

# Press release: UK helps rid war-torn Afghanistan of lethal landmines making thousands safer

Among Herat City's historic sites cleared of landmines are the 15th century minarets of the Husain Baiqara Madrasa

UK aid-backed The HALO Trust has, after a mammoth 10-year clear-up operation, handed back Afghanistan's most deadly province for landmines to its governor, after making land safe once again for homes, schools and farmland.

The NGO's Afghan staff have cleared 39 million square metres of mine fields and 45 million square metres of battlefield in Herat with UK aid support.

In total, more than 600 minefields have been cleared in the province in the west of the country.

Minelaying during previous conflicts had left Herat with the highest landmine accident rate in the country. Before mine clearance began there, on average 125 people each year were maimed or killed by landmines each year in the province.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

Landmines are an abhorrent and indiscriminate killer that causes suffering across the world. It is often children who are the most affected by landmines, playing in dangerous areas where one wrong step can maim them forever or take their life.

Clearing land of mines gives people a chance to rebuild their lives through new schools, farming the land and starting businesses that allow them to support their families.

The HALO Trust was founded 30 years ago in Afghanistan and has grown to be the world's largest humanitarian mine clearance organisation. The handover of the land to the governor is yet another milestone for them to celebrate and shows how UK aid is supporting one of the most fragile countries in the world to stand on its own two feet.

This is one of the many ways that UK aid is making the world safer, healthier and more prosperous for us all.

James Cowan, The Halo Trust CEO, said:

Among the achievements of this project, one that makes me most proud is the USAID-funded women's dormitory built at Herat University on land cleared by HALO with UK funding. Hundreds of young women now have access to higher education at Afghanistan's second-largest university. This has given hope to an entire province of one of the world's most heavily-mined countries.

We have witnessed the amazing contribution that DFID is making to clearing the country of landmines. DFID's support is saving lives and creating livelihoods.

In Herat City an entire new district, Jebrail, has been built on land cleared of landmines and has become home for 60,000 people – many of them returning refugees.

New schools and colleges have been built on the cleared land as well as several businesses and new railway infrastructure, which will allow for safer travel throughout the region.

Among Herat City's historic sites cleared of landmines are the 15th century minarets of the Husain Baiqara Madrasa.

The removal of landmines has had a major impact on Herat's potential for economic development.

Around 75 per cent of the population of the province is rural and millions of square metres of prime agricultural land were unusable because of the fear of landmines.

With UK funding, HALO has made 40 million square metres of agricultural land safe to farm, and in doing so has immeasurably improved and made more secure the futures of farming families.

- Representatives from The HALO Trust attended a handover ceremony in Herat City with Mr. Haji Kamran, Chairman of the Provincial Council of Herat Province and Mrs. Monesa Hassanzada, Deputy Governor of Herat Province. Two districts in the province, have not yet been cleared because of insecurity where they are located.
- The UK Government committed £100 million over three years to demining in April 2017. This £100m commitment comprises:□
- £12.6 million in the current financial year as an extension to the pre-existing contract of the Global Mine Action Programme, which is delivered by the Halo Trust, MAG and Norwegian People's Aid in Burma, Cambodia, South Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Laos, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.□
- £20 million for Afghanistan in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20.□
- £15.4 million for the Middle East including Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20.□

- The remainder will be for demining programmes in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20 in Angola, South Sudan, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.
- Last year Global Mine Action Programme ensured that more than 140,000,000 square meters of land have been released. Mine risk education programmes have reached more than 426,000 people this year, including near 360,000 women and children.
- DFID will be continuing its programming in Asia and Africa including Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Somalia and South Sudan.
- In January this year, DFID invited organisations to bid for work in Angola, South Sudan, Lebanon, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.
- In Afghanistan the UK has supported demining activities, through the HALO Trust in Herat (Western Afghanistan), Baghlan, Balkh and Samangan (Northern Afghanistan) since 2008, through two five year phases with a total of £20.5 million. This support to the HALO Trust in Afghanistan will end in March 2018. Through UK aid:
  - 193,650 families have benefited from cleared lands in Herat, Baghlan, Balkh and Samangan
  - 2,900 hectares have been unblocked for development purposes (agriculture, grazing, residential and road access)□
  - 96% of households surveyed reported increased income as a result of mine clearance
  - 43 communities have been cleared of all known mine/ unexploded ordnance hazards
  - 380 direct and 660 indirect jobs have created in all target provinces
  - Over 39,147,860 square metres of accessible minefields have been cleared in target provinces
  - Over 45,609,000 square metres of remaining area of battlefield with unexploded ordnance and ammunition are cleared in target provinces

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## [News story: Foreign Office Minister condemns Russia for NotPetya attacks](#)

Foreign Office Minister Lord Ahmad has today attributed the NotPetya cyber-attack to the Russian Government. The decision to publicly attribute this incident underlines the fact that the UK and its allies will not tolerate malicious cyber activity.

