion investment through the Home Building Fund to develop new, modern approaches to design and construction

To date, 8 projects across 11 local authorities, backed by government funding, will use modern methods of construction such as modular homes to build good quality homes, using the latest techniques, whilst helping to speed up housing delivery.

Learning from other countries like Australia, Norway and Sweden where good design is embedded in decision making

For example, based on an Australian model, the government will urge councils to set their own design quality standards, giving communities the ability to better reflect their own unique character in local planning policy.

Embracing new technologies

For example using Virtual Reality (VR) technology to win the confidence of communities before a single brick is laid. By visualising proposed new housing from the neighbour or homebuyer's perspective, communities will be able to see how development can visually contribute to the area from an early stage, even before planning permission has been granted.

Housing Secretary Sajid Javid will say:

Our homes are the making of all of us, which is why today's event on raising the bar on the quality of new homes is so important.

This government is determined to make sure that high quality design is the norm rather than the exception.

Housing Minister Dominic Raab will say:

We are putting high-quality design on the map as never before when it comes to building better homes and stronger communities.

Today's conference marks an important milestone in that journey.

Industry leaders, including local authority planners, developers and design professionals, attending the Design Quality Conference will share their expertise to ensure how homes look becomes just as important as the number delivered.

Ministers will focus on how developers can use better quality design in order to win over both communities and new generations of first-time buyers, who expect the highest quality homes before parting with their hard-earned deposits.

When things go wrong, the government has also proposed strengthening ways for homebuyers to complain when their home hasn't been built satisfactorily – with these new measures recently being subject to a [consultation](#).

The event will build on previous government action to ensure new homes are built using quality materials and design methods, as set out in the recently published [draft National Planning Policy Framework](#).

The document, which is currently out to consultation, outlines requirements for design guides and codes to feature prominently in new Local Plans, significant consideration to be given to existing local character as well as setting out the density of developments that meet the needs and expectations of the community.

The conference will also include speakers from the Royal Institute of British Architects, Stephen Lawrence Trust, The Princes Foundation, Historic England and Homes England as well as other experts with experience in delivering excellent build quality for new and existing communities.

A series of exhibitions and seminar workshops will be held during the day, focusing on a range of issues such as:

- How to use quality methods and materials to create supportive communities.
- New approaches that lead to quality design in practice.
- Using new technologies that support greater community engagement in design, approaches to measuring quality and presentation.

- Training, skills development and latest innovation to ensure the use of good design principals spread across the industry.
- The expectations of consultee organisations such as Historic England, Homes England and the National Infrastructure Commission in designing homes that fit in with their wider setting.

National Planning Policy Framework

In the [revised National Planning Policy Framework](#) it is made clear that the government is committed to ensuring the planning system can deliver high quality buildings and places.

The document sets out that permission should be refused for a development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions. Conversely, where the design of a development accords with clear expectations in local policies, design should not be used by the decision-maker as a valid reason to object to development.

Housing white paper

The [housing white paper](#) published in February 2017 also set out the government's ambition to give communities a stronger voice in the design of new housing, and to drive up the quality and character of new development, building on the success of neighbourhood planning.

Home Building Fund

The £3 billion [Home Building Fund](#) provides support for builders using modern methods of construction, custom builders, and new entrants to the market. An additional £1.5 million announced in the Autumn Budget will help small and medium-sized builders who cannot access the finance they need.

Eight projects employing modern methods of construction have been awarded almost £1 billion through the Home Building Fund to date.

[News story: New taskforce to take action against violent crime](#)

Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, today announced a coalition of government ministers, cross-party MPs, police leaders, local government and the voluntary sector will make up the Serious Violence Taskforce – which will ensure sustained, swift and decisive action against violent crime.

Together with the government, the taskforce will help design and deliver the key commitments of the [Serious Violence Strategy](#), working with affected

communities to ensure immediate and real action is taken.

