

# 300 British troops deploy to Mali on UN Peacekeeping Mission

300 UK troops have arrived in Mali as part of the UN's peacekeeping mission, primarily drawn from the Light Dragoons alongside the Royal Anglian Regiment and supported by specialist trades from across the Armed Forces.

The UK Task Force will provide a highly specialised reconnaissance capability, conducting patrols to gather intelligence and engage with the local population to help the UN respond to threats from violent extremism, and weak governance.

The UN Mission in Mali is made up of over 14,000 peacekeepers from 56 different countries and works to support peace efforts, encourage security sector reform, protect civilians and promote human rights.

## **Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:**

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council this deployment is a demonstration of our firm commitment to peacekeeping and the importance we place on improving security in the Sahel by protecting local communities.

Our land forces are the best in the world, and we are one of a small handful of nations able to provide this specialist capability in a challenging environment which will help prevent the spread of conflict across the region.

The main body of troops arrived on 2nd December, and all UK personnel will have arrived by 8th December to set up the UK Headquarters. They have flown from RAF Brize Norton by A400M aircraft to the UN camp in Gao. They will be based in the newly formed Camp Bagnold, which is named after Brigadier Ralph Alger Bagnold, the desert explorer and first Commanding Officer of the British Army's "Long Range Desert Group."

## **Lieutenant Colonel Tom Robinson, Commanding Officer of the Light Dragoons, said:**

The 300 strong Light Dragoon task group is joining over 14,000 peacekeepers from 56 Nations as part of this challenging UN mission in Mali to help protect the people from violence and support political dialogue. We bring years of experience on operations, first class equipment and exceptional people.

We've trained hard for the last year to make sure that we are ready for this challenging mission. We're proud to be the first British soldiers to join in this team effort to help combat instability in the Sahel.

The Sahel is one of Africa's poorest and most fragile regions. It is marked by chronic poverty, instability, high levels of gender inequality, and is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Terrorist violence and conflict is sharply on the rise. It is in all our interests that we work together to protect civilians and help build a safer, healthier and more prosperous future for the region.

**Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:**

This new deployment of 300 British troops to the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Mali is part of our ongoing work in the Sahel region to build stability, improve the humanitarian response and help protect innocent civilians from violence.

British troops will reinforce our development and diplomatic work, to maximise our impact on the ground.

The UK is one of the largest humanitarian donors to the Sahel – in 2020 the UK gave £14.65m in humanitarian aid to Mali and is currently in the process of increasing the size of the UK embassy to reinforce our diplomatic strength in the country.

Alongside this, the MoD currently has 3 Chinook helicopters and 100 personnel in a logistics role supporting the French-led Counter-Terrorist mission, Operation BARKHANE. This is entirely separate from the UN mission, but they will be operating in the same region.

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## [Grimsby and Cleethorpes flood sirens to be decommissioned](#)

More than 80% of the 33,000 properties at risk of flooding in the area now receive advanced warnings through the direct-messaging service, making the old sirens redundant.

The towns' 18 flood sirens were installed in 2006 to help warn the vast majority of at-risk properties that – at the time – were not yet signed up to the then-fledgling [Flood Warning Service](#).

## **Sirens now redundant**

Now, 14 years later, that service's advanced-warning messages are delivered to around 3,750 more properties than the sirens were ever able to reach, with more accurate, tailored and reliable messages than the sirens could.

Using the latest forecasting and modelling techniques, the Flood Warning Service alerts people to the possibility of flooding many hours – and sometimes days – in advance.

It sends timely, tailored, location-specific messages with exact details of what to expect, when, and how to react.

## **Sign up to stay alert**

Those messages can be sent via a choice of text, landline, mobile and email – or any combination of those methods up to a maximum selection of five. For example, text messages to two mobiles, emails to two addresses, and an automated call to a landline.

It is a far cry from a short-notice, potentially confusing siren containing no specifics and no advice, and with no guarantee of being heard.

Since the Flood Warning Service launched in 2006, the [Environment Agency](#) and its partners have been continuously transforming it, making the best use of the latest technology to better reach people living, working and travelling through flood-risk areas.

