

Press release: Foreign Secretary orders plastic to be binned from Britain's diplomatic network

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) will eliminate avoidable single-use plastics from its UK operations by the end of the year, and from its global operations by 2020. It is the first UK government department to announce such a ban.

This ambitious target makes the FCO a leader in the fight against plastic pollution not just in the UK, but globally too.

In recent weeks, the FCO has already removed all plastic cups, crockery, cutlery, straws and single-use condiment sachets from its London staff canteen, and is providing re-usable or biodegradable alternatives.

It plans to increase its "latte levy" from 10p to 50p to encourage staff to use their own mugs instead of disposable ones – and places the FCO firmly at the top of the pack in taking real action to end plastic waste.

The Foreign Secretary has set a deadline of year-end 2018 for the FCO to find alternatives to the remaining avoidable single-use plastics in use in its UK estate.

As well as a ban by year-end in the UK, the Foreign Secretary has given a 2020 target for its overseas estate, with a significant reduction this year.

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

It is time for the world to truly wake up to the damage being done to the environment, and especially by the sheer volume of plastic that is dumped in our oceans.

If the UK is to turn the tide overseas on this crucial issue, it is only right that the Foreign Office leads the way at home.

Sir Simon McDonald, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office said:

Since 2009/10, the Foreign Office has reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 39%, waste by 45%, paper consumption by 42% and water use by 12.9m litres in our UK operations. But we must do more to reduce our use of plastic. I am confident we can meet the challenge put to us by the Foreign Secretary.

In addition, the FCO is looking at how it can further reduce its environmental impact beyond plastic. Projects identified for

consideration include replacing existing vehicles with electric hybrid vehicles, waste to energy projects, and a global automated energy monitoring and reduction programme.

The drive comes on the back of the launch of the Government's 25-Year Environment Plan last month, which set out measures to eliminate avoidable plastic waste by 2042 across the whole of the UK.

Notes to editors

The drive comes on the back of the launch of the Government's 25-Year Environment Plan last month, which set out measures to reduce plastic waste.

The FCO already has a strong record in sustainability. Its most recent [annual sustainability report](#) show that in 2016/17 in its UK operations the FCO:

- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 39%
- Reduced water consumption by 12.9m litres
- Reduced waste & recycling produced by 45%
- Reduced paper consumption by 42%

In recognition of these efforts, we were shortlisted as a finalist in the British Institute of Facilities Management (BIFM) Awards 2017 for its actions to drive significant reductions in water and energy use across the UK estate – the first central government department to achieve this success in the 16 years the awards have been running.

Estimates of the amount of avoidable single-use plastics in the FCO include:

- 103,201 cold drinks bottles purchased by the FCO in the UK in 2017 (stretching from FCO HQ to Heathrow Airport)
- 655,718 hot beverage cups purchased by the FCO in the UK in 2017 (FCO HQ to Milton Keynes / Brighton)
- 285,600 plastic water cups purchased by the FCO in the UK in 2017
- 14,950 pieces of plastic cutlery purchased by the FCO in the UK in 2017
- 1.37m avoidable single-use plastic items were used purchased by the FCO in the UK in 2017
- Initial estimates suggest that the FCO globally is consuming at least 3.45m items of avoidable single-use plastics.

Further information

[Press release: Illegal Newcastle](#)

scrapyard charged with £7k fine

A Newcastle man has been fined for operating a vehicle scrapyard without a permit in a prosecution brought by the Environment Agency.

Ronald Coulson Vincent Grieveson, 23, of Forest Hall, appeared at Newcastle Magistrates' Court on Friday, February 23.

He pleaded guilty to illegally storing and treating waste vehicles and parts without a permit. He was fined £3,628, and ordered to pay costs of £3,273.58 and a victim surcharge of £362.

Acting on behalf of the Environment Agency, solicitor Chris Bunting told the court Grieveson had been operating an illegal waste site at Unit C, Grieveson Industrial Estate, Byker, without an environmental permit.

Environment Agency officers visited the site on 16 November 2016 and saw oil seeping from loose car engines onto the concrete and into a combined sewer system nearby. Grieveson was told to stop illegal activities and stop oil leaking off site.

On a further visit a month later, Environment Officers found oil continued to leak off site from engines left on the concrete surface. More car engines were stored in a red skip and various car parts and tyres were stored elsewhere on the site.

Grieveson was issued with a legal notice warning him to stop all illegal activity on site and remove all waste by 16 January 2017. Yet, when officers returned again on 27 February 2017 they found little had changed.

In court solicitor, Jack Lovell, in mitigation stated that Mr Grieveson realised he had been naïve and foolishly thought he could operate legally with just a waste carrier's licence. Mr Grieveson produced photographs to show the site is now cleared of waste.

Jamie Fletcher, Area Environment Manager, Environment Agency, said:

It is important that waste materials are stored, handled and disposed of correctly to protect the environment and safeguard human health. The defendant in this case continued to operate outside the law despite numerous warnings, and by handling un-depolluted vehicles and parts, he caused pollution.

