

A proud partnership, a cherished friendship – UK and Israel united for 70 years

Anniversaries are a good time to reflect, to look back on how events have shaped us and dwell on happy memories. They are also a time to look to the future, set goals, and make plans for the future. And it is with that sense of optimism, this week, that we mark the 70th anniversary of the UK opening its embassy in Tel Aviv, beginning the UK's diplomatic relations with Israel.

Over those 70 years we have seen engagements between Her Majesty the Queen and Israeli Presidents Haim Herzog, Ezer Weizman and Shimon Peres. In 2018 HRH Prince William visited Israel and met Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Rivlin, Holocaust survivors, activists and even carved out some time to meet Israeli Eurovision sensation Netta.

The Prime Minister was pleased to host Prime Minister Netanyahu at Downing Street last year, while earlier this year, HRH The Prince of Wales visited Israel to speak at a Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial ceremony and joined world leaders in Jerusalem to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz.

I know what an amazing place Israel is to visit having had the chance to do so shortly after becoming an MP in 2015. A country with antiquity and modernity side by side, things that seem familiar to my British eyes and things which are fascinating and unique. A country proud of its modern science and technology sectors and also home to some of the most holy places in the world.

I had hoped that my work as minister responsible for the Middle East and North Africa might give me the chance to go back to a fantastic fish restaurant on the waterfront at Jaffa, listen to the call to evening prayer from the mosque while watching the sun set over the Mediterranean Sea. Unfortunately Covid-19 means that I, like people in Tel Aviv, will have to wait before dining there again.

But even in these challenging times, this anniversary week gives us both cause for optimism. The UK and Israel are working side by side in the fight against coronavirus, with our top health and scientific advisers sharing information and exchanging valuable insights into how to manage and ultimately beat the pandemic. Our respective world-class hospitals and laboratories are working together to support the development of antibody treatments for patients and discussing ground-breaking innovations, from tracing apps to potential vaccines.

Of course, the ties between UK and Israel go far beyond scientific cooperation. High tech-collaboration is also thriving, with Israeli start-ups working with the UK's biggest companies in health, finances, pharma, energy

and more. Leading British firm Dyson is using Israeli technology in its appliances and Israeli MobilEye's systems work to reduce road traffic accidents and protect cyclists and pedestrians across Britain. The UK is Israel's biggest trading partner in Europe: our trade has been growing steadily over the years, and in recent years we have seen annual trade exceed £8 billion, according to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics. In 2016, the UK signed its biggest-ever trade deal with Israel, with Rolls Royce providing £1 billion of engines to El Al's new Dreamliner planes. UK-Israeli trade and collaboration touches every aspect of our lives and helps build a more prosperous future for both our countries.

Of course, the prosperity of Israel and the UK is inextricably linked to the stability of the wider Middle East. I am a firm believer that a negotiated agreement between Israel and the Palestinians for a two-state solution is the best way to secure enduring stability and success. As Israel's new government gets to work, I encourage both sides to focus on that great, if sometimes elusive, prize; sustainable peace. I urge both to continue to build on the constructive collaboration that they have shown during this pandemic and find ways to return to the table. I hope that steps on the road towards lasting peace are taken, and pathways that might lead away from that goal are avoided.

Much changes over a 70 year period but some things do not change. We will continue to cherish our friendship with Israel, stand united in the struggle against the insidious forces of hate and antisemitism and work towards an even brighter and better future for us all.

Here's to the next 70 years! Am Yisrael Chai.

Further information

[COP26 President remarks at first day of Petersberg Climate Dialogue](#)

COP26 President Alok Sharma spoke at the High Level Stakeholder Session for the Petersberg Climate Dialogue on Monday 27 April 2020.

This was an online session involving international organisations, governments, business, and members of civil society.

Firstly, thank you everyone for joining us for this discussion, despite the very difficult circumstances facing so many people right now.

I am very honoured to be co-hosting the Petersberg Climate Dialogue with Minister Schulze; and it's great to be participating in this high-level

stakeholder event ahead of the ministerial discussions that are going to take place tomorrow.

While we rightly focus on fighting the immediate crisis of the Coronavirus, we must not lose sight of the huge challenges of climate change. And Minister Ribera of course referred to that in some detail.

We all know that climate risks are growing year by year. And the steps we take now to rebuild our economies can have a profound impact on our societies' future sustainability, resilience and, ultimately, wellbeing of humans, but of course, nature as well.

And two of the areas that I think we particularly need to have our attention on are the power and transport sectors.

Energy transition and accelerating the move to zero-emission road transport are two of the five key campaigns that the UK is going to be focusing on in the lead up to COP 26.

