

Press release: 7 years of conflict in Syria: Statement by International Development Secretary and Foreign Secretary

The International Development Secretary, Penny Mordaunt, and Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, have issued a statement to mark seven years of the Syria conflict.

Today the Syria crisis enters its eighth year. It has become one of the longest and bloodiest wars in recent history. The impact on Syrians, above all civilians, has been devastating with an estimated 400,000 dead and 13 million in need of humanitarian assistance.

The Asad regime and those who back it bear overwhelming responsibility for the destruction of the country, its infrastructure and the lives of its people.

Despite promises of de-escalation, the violence continues and the civilian death toll continues to rise. Last month the UK supported UN Security Council Resolution 2401 calling for a ceasefire. Yet in Eastern Ghouta – which Russia itself declared to be a de-escalation area – the regime, with Russian support, has continued to bombard and besiege the population, turning it into a hell on earth. Over 1,100 people are estimated to have been killed there since 18 February alone.

We find it utterly abhorrent that the regime is using food and medical supplies as a weapon of war. Civilians continue to be deliberately and indiscriminately targeted by military strikes, and despite promises made by Russia to ensure Syria would abandon all of its chemical weapons in 2013, international investigators have confirmed that the regime has since used chemical weapons in four separate attacks – which Russia has gone to great lengths to conceal. The UK is committed to ensuring that all those responsible for chemical weapons use and other violations of international law in this conflict are held to account.

The UK has always been at the forefront of the response to the crisis. More than 13 million people in Syria and in neighbouring countries are still in need of assistance. We will continue to help innocent people survive the toughest situations imaginable and, ultimately, help them to rebuild their lives.

The suffering will only end when there is a political solution to the conflict. We will continue to use our position on the UN Security Council to pursue this, as well as to unlock humanitarian access and protect civilians. The UN is ready to mediate a settlement. The opposition have declared their

readiness for negotiations without preconditions. But the regime continues to obstruct progress. The international community must commit to a ceasefire and a political process that ends this conflict for good.

Press release: New video showcases design for major M25 junction upgrade

The animations show the design of the junction as well widening of the A3 at the Painshill junction, as well as the new access road for RHS Gardens Wisley. The preferred route was announced last year and a consultation on the final design was launched last month and runs until 26 March.

Highways England senior project manager Brian Gash said:

We hope that this fly-through video helps to give people a good overview of how each element of the upgrade will look when complete. It's a hugely busy junction with one of the road networks highest collision rates and this upgrade will not only help to alleviate the congestion but improve safety as well.

We are nearing the end of the consultation period but there is still plenty of time to get involved. We welcome all views and ideas and encourage those with an interest in the scheme to come and see the project team at an event.

Under the plans, the interchange between the M25 and the A3 will be redesigned to create four dedicated link roads for all drivers making left turns at the junction while drivers turning right will use a new enlarged junction roundabout.

The A3 will also be widened from three lanes to four between Ockham and Painshill in both directions with two lanes remaining over the M25. A new access road providing better, safer access to several local roads and RHS Garden Wisley will be created. The A245 will also be widened near the Painshill junction to accommodate three lanes of traffic leaving and joining the A3.

Screen grab of the new Highways England visualisation of the M25 junction 10 scheme

A public consultation on the proposals runs until 26 March. Highways England is holding information exhibitions at venues across the area so that people can examine the proposals and put any questions directly to project team.

Public information events dates and locations still to go:

- Friday 16 March 8am to 8pm, Cobham Services, M25
- Friday 23 March 8am to 8pm, Cobham Services, M25

The new visualisation, details on the design and feedback forms are [available on the scheme website](#) until 11:45pm on 26 March 2018.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

News story: New laws unlock exciting space era for UK

New laws are set to get Royal Assent today (15 March 2018) which will unlock an exciting era of British space innovation, exploration and investment.

The [Space Industry Bill](#) will enable the first commercial space launch from UK soil in history, creating the potential for hundreds of highly-skilled jobs and bringing in billions of pounds for the economy.

The passing of the Bill, the most modern piece of space industry legislation anywhere in the world, means British businesses will soon be able to compete in the commercial space race using UK spaceports.

This will not only ensure Britain is capable of launching small satellites and scientific experiments from our own soil, but also able to take advantage of future developments like hypersonic flight and high-speed point to point transport.

The UK is already a global hub for satellite manufacturing, operation and application development. Access to space will allow companies to deploy satellites as well, making the UK a one-stop shop for satellites services and the best place in Europe to start and grow a space business.

Transport Minister Jo Johnson said:

Access to space is the final piece of the puzzle for the UK space sector and forms part of the government's [Industrial Strategy](#) – helping to drive growth across the country and unlocking hundreds

of highly-skilled jobs in our regions.