The taskforce's aim is to stop the recent increases in serious violence and see levels of violent crime reduce. It will hold the government and others to account, evaluate the strategy's impact and commission further work as commitments are delivered.

Chaired by the Home Secretary, the taskforce – which will meet for the first time on 26 April, when the frequency of future meetings will also be decided – will have the vital job of ensuring the strategy is effectively delivered.

Home Secretary Amber Rudd said:

I am determined that the Serious Violence Strategy will have an immediate impact on tackling the scourge of serious violence.

I am absolutely clear that the taskforce must work with the government to deliver the strategy's commitments. Together, we will seek to prevent serious violence from happening in the first place and ensure the measures that I set out when I launched the strategy are delivered.

Everyone joining the taskforce is committed to ending the serious violence blighting our communities and I look forward to working together in the weeks and months ahead.

The taskforce's members include Home Office ministers Nick Hurd and Victoria Atkins; London MPs Chuka Umunna and David Lammy; Mayor of London Sadiq Khan; Met Commissioner Cressida Dick; National Crime Agency Director-General Lynne Owens; and Chingford and Woodford Green MP Iain Duncan Smith, who founded the Centre for Social Justice and has a long-standing interest in issues around serious violence.

Its membership reflects the Home Secretary's words when launching the strategy last week when she spoke of the importance of the taskforce's cross-party dimension.

Establishing the taskforce was one of 60 measures announced in the Serious Violence Strategy. Commissioned by the Home Secretary and backed with £40 million of Home Office funding, the strategy marks a major shift in the government's response to serious violence.

It strikes a balance between prevention and robust law enforcement with a new £11 million Early Intervention Youth Fund for community projects to help young people live lives free from violence.

The strategy identifies the changing drugs market – in particular the devastating impact of crack cocaine – as a key driver of the violence harming our communities, and announces a range of powerful actions to tackle the issue of 'county lines' and its implications for drugs, violence and exploitation of vulnerable people. That includes £3.6 million to establish a

new National County Lines Co-ordination Centre.

The membership of the taskforce will be:

- Home Secretary, Amber Rudd
- Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability, Victoria Atkins
- Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, Nick Hurd
- Minister for Children and Families, Nadhim Zahawi
- Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, Margot James
- Member of Parliament for Tottenham, Rt Hon David Lammy MP
- Member of Parliament for Streatham, Chuka Umunna MP
- Member of Parliament for Chingford and Woodford Green, Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP
- Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Cressida Dick
- National Police Chiefs Council Deputy Assistant Commissioner, Duncan Ball
- Director-General of the National Crime Agency, Lynne Owens
- Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan
- Chair of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, David Lloyd
- Chief Executive of the Big Lottery Fund, Dawn Austwick
- Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield
- Chief Executive of Public Health Wales, Dr Tracey Cooper
- Chief Executive of Public Health England, Duncan Selbie
- Local Government Association, Councillor, Simon Blackburn
- CEO of the Ben Kinsella Trust, Patrick Green
- CEO of Redthread, John Poyton
- Head of Gangs SOS project for St Giles Trust, Junior Smart
- CEO of Onside Youth Zones, Kathryn Morley
- Chief Operating Officer of Catch 22, Naomi Hulston
- Knife crime campaigner and Member of Parliament for Enfield North (2010-2015), Nick de Bois

[Press release: Minister for Europe attends Gallipoli Commemorations in Turkey](#)

The Minister paid respects to allied forces who lost their lives over a century ago in the World War One Gallipoli campaign.

Sir Alan attended an International Service of Commemoration where he was invited to deliver a [speech of reconciliation](#) and lay a wreath.

He will join other dignitaries from around the world representing New Zealand, Australia and France.

The Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan said:

I am honoured to attend the Gallipoli commemorations and pay respects to allied forces who fought in the World War One campaign.

It is also a remarkable testament to the power of reconciliation that a century after Turkey and the UK were on opposite sides, we now stand shoulder to shoulder as NATO allies and trusted friends.

Further information