And I believe that by actually uniting around specific issues, we hope to spur innovation, scale up solutions and bring down the costs in both of these areas. And I'll talk a little about what's been happening in costs in these areas

The challenge we face is how do we speed up progress towards a zero emission and climate-resilient global economy, whilst at the same time creating jobs and supporting communities through the transition? And, of course, that it is particularly important now as a result of where the global economy finds itself in the COVID-19 situation.

To meet the goals of the Paris Agreement, we need to decarbonise the global economy about three to five times faster over the next decade than we did over the last two decades.

And it is right that we should come together as we have done today – international organisations, governments, business, civil society – to discuss how we meet that challenge together.

Now, our efforts can and they must of course support each other. And government policy can encourage business investment. And business innovation can create new options for consumers. And civil society advocacy can build on support for strong policy.

And we live in a globally connected economy, and the options available to each country depend greatly on the actions that we take together and the actions that are taken by others.

And I do think that if we work together on this we can progress a lot faster.

So, just to give you some statistics.

In the power sector, the pace of progress has actually been pretty impressive. Globally, the cost of solar power has fallen by 85%, and that of

wind power by 49%, since 2010.

Renewables are already cheaper than new coal power in two thirds of all countries in the world. And before long, it will be cheaper to build new renewables than to continue to operate existing coal plants. And I do think actually this is a remarkable global achievement. All countries that have deployed these technologies have helped to increase economies of scale, to accelerate innovation, to shift investment, and ultimately to bring down costs.

Cheap and clean electricity is very much a reality. But the transition away from polluting coal power is not complete.

The goal of phasing out unabated coal from power generation is now supported by 97 members of the Powering Past Coal Alliance, so this is 33 countries, 27 sub-national governments, around 37 businesses and related organisations. And the Alliance now covers more than a third of the total coal power capacity of the OECD countries.

It's clear that developed countries should lead the way, and the UK is committed to achieving zero coal power by 2024.

Last year, if I can tell you, that only 2% of all our electricity generation in the UK came from coal, which is for us a record low. Just eight years ago, that level was around 40%. So, where we work effectively we can make a difference.

In parallel we also need to scale up technical assistance, investment, and indeed, policy support, so that clean power becomes the most attractive option for all countries, not just developed ones.

So that the global pipeline of planned new coal plants, which is already shrinking, we should aim to have that eliminated entirely.

We must support heavily coal-dependent countries in making a 'just transition' – it's a phrase we use a lot, but I think we have to really give effect to that. We need to help them to move to clean energy in a way that creates jobs and supports the communities that are most affected.

And we absolutely have to work together to extend access to electricity to almost the almost billion people – around 840 million people – around the world who don't actually have access to it right now.

Turning to road transport, the promise of cheaper, cleaner technology is, again, equally real.

Electric vehicles are cheaper to run than fossil fuel cars and are expected to be cheaper to buy by the early 2020s.

The auto industry is being hit hard by the current crisis, we all know that for those of us who are dealing with this in our own governments. And of course our immediate concerns are the businesses and jobs that are affected.

But the long-term prosperity of the industry, and for wider society, the challenge of transition is just as important.

By the most optimistic estimates, over half of new car sales globally will be electric vehicles by 2040. To meet the Paris Agreement goals, we probably need all new vehicles to be zero emission by then. In other words, we're going to need to double the pace of the global transition.

I do believe that we can achieve this if we work together.

The UK itself has already set the goal of ending the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040. And in February, thanks to progress in the sector, our Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced we were bringing this target forward to 2035 or, indeed, earlier if we can give effect to that.

We have also invested in a UK Battery Industrialisation Centre, and that's a stepping stone to our larger commitment for a Gigafactory – a large-scale battery technology factory for electric vehicles.

Now, I do believe that actually the more countries that set clear targets and policies in line with this rapid transition that I've talked about, the faster investment will shift towards new technologies, and the faster their costs will come down. We've seen that in renewables and we want to see that when it comes to vehicles as well.

Faster transitions in power and transport will absolutely have far-reaching consequences and we all understand that.

Cheap and clean power, and the scaling up of batteries and fuel cells in road transport, will absolutely open new pathways to decarbonisation in industry, buildings, aviation and shipping.

And we are only just beginning to experience the benefits of a clean economy, and we need to move much more quickly towards it.

And I do believe that whether we live in the South, the North, the East or the West, we do share one life-giving but incredibly fragile planet. We share an interconnected global economy. That is absolutely clear and has been very clear as we've seen the consequences throughout COVID-19.

But we also share the hope of a prosperous future.

And I hope the discussion today can explore opportunities for stronger cooperation to meet this shared challenge, working together. Absolutely, we can certainly make faster progress.

Thank you.

