

# Press release: UK Commonwealth Minister visits Scotland ahead of April's summit

The UK's Minister for the Commonwealth has visited Edinburgh today (Tuesday 6 March) to explore the historical and present-day links between Scotland and other Commonwealth nations ahead of the [Commonwealth Summit](#).

Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister of State Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon met students from Kelvin College, Glasgow and heard about their textile design project, run in collaboration with students at a women's community college in Guntur, India. The project centred around the history of the famous Paisley Pattern, which originated in India, and culminated in joint fashion shows in both Paisley and Guntur.

Lord Ahmad visited the Scottish Youth Parliament to meet young people active in their communities, including individuals who will attend the Commonwealth Youth Forum during the summit. They discussed issues facing young people in Scotland, and how the summit can best capture the voices and interests of young people across the world.

He also attended a lunch with diaspora members and faith representatives to hear about how different communities will be involved with the Summit and to uncover more about the international relationships that act as living bridges between Scotland and other Commonwealth countries today.

In April, the UK will host the annual Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting with world leaders travelling in to take part in a week-long programme of activities.

Lord Ahmad said:

My father arrived in Glasgow from the Indian subcontinent in the 1950s and made a home in the UK. For this and many other reasons, Scotland, and its Commonwealth ties, is very important to me.

The Commonwealth is a unique family of nations and its members account for two and a half billion people. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April will focus on young people as we strive to meet the aspirations of the one billion people in Commonwealth countries under the age of 25. I want to see Scotland, especially its young people, involved in shaping decisions that affect their future.

I am incredibly confident in the future of the Commonwealth and the role Scotland has to play in it.

Lord Ahmad met Fiona Hyslop, the Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, to discuss the key role that the Scottish Government has in the run up to the Commonwealth Summit, including through hosting Commonwealth 'Big Lunches' and engaging young people.

## Further information

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## [Speech: Penny Mordaunt's speech at the DFID and UN Somalia meeting](#)

I'm delighted to welcome you here today and in particular to His Excellency, Mr Gamal Hassan, the Minister of Planning, Investment and Economic Development of the Federal Republic of Somalia today and our other distinguished guests. I'd also like to thank Mark Lowcock for initiating this meeting, and for all the work his team has done with my officials to bring us all together today.

I am proud of the UK's partnership with Somalia. This time last year, Somalia was on the brink of disaster and we realised that we had to step up. Together we have averted a famine and saved thousands of lives.

Last year's response was an important success story, both for Somalia and for the international humanitarian system. But the job is not finished yet. The humanitarian situation remains a major cause for concern, and the famine risk remains high.

We need to sustain and build on our humanitarian response to ensure that we meet the most immediate and urgent needs. Alongside this, we also need to recognise the need for long-lasting solutions to break the cycle of this crisis. That is why we have called this meeting today.

My Department, and the UK Government, remain committed to working with the Somali authorities, local and international NGOs, UN agencies, and new partners who can help us reach the 5.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance after some of the worst droughts on record.

In January I visited Mogadishu and saw first-hand the lifesaving work we are doing together, and I also announced £21 million in UK funding towards the 2018 humanitarian response.

Today, I'm pleased to confirm a further commitment, bringing our total contribution to £86 million. This includes £24.6 million from the UK Crisis Reserve, which helps us respond to emergency situations. I'm pleased to confirm that £46 million of this will be released before the end of this month, to ensure that funds are available to support early action and intervention. And I would like to thank all of you for your continued support

to Somalia and encourage you to step up to the challenge in 2018 as we try and avert a potential famine.

I hope that this meeting will serve to encourage all of us to sustain our efforts to continue to tackle the drought, and ensure that the famine we helped to prevent last year does not happen again instead, to ensure that funds are available to support early action and intervention. I would like to thank everyone for your continued support.

I know that the spring rains will be critical in determining how severe the situation becomes this year. But even if the rains are good, humanitarian needs will still remain high. That is why I have asked my officials to keep me updated. As the year unfolds we will consider if additional UK resources are required.

As we join together to meet the challenges ahead, we must also ensure that we deliver against the Grand Bargain commitments that we all signed up to.

We must do better at including the most marginalised Somalis and ensuring that we protect the most vulnerable – women and girls and disabled people in particular. This means ensuring that aid is able to reach conflict-affected areas. And I call on the Somali authorities, and international partners, to do all they can to ensure that access for humanitarian aid is not restricted.

And we must also look forward and beyond the current situation. Drought need not turn into widespread food insecurity and famine. It is vitally important that we balance both the short and long term needs of vulnerable Somalis, and make sure there are stronger links between our humanitarian and development work so we can build resilience and the ability to cope with future shocks. As Somalia's government makes progress in addressing insecurity, rebuilding its institutions, and creating economic opportunities for its citizens, we will be better placed to break this persistent cycle of crisis.

And having recently visited, I am optimistic about the future.

