

Press release: Government backs new memorial to Sikh servicemen

Plans for a national memorial to honour the contribution Sikhs made to Britain and her allies has today (30 January 2018) received backing from Communities Secretary Sajid Javid.

He confirmed government support for campaign to erect a Sikh war memorial in London. Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said:

The part played by Sikh servicemen really stands out – a contribution that’s all the more remarkable when you consider that these brave men travelled thousands of miles to fight for a country that wasn’t their own.

We are indebted to all those servicemen who volunteered to serve and fought to defend the freedoms we enjoy today.

That’s why a Sikh war memorial in our nation’s capital will honour their sacrifice and ensure that this part of our shared history is never forgotten. So I’m delighted to get behind this campaign and ensure its success.

Sikh servicemen in the British Armed Forces have displayed extraordinary acts of bravery and sacrifice in the service of Great Britain and her allies. Hundreds of thousands of Sikh soldiers saw active service during the First and Second World Wars and in subsequent conflicts. More than 83,000 turbaned Sikh soldiers gave their lives and more than 100,000 were injured during both Wars.

Despite making up only two per cent of the Indian population when the First World War broke out, Sikhs accounted for more than 20 per cent of the Indian Army’s manpower. Sikh soldiers from the Punjab and surrounding states saw action in Europe, Africa and the Middle East, most notably on the Western Front and at Gallipoli.

On the Western Front Sikhs fought and died alongside their British, Indian and Commonwealth counterparts. Their contribution was essential to the war effort and of the twenty-two Military Crosses awarded to Indian soldiers, fourteen went to Sikhs.

As part of marking the final year of the First World War centenary commemorations, Government has extended support for a campaign led by Slough MP Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi to help set up a Working Group and support the campaign to find a suitable location. Once an appropriate site has been identified and a memorial agreed on, the Government has agreed to provide funding towards the project.

More information on government activity for the [First World War Centenary](#).

[Speech: Call for Humanitarian Access in Syria](#)

Thank you Mr President, and thank you also to Assistant Secretary General Muller for her briefing.

When considering the Syria humanitarian issue, we always have in mind the powerful plea last December by the Russian Permanent Representative that we should keep our differences over the politics in Syria out of our consideration of humanitarian issues which we strongly continue to agree we should do.

Last week, Mark Lowcock briefed us on his visit to Syria. This was the first time an Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs had visited Syria for over two years, having been blocked previously from visiting. The United Kingdom commends the Under-Secretary-General's efforts to start a meaningful dialogue between the UN and the Syrian regime in order to improve the humanitarian situation for the people of Syria.

On the basis of his discussions, and as reiterated today, the Under-Secretary-General set out five clear asks to enable the UN to sustain and improve its aid efforts. The UK supports those asks fully.

Unfortunately, the Council has been unable to reach agreement on a text which would unanimously call upon the Syrian regime to ensure that these five asks are granted without delay. And I want to reflect on this disappointing situation.

One of OCHA's five key asks is the Regime's agreement to allow three or four UN and Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoys each week across front lines to provide assistance to up to 2.5 million people in besieged and hard to reach areas. These convoys are needed to deliver aid, including both food and medical supplies, to civilians who have lived in a war zone for almost seven years.

This request for consistent, regular access to all people in need is crucial. In 2017, only 27% of UN inter-agency convoy requests were approved by the Syrian regime in full. This is significantly worse than in 2016 when 45% of requests were approved. ASG Mueller's briefing was especially concerning in this respect. We cannot let this happen again in 2018.

94% of those living under siege are located in Eastern Ghouta. The Assad regime is using humanitarian aid as weapon of war by restricting access to the besieged population. There were no aid deliveries to the area for the

whole of December, and nearly 12% of children under five in Eastern Ghouta suffer from acute malnutrition. It is appalling that innocent children are once again suffering the most.