The Space Industry Bill gives companies the ability to launch satellites from UK soil, putting us at the forefront of the new space race, and helping us to compete as the destination of choice for satellite companies worldwide.

Science Minister Sam Gyimah said:

The Space Industry Bill offers an exciting opportunity for the UK to soar to new heights and be at the forefront of the commercial space age. Through the government's ambitious Industrial Strategy, we are working with the sector to pursue pioneering commercial space opportunities, including developing new technologies, infrastructure and services. This will open up the UK to new frontiers, transforming the way we live, and establishing us as a space flight leader.

With one in four of all telecoms satellites substantially built in Britain and our businesses at the forefront of hypersonic flight technology, through its Industrial Strategy, the government is working with the industry to increase its global share of the space sector from 6.5% to 10% by 2030.

And if the UK can build its own spaceports, we will also be able to tap into the rapidly expanding launch market – worth an estimated £10 billion over the next decade.

Satellite services already support more than £250 billion of GDP in the wider UK economy as well as products and services we all rely on.

Science Minister Sam Gyimah will also announce 8 new projects today as part of the UK Space Agency's [Space for Smarter Government Programme](#), which demonstrates the potential of using satellite technology to solve challenges faced by the public sector.

These projects range from using satellite data and machine learning technology to support the roll out of charging points for electric vehicles, to deploying drones and satellites in the battle against marine waste.

The Space Industry Bill will also create new opportunities for the UK's business and scientific community to carry out cutting-edge research and inspire the next generation of British scientists and engineers.

Work is already underway to ensure the next generation is involved – with over 1,000 apprenticeships in the space sector and government's [Year of Engineering](#) campaign championing careers in STEM to the next generation of scientists and astronauts. And it is British scientists, engineers, programmers and entrepreneurs who are at the forefront of shaping this future.

Dr Graham Turnock, Chief Executive of the UK Space Agency, said:

The Space Industry Bill guarantees the sky is not the limit for future generations of engineers, entrepreneurs and scientists. We will set out how we plan to accelerate the development of the first commercial launch services from the UK, and realise the full potential of this enabling legislation over the coming months.

Currently UK firms rely on a limited supply of launches in other countries which leaves them vulnerable to launch delays. The Space Industry Bill will help to increase the supply of launch services closer to home, and capture a share of growing global launch demand.

Government will now work to create a regulatory structure that empowers innovation, embraces opportunity and ensures UK launch activity is carried out safely and responsibly in the UK.

News story: £67 million boost for a Full Fibre future

Tens of thousands of businesses and homes across the UK are set to benefit from a £67 million investment in faster internet connections, the Chancellor Philip Hammond announced today.

The Nationwide Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme (GBVS) will provide vouchers worth up to £3000 for a small or medium sized business or £500 to residents to help with the costs of connecting to full fibre broadband.

The scheme is part of a wider government plan to get more homes and businesses connected to full fibre broadband. It builds on the £200 million Local Full Fibre Networks programme which gives funding to local areas to boost full fibre delivery. £95 million of this funding was allocated at Spring Statement to 13 successful bidders across the UK.

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond said:

We're backing Britain's small businesses by investing £67 million to bring full-fibre broadband to more businesses up and down the country.

This means faster, more reliable broadband access as we build the digital infrastructure we need to make our economy fit for the

future.

DCMS Secretary of State, Matt Hancock said:

Small businesses are the backbone of the British economy and now they can turbo-charge their connectivity with gigabit speeds.

By building a full fibre future for Britain we are laying the foundations for a digital infrastructure capable of delivering today what the next generation will need tomorrow.

Full fibre connections are faster, more reliable and cheaper to operate than traditional copper lines, and are capable of supporting not only gigabit, but terabit and even petabit speeds, which will serve the UK far into the future. Currently only around 3% of UK premises have access to a full fibre connection.

The scheme forms part of the Government's commitment to make full fibre broadband available to at least 10 million homes and businesses by 2022. Over the past 18 months, the government has taken significant steps to support the commercial roll out of full-fibre broadband, including:

This next generation of connectivity will help the country to remain productive and competitive over the long-term, creating a Britain fit for the future, and enabling businesses to create better, higher-paying jobs in every part of the UK. Through its Industrial Strategy, the Government is continually driving the UK's connectivity, telecommunications and digital sectors, and investing in the skills, industries and infrastructure of the future. Registration for new suppliers will open before the launch of the scheme at the end of March 2018. The scheme will be open until March 2021 or until all available funding has been allocated. There is more information [on our website](#).