Long term solutions require stability and a real commitment from Somalia itself. We have seen that we can work together to stave off disaster. We are also seeing growing evidence that Somalia is heading towards a future where it can better take care of its own needs, including making good progress on its re-engagement with the IMF and the development banks and raising its own revenue.

This is why the UK government will continue to play an active role in supporting Somalia to meet all these objectives, including helping develop new ideas for economic recovery and continuing the progress being made towards re-engagement with the international financial system.

I wish you a very fruitful meeting today and I thank you again for your continued commitment to Somalia.

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## News story: Central booking system for NI women seeking an abortion in England

The Department of Health and Social Care has established a central booking service that will be run by the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS). Women from Northern Ireland can call a single telephone number to make an appointment with the most appropriate provider, based on:

- the woman's requirements
- her medical condition
- provider availability

The number is 0333 234 2184.

In June 2017, the Minister for Women and Equalities announced that women who are residents of Northern Ireland would be able access abortion procedures in England free of any charge. The package of care available includes:

- a consultation with an abortion provider in England, including an assessment of whether the legal grounds for an abortion are met
- an abortion procedure
- HIV or sexually transmitted infection tests
- choice of contraception from the abortion provider
- support with travel costs if women face financial hardship

The new booking system does not include the provision of any services in Northern Ireland and does not change the arrangements announced in 2017.

The central booking system will be funded through a grant from the Department of Health and Social Care, with support from the Government Equalities Office and HM Treasury.

The government has also finalised grant agreements with the 3 main abortion service providers to fund procedures for women from Northern Ireland. These are:

- BPAS
- Marie Stopes International
- NUPAS Ireland

The Department of Health and Social Care will also be reimbursing providers for all procedures they have undertaken on Northern Ireland residents since 29 June 2017.

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## **Press release: PM meeting with Guy Verhofstadt: 6 March**

This morning the Prime Minister met Guy Verhofstadt MEP at Downing Street, as part of ongoing engagement with representatives from the European Parliament.

The Prime Minister and Mr Verhofstadt discussed the importance of citizens' rights, including the proposals the UK put forward last week regarding EU citizens arriving during the implementation period. The Prime Minister reiterated that the expectations of those moving to the UK in this period will not be the same as those who arrived before our withdrawal.

The Prime Minister restated her commitment to avoiding a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland and noted the importance of officials from the Irish government, the European Commission and the UK meeting to discuss practical solutions.

They discussed the European Parliament's proposals for an institutional framework to support a close future relationship between the UK and the EU and the Prime Minister explained the vision for the future economic partnership set out in her Mansion House speech.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster David Lidington and the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU David Davis attended the meeting. Mr Verhofstadt also met the Home Secretary Amber Rudd after the meeting.

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## **Press release: Sandwell Valley Park remains open during construction works**

Access preparation for the construction of phase 2 of the Environment Agency's Perry Barr and Witton Flood Risk Management Scheme started late January and will continue for the next couple of months. The main construction for the scheme will begin late spring/early summer and will reduce the risk of flooding to 1,400 properties in the area.

Over the next few weeks park visitors will see tree felling operations and some movement of HGVs through the access routes by Forge Mill Farm and the railway bridge by the RSPB centre. Any HGV movement will be carried out within normal working hours Monday to Friday. Priority will be given to park users, to keep disruption to a minimum. Both Forge Mill Farm and the RSPB will remain open during construction, and a path between the 2 buildings will

remain available throughout the construction of the scheme. Handsworth Golf Course will be modified to support the scheme, but it will remain open as usual.

Recent Environment Agency drop-in sessions updated the public about progress of works, and received valuable feedback from local community members and representatives of user groups in the park. Another drop-in session is being planned in the near future. Staff will be on hand to answer questions and confirm information such as timescales, footpath closures and traffic management. Attendees will also be able to view the plans and get an overview of the programme as a whole.

Rachel Kelly, Environment Agency project lead for the scheme said:

This is a very exciting scheme that is going to reduce the risk of flooding for 1,400 properties in the area. We have been working closely with our partners and the local community to ensure that we minimise disruption to the park users and keep the community informed as we progress through the construction phase.

Councillor David Hosell, cabinet member for highways and the environment, said:

Council officers have worked hard with the Environment Agency to ensure that the scheme has minimal effect on visitors to the Valley.

We are delighted that part of the scheme and work in the Country Park will include new fencing for improved animal pens at Forge Mill Farm, extending it as a visitor attraction. There will also be improvements to the entrance into the park for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders entering from the Old Newton Road.

More information about the Perry Barr and Witton Flood Risk Management Scheme is available [online](#). Alternatively contact the Environment Agency project team at [witton.frms@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:witton.frms@environment-agency.gov.uk).

Along with flood defences and flood management schemes, knowing your flood risk is also important when protecting your family and property from flooding. People can check their risk and register to receive free flood warnings by visiting the Environment Agency's [flood information pages](#) or calling Floodline on 0345 988 1188.