

# Speech: Prime Minister's 2018 Christmas Message to the Armed Forces

To all our servicemen and women around the world, I want to wish you and your families the very best this Christmas.

Many of you will spend this season miles apart from your loved ones, and as you forgo the comforts of home, it is particularly important that we remember your commitment, and say thank you.

And this year, as we looked back to the sacrifices made by generations in the past, you continued to demonstrate why you are the finest in the world.

From playing a vital role in cleaning up after a sickening nerve agent attack on the streets of Salisbury, protecting our waters and our skies from Russian intrusion and strengthening our allies in Eastern Europe, striking at terrorism as part of the Global Coalition against Daesh, and along with our US and French allies – sending a message to the Assad regime that we will not stand by while chemical weapons are used, as they were in April on families, including young children.

Time and again, you have stood up to aggression and those who flout the rules based international order. You should be incredibly proud of all that you do – just as the whole country is proud of you.

This year we also marked significant milestones. At memorial sites in the UK and around Europe, we honoured our fallen and paid tribute to their memory as we commemorated a centenary since the end of the First World War.

We celebrated 100 years of the RAF – including a magnificent flypast over Buckingham Palace. And looking to the future, our F-35 Lightning stealth fighter jets landed on the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth for the first time.

Now as we approach the New Year, there will be new challenges ahead. But I know you will continue to meet them in the same way that you have always done.

With courage, determination, resilience, ingenuity.

Qualities that are as vital now as they have ever been.

So on behalf of the whole country – let me say thank you to you, and to your families whose love and support is so important.

And let me wish all of you a peaceful Christmas and a very Happy New Year.

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# News story: British Army receives pioneering bomb disposal robots

The delivery comes from a total contract of £55 million for 56 robots. The Harris Corporation's T7 unmanned ground vehicle (UGV) are equipped with high-definition cameras, lightning-fast datalinks, an adjustable manipulation arm, and tough all-terrain treads, allowing them to neutralise a wide range of explosive threats.

The game-changing platform endured a variety of tests during an eight-week 'acceptance' trials period at UK and US sites specifically chosen to put the robots through their paces.

The robots were pushed to their limits by trials including multi-terrain driving, a series of battlefield missions, weightlifting and dexterity tasks, climatic and vibration testing, high stress capabilities, live-firings, maximum traversing angles and interoperability assessments.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

These robots will go on to be an essential piece of kit, preventing harm to innocent civilians and the brave operators who make explosives safe.

The robots will provide the Army with the latest bomb-disposal technology and will prove to be trusted companions both on UK streets and in deadly conflict zones.

Col Zac Scott, Head of the Defence EOD & Search Branch said:

Remote Control Vehicles (RCVs) are critical to the safe conduct of Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) tasks.

The Harris T7 harnesses cutting-edge technology to provide EOD operators with unprecedented levels of mobility and dexterity. It represents a step-change in capability for our service personnel and it will save lives.

The bomb disposal robots have been procured by Defence Equipment and Support, the MOD's procurement organisation, under Project Starter. The deal was announced in September 2017 at the Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) Exhibition in London.

Project Starter will procure 56 Harris T7s to support Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams. The programme is designed to replace the Army's fleet of Wheelbarrow Mk8B remote-controlled EOD robots which have been used across the globe by UK Armed Forces since 1972.

Lt Col Thornton Daryl Hirst, Section Head of Remote Controlled Vehicles within DE&S' Special Projects Search and Countermeasures team, said:

The first four production standard vehicles have been delivered early to the British Army enabling us to conduct train-the-trainer packages from January onwards.

The hard work and dedication of my team has helped ensure that this critical project has run to time and cost and the trials exceeded our performance expectations.

The Harris T7s robots use 'advanced haptic feedback' to allow operators to 'feel' their way through the intricate process of disarming from a safe distance, protecting UK soldiers from threats such as roadside bombs.

The haptic feedback function is designed to provide operators with human-like dexterity while they operate the robot's arm using the remote-control handgrip. The unit gives the operator physical feedback, allowing intuitive detailed control.

All 56 robots are due to be delivered to the UK and in service by December 2020.

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## **[Press release: Thousands more families to benefit from the Adoption Support Fund](#)**

Thousands more adoptive families and special guardians are set to benefit from additional support after special fund was increased by £12million – taking the total investment to £149million since 2015.

Over 35,000 families have already benefitted from the Adoption Support Fund, which has provided things like cognitive therapy, play and music therapy, and family support sessions. This much needed therapeutic support can help children come to terms with their difficulties – giving them the confidence to build strong relationships with their new family.

This latest additional funding means that the Adoption Support Fund has grown every year since its introduction in 2015 – with the £40million available for next year double the original investment of £18million, underlining the Government's determination to support adoptive families as they settle in to their new lives.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

Spending quality time with family is one of the most important parts of Christmas, and adoptive parents, along with foster carers and kinship carers, provide loving, stable homes for so many vulnerable children and young people.

Thousands of families have had their lives transformed by adoption, but there are still too many children waiting to be adopted. I want those thinking about adoption and existing adoptive parents to know there is specialist support in place to help families as they adjust to their new lives together.

We have seen how life-changing the fund can be and this extra funding will continue to support thousands of children who have experienced trauma and adoptive families as they settle in to their new homes.

Sue Armstrong-Brown Chief Executive of Adoption UK said:

This is fantastic news for adoptive parents across England. I'm pleased that the government heard our recent message, delivered directly to the Children's Minister by adoptive parents, that more support was needed. Adopters told the minister that many had received life-changing therapeutic support through the Adoption Support Fund.