## **World-class warning service**

Innovations include automated warning messages to mobile phones registered with certain providers, and becoming one of the first European countries to use Google Public Alerts to display live flood warnings on Google searches and Google Maps, just seconds after they have been issued.

The advances combine to make England's Flood Warning Service among the best in the world – and the sirens out-dated.

Ben Thornely, flood risk manager at the Environment Agency, said:

We know how devastating flooding can be, and we want people to have the most accurate and timely information when flooding is expected.

The best way of doing that is via our free, reliable Flood Warning Service, which gives people clear, specific advice on how to protect themselves, their loved ones and their homes. This just isn't possible with sirens.

It takes just a minute to check online if you're at risk of flooding and to sign up for warnings. We urge people to do that now via [GOV.UK/Flood](#) or by calling 0345 988 1188.

Doing so can reduce the impact of flooding – saving you thousands of pounds.

Cllr Stewart Swinburn, [North East Lincolnshire Council's](#) cabinet member for the environment, said:

We've been kept up-to-date with the Environment Agency's plans for the flood sirens and they've also held two virtual sessions with councillors to explain their proposals. Those sessions have allowed us to inform the Environment Agency's approach and we've stressed the need for local people to be given all the information they require to adapt to the changes with the sirens.

We're aware similar system updates have worked well in other areas and we share the Environment Agency's expectation that advances in technology will make it easier for people to get any flood messages as quickly as possible should the need arise.

To give the best service, the Flood Warning Service relies on people choosing to sign up. It takes around a minute to do so, and can help reduce flooding's impact and damage – saving potentially thousands of pounds.

People are urged to sign up now via 0345 988 1188 or [GOV.UK/Flood](#), where there is also information on the [practical things](#) people can do to protect their businesses, homes and valuables.

## **Prepare for flooding**

Checking if you live in an area at high risk of flooding, preparing a bag with medication and important documents, and moving valuable and sentimental items upstairs or to a safe place can [reduce the damage](#) caused by a flood by around 40%.

Since the sirens were installed in 2006, the Environment Agency has invested around £20m into the area's flood defences. That includes a £19m upgrade along the Humber and at the port of Grimsby, and improvements along the River Freshney. Further work between Immingham and Grimsby is expected to begin in 2022.

The Environment Agency plans to stop using the flood sirens from 31 December 2020.

## **Background**

- The Flood Warning Service currently reaches 83% of at-risk properties in the area, compared to the 72% of at-risk properties within audible range of a siren. Even those in range of a siren may not hear them because of things like wind direction and double glazing.

- The average cost of repairing a flood-damaged home is around £32,000.
  - 33,235 homes are at risk of flooding across the area. – 27,735 (around 83%) are reached by the Flood Warning Service. 5,500 (around 17%) are not reached by the Flood Warning Service and need to sign up. 23,997 (72%) are in range of a siren but not guaranteed to hear it or know how to react.
  - 5.2 million properties are at risk of flooding in England. People are urged to visit [GOV.UK/Flood](https://gov.uk/flood), check if they're at risk, and make sure they know what to do if it floods.
  - In many flood risk areas, people can sign up for [flood warnings](#). These warn of the risk of flooding from rivers, the sea and groundwater. They'll alert people by phone, email or text when flooding is expected.
  - The best way for people to protect themselves from flooding is to know what to do in advance – they can download and save a simple [Prepare, Act, Survive plan](#) so they know what to do when there's a flood warning in their area.
  - The [National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy](#) was adopted in Autumn 2020 and sets the blueprint for how the Environment Agency and other organisations will manage flood and coastal change from now until 2100.
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## [OSCE Ministerial Council side event on the Moscow Mechanism report: UK remarks](#)

Good afternoon and welcome to this event on the ongoing situation in Belarus. I would like to thank my colleagues for agreeing to co-host this session and the other states who joined us in invoking the Moscow Mechanism in September. Your continued support for the people of Belarus is critical as they continue their campaign for justice and democracy, in the face of greater repression.