Anyone who has information about waste crimes can call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Press release: Minister for Middle East statement on planned Israeli settlement



Minister Burt said:

The UK strongly condemns the Israeli government's decision to 'legalise' the Netiv Ha'avot outpost in the West Bank. The international community has repeatedly stated that settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the physical viability of the two-state solution.

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Speech: Lord Ahmad marks 70th anniversary of UN Human Rights Declaration

2018 is the 70th anniversary of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) but this is not a moment for idle nostalgia. It is our opportunity to reaffirm the Declaration's enduring relevance. An opportunity to redouble our collective efforts to uphold the rights of individuals; to nurture the creativity and human progress which flow from these rights; and to promote the openness and tolerance that allow societies to flourish. We must do this now more than ever because all around the world these rights are under threat.

Syria

In Syria, nearly 7 years since the conflict began, human rights and international humanitarian law are being flouted daily, with apparent impunity. Across the country, thousands of detainees are suffering inhuman conditions and torture. Chemical weapons have been used. Pro-regime forces bomb hospitals and schools, and use starvation sieges to force surrender. Eastern Ghouta, where hundreds have been killed in the past week by pro-regime bombing, is hell on earth. We are appalled by reports that pro-regime airstrikes continue in spite of the UN Security Council Resolution calling for a humanitarian pause. Those with influence over the regime must act now to ensure the ceasefire is implemented in full. We must bring this conflict to an end.

The UK commends the work of the UN Commission of Inquiry in investigating and highlighting abuses and violations and we urge members to support the renewal of its mandate. We are pleased that the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism has begun to identify and build cases against those responsible. The international community must speak up for those who have no voice. We are particularly concerned about the plight of Syrian children. The High Level Panel on the Violations of the Rights of Children should allow us to discuss what more can be done to protect them.

Myanmar

Turning to Myanmar: earlier this month our Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, saw first-hand the devastating impact of the crisis on Rohingya refugees. Ethnic tensions were a significant factor behind the appalling violence in Rakhine state last summer, and we remain deeply concerned by the persecution faced by Rohingya Muslims, Christian and other minorities in Myanmar.

The UK is clear that the despicable atrocities carried out against the Rohingya were ethnic cleansing. In the absence of a credible and transparent judicial process in Myanmar, the UK will continue to explore with international partners how to bring to justice those responsible for these appalling crimes. The UK supports the work of the Fact Finding Mission and the Special Rapporteur, Ms Yanghee Lee, and calls for the renewal of her mandate.

It is right that we should focus on ensuring that refugees can return voluntarily in safety, dignity and with international oversight. However, we must also work for the longer term. That means supporting Myanmar's democratic transition, and the promotion of freedom, tolerance and diversity, to build a lasting peace.

North Korea

Likewise in North Korea, the international community has rightly focused on exerting pressure on the regime to give up its illegal nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. However, we must not overlook its appalling human rights situation.

North Korea's Constitution speaks of freedom but in reality that freedom is a mirage. In the 2017 ranking of press freedom by Reporters Without Borders, North Korea came last. If North Koreans express religious beliefs they face harsh punishment or even death.

The 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry estimated that there were between 80,000 and 120,000 political prisoners in North Korea. The 2016 Global Slavery Index estimates more than a million North Koreans are enslaved. We urge all UN Members to enact UN Security Council Resolutions regarding North Korean overseas workers, and to avoid returning defectors to North Korea in such circumstances.

The UK urges North Korea to end its illegal nuclear weapons programme; to cooperate with the international community; and to allow human rights actors unhindered access. There is a very different path open to the regime. One that offers security and prosperity and the genuine chance of a better life for every citizen.

Iran

In Iran, while we welcome the passage of the new anti-narcotics law, there remain other issues of real concern, including the reports of torture and deaths in custody during recent protests; the increase in religious persecution in particular against the Baha'i and Christian converts; and the use of the death penalty for juvenile offenders, which is in clear violation of Iran's international human rights obligations. The UK urges Iran to end such executions immediately and to allow all its citizens the rights and freedoms set out in international law. We pay tribute to Asma Jahangir for her dedication to the promotion of human rights.

The Maldives

In the Maldives, the UK is dismayed at the continued erosion of democracy, human rights and respect for the rule of law. We urge the government to end the State of Emergency and restore fundamental freedoms by ceasing all interference in independent institutions, and by guaranteeing free and fair presidential elections.

Sri Lanka

Elsewhere in Asia, we welcome Sri Lanka's constructive engagement with the UN, but we urge them to make more progress in implementing their Council commitments. We look forward to High Commissioner Zeid's update.

South East Asia

Turning to South East Asia – its impressive economic growth could be put at risk if political and civil space is eroded. Yet there are concerning developments across the region – whether it be the dissolution of the main opposition in Cambodia, the arrest of Mother Mushroom in Vietnam, the trial

of Reuters journalists in Burma, the increasing use in Thailand of laws against sedition, Computer Crimes and lèse majesté, or the deadly 'war on drugs' in the Philippines.