The eleventh annual [Petersberg Climate Dialogue](#) is the first major climate ministerial meeting of the year, bringing together ministers from 35 countries within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

[Letter to the ACMD on advice on emergency legislation to enable supply of controlled drugs](#)

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

[Storage limit for frozen eggs, sperm and embryos extended during coronavirus outbreak](#)

Anyone who has frozen their eggs, sperm and embryos will be able to extend their storage for an additional 2 years under new government plans to support those going through fertility treatment during the global coronavirus pandemic.

To support wider changes to the health service in responding to the pandemic, fertility treatment in the UK across the NHS and private sector was temporarily paused earlier this month.

In recognition of the potential impact this may have on those wishing to start a family, the government has confirmed that the current 10-year storage limit for embryos and gametes will be extended by 2 years to enable sufficient time for fertility treatment to resume.

Currently the storage period for embryos and gametes is limited to a maximum of 10 years, after which people must choose whether to undergo fertility treatment or have their frozen eggs, sperm and embryos destroyed.

Health Minister, Lord Bethell, said:

Many people rely on fertility treatment as their only hope to start

a family and the current pandemic means some will have to put their hopes on hold.

We are taking steps to ensure during these extraordinary times, those that have embryos, sperm or eggs stored as part of their treatment are not unfairly caught out by the existing storage limits and have the best possible opportunity to start their family in the future.

I know for some people the pausing of services will be extremely worrying and we are constantly assessing when it will be appropriate to commence fertility services again while balancing the pressures of the pandemic on our NHS and workforce.

Sally Cheshire, Chair of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, said:

We welcome today's announcement from the DHSC. We have been working together to ensure those patients who have stored sperm, eggs or embryos that are reaching the 10-year storage limit are not penalised by the current suspension of fertility treatment due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We know this is a difficult and distressing time for all patients, so this decision brings good news for those who are reaching the 10-year storage limit. It provides them with some much-needed reassurance and most importantly gives more time to try for their much longed for family.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority will be issuing new guidance to fertility clinics across the UK to support them in implementing the new storage limit extension.

Freezing and storing sperm, eggs and embryos are becoming more frequent with patients choosing to do so for various reasons. These may include that:

- they are not ready to have a family but want to preserve their fertility so that they can start a family later in life
- they are having cancer treatment that may affect their fertility and wish to protect and preserve their future fertility
- they may be planning on transitioning or having gender reassignment surgery but intend to start a family later
- they have several good embryos as part of their treatment cycle and store these for future treatment use
- Earlier in the year, the government launched a consultation for views on whether the current law to store their frozen eggs, sperm and embryos for 10 years should change.
- Currently the storage period is limited to a maximum of 10 years and only those stored for medical reasons, such as cancer treatment, and

premature infertility can be preserved for longer – up to 55 years in total. The consultation will also consider arguments about whether women are disproportionately affected by the current time limit.

- The consultation continues until 5 May to consider [whether the limit should be extended in line with significant improvements in freezing technologies.](#)

First ‘Foodbank Thursday’ success for new response team

The ‘Area 6 Covid Response Team’ is providing vital help to boost support for vulnerable people living in isolated areas in and around Hillcrest and Hensingham in Whitehaven, which is some of the largest residential areas in the town.

Ryan Taylor, Senior Project Manager, is leading the response team.

He said:

I was approached to lead the team by John Murphy who is doing the same in Cleator Moor and I was keen to help. We have a lot of amazing volunteers offering their time, so the main priority is ensuring that we organise and coordinate them in the best way, to get the right support to the right people as quickly as we can.

A big thank you to the people helping us make this a more positive situation for those living in our area. Those of us from Sellafield Ltd are also very lucky to have the support of our management, who are giving us time to support the community.

Area 6 covers Hillcrest, Hensingham, Richmond, Red Lonning, Inkerman and surrounding estates in the Whitehaven area.

The service offered includes food shopping and deliveries, pharmacy collections, a telephone befriending service, utilities support, dog walking and even gardening.

The team had an overwhelming response to their first ‘Foodbank Thursday’ event this week, which saw food parcels being collected from doorsteps and taken to a new collection hub in Rascals nursery at Red Lonning.

Foodbank Thursday

Jessica Ward, Programme Manager, has allocated teams to focus on specific 'zones', ensuring everyone has access to support if they need it.

She said:

The first thing we did was devise a strategy to set-up the group of volunteers as quickly as possible. Within 24 hours we had split the area into 6 zones, allocating a lead to each.

Each team now has their own Whatsapp groups and are providing a vital service to those who are in need of a helping hand. Its really motivational to see such a caring and proactive community of people working to turn a difficult situation into one that is more positive for local people.

Local Councillors Allan Forster, Mike Hawkins and Chris Hays are also backing the efforts.

Cllr Forster said:

This is a hugely populated area of Whitehaven and we're keen to do all we can to ensure vulnerable and isolated residents get the help they need.

We have been overwhelmed by offers of support and are very grateful to our volunteers offering time and skills to help their neighbours during this testing time.