The attack masqueraded as a criminal enterprise but its purpose was principally to disrupt. Primary targets were Ukrainian financial, energy and government sectors. Its indiscriminate design caused it to spread further, affecting other European and Russian business.

## **Foreign Office Minister for Cyber Security Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon said:**

The UK Government judges that the Russian Government, specifically the Russian military, was responsible for the destructive NotPetya cyber-attack of June 2017.

The attack showed a continued disregard for Ukrainian sovereignty. Its reckless release disrupted organisations across Europe costing hundreds of millions of pounds.

The Kremlin has positioned Russia in direct opposition to the West yet it doesn't have to be that way. We call upon Russia to be the responsible member of the international community it claims to be rather than secretly trying to undermine it.

The United Kingdom is identifying, pursuing and responding to malicious cyber activity regardless of where it originates, imposing costs on those who would seek to do us harm. We are committed to strengthening coordinated international efforts to uphold a free, open, peaceful and secure cyberspace.

### **Notes to Editors:**

The UK's National Cyber Security Centre assesses that the Russian military was almost certainly responsible for the destructive NotPetya cyber-attack of June 2017. Given this is the highest level of assessment and the broader context, the UK government has made the judgement that the Russian government was responsible for this cyber-attack.

### **Further information**

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## **[Speech: Recognising ECOWAS and Civil Society's Role in Resolving Crisis in Guinea-Bissau](#)**

Thank you Mr President, and thanks to SRSG Toure and the other briefers for sharing their views and insights.

The situation in Guinea Bissau is concerning. It is not the first country in the world to experience a political impasse. But it is a country still emerging from serious instability and violence in its recent past.

This political impasse has prevented progress on reforms that are critical to addressing key conflict risks in Guinea Bissau. The situation is only likely to become more volatile as we move towards elections. We have already seen violent confrontations between demonstrators and police, and witnessed worrying efforts to curb political freedoms. Economic growth is at risk and a serious deterioration in stability would be deeply damaging for development and human rights. The illicit economy and transnational organised crime risk becoming further entrenched – with global implications. More broadly, instability in Guinea Bissau will affect the wider region, which over the last year has been, for the most part, the site of positive political progress.

Mr President,

The United Kingdom welcomes the leadership shown by the West African region, particularly through ECOWAS. It has shown persistence and patience; this is a crisis that started in 2015. It brokered the Conakry Agreement 15 months ago. It has agreed to countless communiqués and published innumerable statements. It has sent numerous high level delegations to Guinea Bissau – three in the last six months alone.

But now those most responsible for Guinea Bissau's crisis responded with stubborn refusal to give ground and find compromise.

Therefore, it is understandable that the region's patience has worn thin. ECOWAS has now forced to sanctions against individuals deemed responsible for impeding implementation of the Conakry Agreement. The African Union PSC has endorsed this move. The United Kingdom supports ECOWAS decision and we urge the Security Council and the whole international community to remain united in support of ECOWAS efforts.

We also believe it is important to recognise the bold efforts of civil society in Guinea Bissau to resolve the crisis. In particular, the mediation efforts led by the Women Facilitator's Group were an encouraging initiative and we welcome the support given to them by the UN.

As set out in resolution 2343, political support from UNIOGBIS for efforts towards implementation on the Conakry Agreement should be a priority for UNIOGBIS. The key next step remains appointment of a consensus Prime Minister so that preparations can go ahead for legislative elections in 2018, as per the country's constitution.

As we open discussions on its renewal, the UK will focus on ensuring the Mission's mandate responds to the political reality on the ground today and that it is focused on the highest priority needs.

Mr President,

Guinea Bissau's people watched the country emerge from a period of instability but then found their hopes for democracy obstructed by a political knot which their own leaders tied. Support from the region and the international community to prevent the country from backsliding further will

not succeed until those who tied the knot untangle it. We hope that good sense, compromise and a commitment to Guinea Bissau's future prevails.