The Under-Secretary-General also requested the immediate evacuation of hundreds of people who are medically in need from Eastern Ghouta. We call on those who can influence the regime to use all of their authority to allow for rapid, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access and medical evacuations for those in need. According to the United Nations Secretary-General, 18 people have already died waiting for the regime's permission to leave the besieged city. People are dying for want of healthcare and services which are available less than ten miles away in Damascus.

Mr President,

Let us recall that the backdrop of the Under-Secretary-General's visit was the escalation of airstrikes in Eastern Ghouta and the northwest, including Aleppo, Idlib governorates and Northern Hama. Yesterday at least five people, including a child, were killed by an airstrike on a hospital supported by Médecins Sans Frontières in Syria's Idlib governorate. The facility was also seriously damaged and at least six people, including three medical staff, were injured as a result of the attack. The airstrikes on the hospital occurred while the doctors were receiving people that had been injured an hour earlier in another airstrike on a market. Those strikes had already killed 11 people.

These are in areas where there are meant to be ceasefires with the stated aim of putting a prompt end to violence and improving the humanitarian situation.

Unfortunately for the people of Syria, this could not be further from the reality. The deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructures in Idlib and Eastern Ghouta continues, in blatant violation of international humanitarian and human rights law.

The intensification of hostilities has displaced approximately 270,000 people within Idlib since 15 December 2017— stretching scarce resources beyond their limits. The escalation of airstrikes in Eastern Ghouta has resulted in hundreds of civilian deaths since 30 December. UNICEF reports that, in the first 14 days of 2018, more than 30 children were killed by escalating violence in the enclave.

It is against this backdrop that I call for the regime to allow for the immediate, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to meet fully the needs of those who require food and medical supplies. Let all with influence exert it to ensure this. This is our most crucial immediate request. It is also imperative that all parties adhere to agreed ceasefires and cessations of hostilities, uphold international humanitarian law, and protect civilians.

Mr President,

Yesterday, a number of us visited the US National Holocaust Museum's

exhibition on Syria. We saw the photographs of those killed and tortured by the regime and we read their biographies, their life stories. It had a profound effect on me, and it brought home just how the tragedy in Syria is not a geo-political one; it is a human one. For humanity's sake, all of us round this table must ensure we have done our all.

Thank you Mr President.

News story: Civil news: next steps in 2018 HPCDS contracts tender process

We are contacting organisations from 30 January 2018 with updates and guidance on next steps about their bids for 2018 HPCDS contracts work.

Following the closure of tenders for HPCDS contracts on 11 December 2017, the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) will now advise those organisations that:

1. bid for a HPCDS contract but failed to reach the minimum threshold to be given further consideration;
2. have not been shortlisted for a HPCDS contract;
3. have been shortlisted for a HPCDS contract.

How will these announcements be made?

We will formally write to each affected organisation using the e-Tendering system, advising them of the status of their tenders, from 30 January 2018.

We anticipate that all notifications will have been sent out by Thursday 1 February 2018.

Applicants bidding for HPCDS contracts who have not been notified by 1 February should contact us through the e-Tendering message board.

When will new contracts begin?

Services under new HPCDS contracts will begin on 1 October 2018.

How long will the contracts last?

Each contract will initially run until 30 September 2021, with an option for the LAA to extend for up to a further 2 years.

What will happen next?

We will continue to consider tenders in line with the process set out in the Information for Applicants (IFA).

Provider enquiries

Update concerning announcement published on GOV.UK Legal Aid Civil Tender 2018 page: [Civil 2018 contracts tender](#)

[Press release: UKEF helps GE Global Services UK secure landmark turbine contract in Iraq](#)

The contracts with the Ministry of Electricity in Iraq, valued at \$220 million, will see GE Global Services UK upgrade and repair existing turbines across 10 sites to deliver an improved, more secure power source. The project will sustain 6.5 Gigawatts of generating capacity, powering millions of homes across Iraq.

This is the second project supported under the [Memorandum of Understanding signed in April 2017](#) between the UK and Iraq Governments, in which UK Export Finance (UKEF) affirmed its commitment to support Iraq's infrastructure development.