Notes to editors:

- The Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme is intended to further the strategic objective of the Local Full Fibre Networks programme to stimulate commercial investment in full fibre coverage across the UK in both rural and urban locations across the UK.
- A market trial of the voucher scheme for business premises was launched in late 2017 in four areas across the country, with one area also running a trial of residential vouchers. Around 1000 vouchers were issued to small businesses through this pilot. These areas were:
 - Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire
 - Bristol, with Bath and North East Somerset (also had residential vouchers)
 - Coventry and Warwickshire (North Warwickshire, Nuneaton and Bedworth, Rugby, Stratford-on-Avon, Warwick)

- West Yorkshire and York (Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, Wakefield and York)
 - Businesses and residents can get vouchers from suppliers who are registered with the scheme. Vouchers may only be used to support the cost of eligible connections. Suppliers can offer vouchers to both new and existing customers.
 - Where suppliers are able to provide qualifying connections to single SMEs, vouchers will be made available to cover up to £3,000 of eligible costs.
 - The only way residents can benefit from the voucher scheme is as part of a local community group scheme, which must also include small businesses. Residents and businesses taking part in a group scheme are able to join together to pool the value of their vouchers. Within this group the total value of vouchers used by businesses must always be greater than the value of vouchers taken by residents.
 - In some areas the value of a single voucher will not fully meet the installation costs of a gigabit capable full fibre connection. Anyone in this position can also benefit from the group approach outlined above. Businesses and local community groups interested in requesting a voucher will be able to find full details of our scheme [on our website](#). The website also includes instructions on how to register for new suppliers, and the full details and terms and conditions of the scheme.
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Press release: Breaking down barriers to Welsh global exporting ambitions

- UK Government seeks views of Welsh businesses on how to boost export potential
- Global Welsh exporters Hiut Denim and Aerfin to help inform UK Government's export strategy review

Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns will challenge Welsh enterprises to set their sights on a global future when he gathers business leaders around the table to discuss the priorities, opportunities and challenges they face on their exporting journeys around the world.

It is part of a series of engagement opportunities undertaken by the UK Government as part of its Export Strategy review.

The Government is working closely with industry to understand the challenges faced by UK firms, increase awareness of export support and finance that is already available, and explore how this can be improved.

Cardigan based denim manufacturer Hiut – who export 25% of their jeans around the world, and the UK's fastest growing exporter, AerFin in Caerphilly will be among those joining the Secretary of State at the first roundtable meeting

in Cardiff today (15 March) with another planned for north Wales later this month.

Exports from Wales rose by 12.3% to £16.4 billion in the latest year on year figures, is home to nearly 4,000 exporters with an average value per exporter of more than £4.2million.

Yet there is huge scope for more businesses to reach new customers by meeting demand for UK goods and services overseas.

As such, the UK Government is calling on Welsh businesses to contribute to the Export Strategy review and share their views on how the UK Government can encourage and support British businesses to take advantage of the enormous potential to grow.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

The big increase in Welsh exports shows our home-grown companies are succeeding on the world stage and consumers want the high quality goods and services that we have to offer.

The Export Strategy review will draw on expertise from across government and the private sector, helping us to understand how best to support British companies to take advantage of opportunities in overseas markets.

Throughout this process, I want to see significant input from businesses in Wales, both large and small, to ensure we develop a strategy that meets their needs.

The meeting comes in the week before a host of Welsh companies attend the UK Government's GREAT Festival of Innovation in Hong Kong (21-24 March) – an event which will showcase the power of UK innovation and technology to the world.

The four-day event will bring together some of the UK and Asia's most pioneering companies to share innovations that will drive the future of free trade and for businesses to build lifelong partnerships.

The UK Government will report on the export strategy in spring this year.

Top 5 ways the UK Government supports businesses to export:

1. great.gov.uk – export platform which lists thousands of export opportunities worth millions of pounds. It also puts firms in touch with global buyers at the click of a mouse.
2. [UK Export Finance](#) – the UK's export credit agency provides financial support like capital loans, to ensure no viable export deal fails due to

lack of finance and insurance. UKEF has recently partnered with 5 of the UK's biggest banks, to help small businesses easily access government-backed financial support.

3. Face-to-face support for exporters in England – delivered via a network of around 250 international trade advisers (ITAs). ITAs are managed by 9 delivery partners who operate in each of the 9 English regions.
4. Trade shows – DIT supports trade shows across the world to showcase the best of UK companies from sectors including life sciences, automotive and food and drink.
5. Board of Trade – with representatives from the business community to be the 'eyes and ears' of modern businesses. It meets 4 times a year rotated around the UK guaranteeing all parts of the union have a chance to raise the issues most important to them.