We hope that Thailand, Cambodia and Malaysia will enable free discussion and open political debate in the run-up to their elections, which will demonstrate that democracy in the region is alive and well.

South Sudan

There are challenges in every continent, for example, in Africa the human rights situation in South Sudan continues to be of serious concern. The details contained in the recent report by the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan reflect the ongoing and widespread human rights violations we have seen since conflict first erupted. The solution is political stability, and we urge all parties to the conflict to engage with the peace process with seriousness of purpose. We also urge the Council to renew the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights.

We are deeply concerned at the allegations of sexual exploitation in the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). We welcome the statement by UNMISS that restates, and outlines concrete steps towards implementing, the UN's commitment to zero tolerance, transparency, accountability. We call on Troop Contributing Countries with allegations made against them to also carry out investigations promptly, transparently and report their findings to the UN. The UK strongly supports the important work done by UNMISS, and all the Troop Contributing Countries within the Mission, to protect civilians and seek an end to the conflict.

The UK fully supports the UN Secretary General's 'zero tolerance' policy on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in peacekeeping operations and multilateral development and humanitarian agencies. In the 21st century, it is utterly despicable that SEA continues to exist. The UK will hold the UN and NGOs accountable for improving their safeguarding measures and review our funding relationship with those who fail to meet standards. Our priority is to keep the world's poorest and most vulnerable people safe from harm.

The Gambia and Zimbabwe

But there are also some reasons for optimism: The Gambia is renewing its democracy after decades of oppression; and Zimbabwe has an opportunity to take the path towards stability, prosperity and democracy.

The UK will continue to play its part in supporting these and other positive developments, both within the international community and through its own bilateral relationships. We welcome the recent co-operation with the Government of Argentina to identify the remains of 88 Argentine soldiers buried in the Falkland Islands. We hope that this project, along with a planned visit to the Islands, brings some comfort to the families of the fallen.

Gender equality

I should like to remark on 2 further issues of particular importance to the UK, namely gender equality and freedom of religion or belief.

Turning to gender equality, the UK believes that women and girls have the right to be educated, equal, empowered and safe and that achieving this will benefit all of society. That is because educating girls gives them greater control over their assets, their income and their bodies. Education empowers girls and women to speak out about issues that affect them and their communities; and it can have a hugely positive impact on stability, conflict-reduction and peace building.

This is why we believe that supporting girls' education is a smart investment. More than 130 million girls are still out of school so there is still much more to be done. The abhorrent abduction of over 100 schoolgirls in Dapchi, north east Nigeria, last week is a stark reminder of just how dangerous it is for some girls to exercise the right to an education that so many of us take for granted.

Freedom of religion or belief

Finally, the UK attaches great importance to freedom of religion or belief. Daily, we hear reports of persecution against the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Shia Muslims, the Baha'i faith and others. The international community must stand together in tackling this issue, so that all individuals can practise their faith or belief freely.

Conclusion

To conclude, we are still far from achieving the rights and freedoms expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At this Council, let us renew our determination to stand up for the downtrodden, to speak up for those with no voice, and to strive for a world in which everyone, everywhere can live without fear or suffering, and is free to live the life they choose.

Further information

[News story: Automated cleaning of surgical instruments: apply for funding](#)

Surgical instruments and tools including scalpels, forceps and tweezers.

The [NHS in Scotland](#) – supported by the [Can Do Innovation Challenge Fund](#) – has up to £150,000 to invest in studies that look at new ways of automating the pre-cleaning of surgical instruments.

Importance of pre-cleaning

Surgical instruments must be properly cleaned, inspected and sterilised within the sterile services process before each use.

Most existing procedures rely on manual cleaning. This is because current, automated pre-cleaning systems have a limited focus on one specific area, such as neurological surgery. They are also not designed for a range of instruments.

Improvements to automated systems could tackle clinical, health, safety and environmental concerns, improve efficiency and reduce costs.

Solutions must reduce cost and waste

The competition aims to find a solution for automated pre-cleaning that reduces costs and waste, is easy to operate and connects with existing NHS equipment. It must include:

- pre-soaking and internal flushing
- automated chemical dosing
- coarse-contamination removal, ideally ultrasonics or a spray function
- fully programmable pre-cleaning steps
- measurement and monitoring
- integration with automated washers or washer-disinfectors

Funding of £150,000 is for a series of feasibility studies. A further £300,000 could be available in a second phase to develop the most promising ideas.

The competition is being run under SBRI (the Small Business Research Initiative).

Competition information

- the competition opens on 5 March 2018, and the deadline for registration is at midday on 9 May 2018
- it is open to any organisation that can demonstrate a route to market for its idea
- we expect phase 1 contracts to be worth up to £30,000 and to last up to 6 months
- successful projects will attract 100% funded development contracts
- a briefing event will be held on 18 April 2018