Baroness Fairhead, Minister of State for Trade and Export Promotion, said:

I'm delighted that UK Export Finance will be supporting this project under the recently signed infrastructure Memorandum of Understanding between our two governments. This project demonstrates the UK's commitment to supporting Iraq's continued economic development, and through Government support we are laying the groundwork for future UK-Iraq trade.

GE Global Services UK will deploy Advanced Gas Path (AGP) solutions and controls software, a technology that will improve gas turbine performance and enable power plants in the Baghdad, Karbala, Kadisiyah, Babil, Najaf and Basrah regions to operate more dynamically.

UKEF, in partnership with the Swiss export credit agency SERV, will provide the Government of Iraq with \$210.8 million in support for the project. UKEF will provide \$105.4 million of this support as a direct loan, with the remaining \$105.4 million given in the form of a guarantee on a loan from JP Morgan Chase, for which SERV will reinsure UKEF.

This is the second of three phases of a wider turbine maintenance programme as part of the Iraq Power Up Program, where GE Global Service UK has been contracted to deliver in the period from 2017 to 2019. It follows [support for](#)

[a GE and Enka UK contract to construct two new power stations](#), agreed last year.

1. [UK Export Finance](#) is the UK's export credit agency and a government department, working alongside the Department for International Trade as an integral part of its strategy and operations.
2. It exists to ensure that no viable UK export should fail for want of finance or insurance from the private market. It provides finance and insurance to help exporters win, fulfil and ensure they get paid for export contracts.
3. Sectors in which UKEF has supported exports include: aerospace, construction, oil and gas, mining and metals, petrochemicals, telecommunications, and transport.
4. UKEF has a [regional network of 24 export finance managers](#) supporting export businesses.
5. Find the [latest information on UKEF's country cover positions](#).
6. UKEF supports exporters with a range of products that include:
 - Bond insurance policy
 - Bond support scheme
 - Buyer & supplier credit financing facility
 - Direct lending facility
 - Export insurance policy
 - Export refinancing facility
 - Export working capital scheme
 - Letter of credit guarantee scheme

Image credit: General Electric

[News story: Border Force stop Farnborough smuggling attempt](#)

Officers discovered the Class A drugs on Monday 29 January, when Border Force officers examined 15 suitcases accompanying 5 passengers on a private jet arriving from Bogota, South America.

It is believed to be one of the largest seizures of its kind in the UK.

The weight of the drugs was estimated to be 500 kilos – a full forensic analysis will now take place.

Border Force Deputy Chief Operating Officer Mike Stepney said:

Working with law enforcement colleagues like the National Crime Agency (NCA) we are determined to prevent drug trafficking and

bring those responsible to justice.

This was a significant find made possible by the vigilance of dedicated Border Force officers. They have prevented a substantial quantity of drugs from ending up on our streets and causing untold misery and damage to our communities.

After meeting the flight and questioning those on board, officers became suspicious and searched the aircraft and their luggage. When opened, each case was found to contain between 34 to 37 tape wrapped packages weighing approximately one kilo each. One of these was pierced and a white powder exposed which tested positive for cocaine.

Border Force arrested the 5 passengers on suspicion of importing Class A drugs. They included 2 British men, 2 Spanish men and an Italian man. The investigation was passed to the NCA. Hampshire Constabulary also helped by guarding the men arrested and moving the drugs to a secure location.

Three addresses in the Bournemouth area have been searched by the NCA as part of the investigation, and items including computers and phones were seized.

The crew of the plane were also questioned and were released without charge.

NCA operations manager Siobhan Micklethwaite said:

This is a major seizure of cocaine, one of the largest flown into the UK by plane in many years, and this seizure by Border Force represents a major blow to organised crime.

We estimate that once cut and sold on the streets in the UK it would have had a potential value in excess of £50 million.

Our investigations into this attempted importation are continuing.

Anyone with information about activity they suspect may be linked to smuggling should call the hotline on 0800 59 5000.