In recent weeks, we have all received the Moscow Mechanism report, compiled through the forensic work of independent expert, Professor Wolfgang Benedek. The UK is extremely grateful for his meticulous approach in exposing so many examples of the appalling human rights violations experienced by people from all walks of life in Belarus, whether students, journalists, political activists and opposition figures, demonstrators and, in some truly shocking cases, children. Equally, the flaws he has exposed in the election process that took place in the summer must be addressed and the UK has been clear that fresh elections can be the only practical way forward to address the political crisis in that country. We should also pay tribute to more than 700 Belarusian citizens who sent their accounts of the abuses they had witnessed and suffered to the rapporteur. We owe it to them to ensure that there is international action on its recommendations.

In today's panel discussion, we are bringing together experts on the situation in Belarus and representatives of Belarusian civil society who are living through this crisis. Their contributions will give us a sense of how the international community can most effectively respond to the recommendations in Professor Benedek's report – the ways in which we can promote their implementation by the Belarusian authorities, and how we might take forward further, more detailed investigations into the human rights violations which have taken place and expose those who are responsible. But also how we can support Belarusian civil society to continue to thrive in the face of repression, to enable the Belarusian people full access to the human rights they should be guaranteed. I am very grateful to all those speakers who have given up their time to join us; your voices must be heard and I am glad we have been able to provide this platform for you today.

We must all work together to ensure that those responsible for the litany of human rights violations recorded in Professor Benedek's thoroughly evidenced report are ultimately held accountable for their actions. The people of Belarus deserve the right not only to choose their government through elections that meet international standards, but also be able to live without fear of the kind of brutal repression we have seen take place. Thank you once again for joining us for this panel discussion on how we can continue to support the people of Belarus, to prevent impunity for their tormentors, and to ensure a future which they can determine, and in which their human rights are protected.

Thank you.

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## [UK pledges urgent aid for people facing starvation in Yemen](#)

The UK has announced emergency funding to help millions of people in Yemen, as a new report says the worsening crisis has left thousands living in 'famine conditions' and facing starvation, death and destitution.

The Foreign Secretary has urged the international community to step up, distribute pledged funds and support the peace process to prevent the crisis worsening even further. Today's announcement of £14 million of new UK aid will help 1.5 million households access food and medicines, and takes the UK's contribution to £214 million this year.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)'s new survey shows that 16,500 people are living in famine-like conditions, a figure expected to almost triple by June 2021. Overall 13.5 million people in Yemen are at risk of starving to death or struggling to get enough food to feed their families amid ongoing conflict.

The UK has been sounding the alarm on Yemen – in September, the Foreign Secretary warned a specially-convened UN meeting that famine was a significant risk unless donors urgently disbursed their funding and increased support. The UK leads on Yemen at the UN Security Council and is actively supporting Special Envoy Martin Griffiths' peace plan to end the conflict.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

Thousands of Yemenis are now living in famine conditions, facing the daily threat of starvation and conflict.

New UK aid will save lives by making sure the poorest Yemenis can feed their families. But the UK cannot solve this crisis alone. Other donors must now release their funding and contribute more support to prevent this becoming an even bigger tragedy.

Famine was averted in Yemen in 2019 through an international funding drive to ensure UN agencies and NGOs were able to provide food and support to those most in need. Since then, funding to Yemen has significantly reduced. This year's funding is a record low, and only half of what has been requested by the UN.

Tackling this crisis is a priority for the Foreign Secretary and the UK's first Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs, Nick Dyer. Since his appointment, Mr Dyer has met donors and partners to discuss how to tackle extreme hunger in vulnerable countries, including Yemen.

## Notes to editors

- The UK is one of the biggest donors to the crisis, committing over £1 billion in UK aid since the conflict began in 2015.
- Our existing £200 million funding for this financial year will support to at least 500,000 vulnerable people each month to help them buy food and household essentials, treat 55,000 children for malnutrition and provide 1 million people with improved water supply and basic sanitation.
- In September, the Foreign Secretary announced a new £119 million aid package to tackle the combined threat of coronavirus and famines, which is expected to help alleviate extreme hunger for over 6 million people in Yemen, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia, Central African Republic, the Sahel, South Sudan and Sudan.
- On 20 November, UN Secretary General Guterres warned that 'Yemen is now in imminent danger of the worst famine the world has seen for decades. In the absence of immediate action, millions of lives may be lost'.