Thank you.

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## **News story: Education Secretary tours the Midlands and North of England**

Education Secretary Damian Hinds has met teachers, children, young people, parents and social workers in the Midlands and North of England.

This was part of a three-day tour to see first-hand how high expectations and the right support can ensure all children and young people get the opportunities they deserve.

With 1.9million more children now in good or outstanding schools across the country, standards are rising. In his first visit to the regions, the Education Secretary visited a range of organisations from across the education system – from childcare through to primary school, further education and support for unemployed adults.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

It has been fantastic to get out and meet so many inspiring teachers, young people, children and education leaders who are all working so hard to improve outcomes for children and young people in their area.

We know that there is some really excellent teaching and learning going on up and down the country – and this trip has really highlighted to me how well it can be done and how we must work together to learn from the best and ensure it is happening across the board.

From high quality childcare to achieving excellent results for disadvantaged pupils and training engineers of the future, I have seen some truly inspiring work.

### **Further details on the Secretary of State's visits:**

On Monday, 12 February, the Education Secretary met teachers and pupils at Sandon Academy in Stoke-on-Trent – an outstanding primary school where progress for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, is well above average. The school, which has been praised for its innovative use of pupil premium funding to raise results for disadvantaged children, is home

to a farm, mini village and on-site nursery.

Also in the region, Mr Hinds met the North Staffordshire YMCA which offers skills training to young people to help them improve their employability skills and gain qualifications. The Secretary of State saw the youth campus, which offers accommodation to 16 – 25 year olds, and sports centre, and met some of the young people who have been supported into employment, education or training through the centre's work.

He went on to meet apprentices at local data solutions business, Synectics Solutions, crowned Staffordshire Business of the Year and employer to over 350 staff, including local apprentices.

On Tuesday, 13 February, the Education Secretary headed north to Blackpool to see some of the high quality technical and professional education and training available to young people and adults in the region. On a visit to Blackpool and The Fylde College's nautical campus in Fleetwood, he met apprentices and trainee nautical engineers while being shown round by Principal Bev Robinson and Head of Campus Captain Neil Atkinson. The college, rated outstanding by Ofsted, is the UK hub for the National College for Onshore Oil and Gas and is an Associate College of Lancaster University.

The Secretary of State went on to visit the Build Up project, which uses the college's classroom facilities two days a week to offer vital construction skills training to unemployed adults – helping them get the skills they need to find employment.

While in the region, Mr Hinds also visited Hawes Side Academy to see the half term activities being run in partnership with the Blackpool Football Club Community Trust – designed to offer extra-curricular activities to young people and aim to reduce the number of those not in education, employment or training in the area.

This was followed by a meeting with a number of multi academy trust leaders from across Blackpool and Lancashire to discuss how schools can work together to raise education standards and increase opportunity for young people across the country.

On Wednesday, 14 February, Mr Hinds' visit focused on how high quality early education and childcare is crucial to a child's future success at primary and secondary school. He travelled to the North East and North Yorkshire where he visited nurseries in Stockton-on-Tees and Bedale. Visiting Fairfield Day Care in Stockton on Tees and Incy Wincy nursery in Bedale, the Education Secretary heard from staff and parents about how the Government's 30 hours free childcare offer is being implemented in their area.

This was followed by a visit to North East Lincolnshire's Children's Services to meet with council leaders, social workers and local organisations such as charities and the police, to understand the strengths and challenges associated with delivering a wide range of children's services.

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# Press release: Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP statement

Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said:

Both parties have conducted discussions seriously and in good faith.

While substantive progress towards an agreement has been made, it appears that this phase of talks has reached a conclusion.

I would urge everyone to reflect on the circumstances which have led to this and their positions, both now and in the future.

The position of the UK Government remains the same: devolved government is in the best interests of everyone in Northern Ireland and is best for the Union. I believe the basis for an accommodation still exists.

As the Prime Minister said during her visit on Monday, we are ready to bring forward legislation to enable an Executive to be formed.

We will continue to work with everyone to make sure we do deliver this. We now need to consider practical steps.

In the continued absence of an Executive, other challenging decisions will have to be taken by the UK Government.

I will update Parliament when the House returns from Recess next week.