ENDS

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# Fast track for public services: new planning reforms to speed up delivery of schools and hospitals

- New schools and hospitals to be delivered quicker through a faster, simpler planning process
- New, simpler process for business premises to become new homes to boost town centres through brownfield development
- The measures build on last week's Spending Review, confirming nearly £20 billion of investment in new housing and a £4 billion Levelling Up Fund to boost local economies

Unprecedented reforms to speed up the delivery of schools, colleges, hospitals and other NHS buildings have been announced by Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP today (3 December 2020).

A new fast track for public service buildings including schools, colleges, universities, prisons and hospitals will be delivered more quickly through the planning system with a faster, more streamlined planning process.

Currently, these buildings can have small extensions without the need for a full planning application. Today's [proposals](#) help to deliver more classrooms and hospital space by enabling them to extend further, faster.

Where a full planning application remains required, such as to build entirely new schools and hospitals, the process will be streamlined to speed up local decision making so that work can continue at pace to deliver public services for the community.

Councils will need to make decisions on these important buildings as a priority and have a legal duty to decide major public service development applications within 10 weeks. Currently, some planning applications are left for many months without a decision.

Proposals will also help tackle the housing shortage by enabling commercial premises to be converted into new homes while giving high streets a new lease of life – removing eyesores and transforming unused and derelict buildings, while making the most of our brownfield land.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

The new fast track for public services makes it simpler and quicker to deliver the schools and hospitals we promised to build in our manifesto. We expect these vital buildings to be approved in weeks, not months and are reforming the planning system so it works for the NHS, our schools and other vital public services.



Like the rest of the planning reforms, these changes will also help to protect and create thousands of jobs in the construction industry.

The new homes will be delivered through a fast track planning process instead of a full planning application. These homes will still be subject to high standards, which have been raised in recent months to ensure they provide for adequate natural light and meet space standards.

The right to be converted to homes does not apply to certain buildings including pubs, theatres and live music venues, recognising the important role they play in communities and their contribution to local heritage.

Investing in new housing is key to delivering more affordable, secure and green homes for families across England and in driving the growth and regeneration of local areas. Official figures show that last year more than 243,000 new homes were delivered in England – the highest number since 1987.

Last week, the Spending Review confirmed nearly £20 billion of investment in new homes to help us go even further. This includes a National Home Building Fund investing £7.1 billion over 4 years alongside more than £12 billion being invested in affordable housing.

The Spending Review also included a new £4 billion Levelling Up Fund. This will invest in local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities and will support economic recovery.

Last August, the government published [Planning for the future](#) – its longer-term plans to overhaul England's outdated planning system to deliver the high-quality, sustainable homes communities need. The government is currently analysing the consultation responses and will respond in due course.

The government is [consulting](#) on the introduction of a new right to allow for the change of use from any use, or mix of uses, from the commercial, business and service use class (Class E) to residential use (Class C3).

This right will provide much needed new homes across the country, giving clarity and planning certainty, and attract footfall to high streets that new residents will bring. All new homes would be required to meet national space standards.

The existing right for extensions of schools, colleges, universities, and hospitals is subject to size limits, limiting extensions or additional buildings to no more than 25% of the gross floorspace of the original buildings with a maximum cap of 100 square metres, or 250 square metres in the case of schools. It also restricts the height of new buildings to 5 metres.

The consultation proposes to amend the right to allow such uses to expand their facilities by up to 25% of the footprint of the current buildings on the site at the time the legislation is brought into force, or up to 250 square metres, whichever is the greater. This would allow greater flexibility

for those sites that have enlarged or developed additional buildings over time and flexibility for those premises with a smaller footprint.

To provide further flexibility, it is also proposed that the height limit is raised from 5 metres to 6 metres, excluding plant on the roof, except where it is within 10 metres of the boundary or curtilage.

School playing fields will continue to be protected from development. The existing permitted development right to allow the erection, extensions and expansion of schools, colleges, universities and hospitals has a condition exempting development on land used as a playing field in the past 5 years from development. The proposals to expand this right would retain this condition, meaning that playing fields are and will continue to be exempt.