This support makes all the difference to families parenting some of the country's most vulnerable children – in many cases it has been the one thing that held the family together and prevented the child returning to care. It's vital that this support is safeguarded into the future, and I'm delighted that an additional £12million has been allocated to support adoptive families.

Andrew Christie, Chair of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board said:

I am delighted that an additional £12million has been put into the Adoption Support Fund. This will enable thousands more families to get access to the support they need to ensure that their children thrive. Adopters and special guardians have told me that access to therapeutic support helps them understand the impact that trauma,

abuse and neglect has had on their children and how they can provide them with the support they need. It is making a huge difference to the lives of thousands of families.

Adoption plays a crucial role in providing support for some of our most vulnerable children, alongside Special Guardianship, foster care and residential care. The new National Stability Forum for Children's Social Care, which held its second meeting in December, brings together system leaders to focus on looked after children's outcomes and sense of belonging, regardless of type of setting or legal order.

This was a key commitment made in the Government's publication *Fostering Better Outcomes* earlier in the year, which set out our aspirations for a high quality fostering system. In January, we will be supporting Fostering Network's revised Foster Carer Charter, with an ambition for a Charter to be in place in every fostering service across the UK. The agreement between fostering services and their foster carers will provide children with the best possible care and is an important step towards foster carers receiving the support and respect they deserve.

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## **Press release: Ban of third party sales of puppies and kittens, known as 'Lucy's Law', confirmed**

The government has confirmed it will be banning third party sales of puppies and kittens, Animal Welfare Minister David Rutley announced today (23 December).

The decision was taken following a [public consultation](#), from which there was over 95 per cent support for a ban. It will help bring to an end the terrible welfare conditions found in puppy farming and solve a range of existing animal welfare issues.

This will mean that anyone looking to buy or adopt a puppy or kitten under six months must either deal directly with the breeder or with an animal rehoming centre.

This will help to crack down on puppy farms and make it much harder for high volume low welfare breeders, both licensed and unlicensed, whose trade relies on third party sellers.

These include the early separation of puppies and kittens from their mothers and the increased likelihood of long journeys that puppies or kittens have to undertake. All of these can contribute to an increased risk of disease and a

lack of socialisation for the puppies and kittens.

During a visit to Battersea Cat and Dogs Home, Animal Welfare Minister David Rutley said:

This ban on third party sales of puppies and kittens is part of our commitment to make sure the nation's much-loved pets get the right start in life. I pay tribute to the Lucy's Law campaign and the many stakeholders who have passionately campaigned for this ban. Today's decision builds on our previous action in this area, including banning the sale of puppies under eight weeks and tackling the breeding of dogs with genetic disorders.

I urge anyone who is thinking of buying a puppy, or any pet, at this time of year to pause and think carefully before doing so. Pets become a part of our families and it is a decision that requires careful consideration and planning. It should not be undertaken on a whim or as a surprise. That is why we promote responsible pet ownership in our welfare codes and I urge fellow animal lovers to consider the idea of rehoming a dog from the many wonderful organisations across the country.

Marc Abraham, TV Vet, and founder of PupAid and the Lucy's Law campaign to ban third party puppy and kitten sales, said:

This is a real victory for grass roots campaigners as well as the UK's dogs and cats. On behalf of my phenomenal Lucy's Law team I thank the government, and every animal lover, ethical animal welfare organisation, parliamentarian, and celebrity that's helped make Lucy's Law's ban on third party puppy and kitten sales a reality.

The third party trade supports and sustains both legal and illegal puppy dealing, inappropriate activities suffering exactly the same negative welfare implications; effectively the puppy or kitten (and their mum) is damaged before reaching the licensed or unlicensed seller. Thanks to Lucy's Law's ban on third party dealers, every breeder now becomes accountable and transparent, prospective owners will always see mum interacting with puppy or kitten in the place they were born, and illegally smuggled pups become more difficult to sell, making it the first major step in tackling irresponsible dog and cat breeding in the UK and beyond.

Lucy's Law will help end puppy farming, protect the future health and happiness of dogs like poor little Lucy, as well as encourage prospective pet owners to adopt from their local rescue shelter too.

Battersea's Chief Executive Claire Horton said:

Battersea welcomes today's government confirmation that third party sales of puppies and kittens will be banned. Properly enforced, this will help put an end to dogs being used as breeding machines and kept in shocking conditions.

The days of unscrupulous puppy dealers lining their pockets with no regard for animal welfare must now come to an end. This ban makes breeders properly accountable for the puppies they produce and will now give future owners the reassurance that they can adopt their new dog or cat from a safe and trusted source and ideally from a rescue centre.

Christmas time is often a popular time for puppy and pet purchases but this carries a number of risks and can have tragic consequences for animal welfare when pets are either abandoned or given to rehoming centres to deal with.

The government fully supports those charities who have been calling for responsible dog ownership and for people to consider carefully whether they want to buy a pet for Christmas before doing so. Pets should not be bought as a surprise.

A Dog Trust spokesperson said:

Today's announcement is a positive step for animal welfare and we are also pleased that our recommendation to regulate the rehoming sector is being seriously considered.

We already know of cases where unscrupulous sellers set themselves up as fake breeders, with fake homes and fake puppy mums, while shipping in puppies from puppy farms or overseas. By looking to address this loophole we can also prevent unscrupulous sellers from setting themselves up as a rehoming organisation in order to continue their devious trade. This is one of a package of measures which must be addressed for a ban to be fully effective.

We ask everyone to remember our famous slogan, 'A dog is for life, not just for Christmas®,' when deciding to welcome a puppy into their lives.

The government will also continue to work with stakeholders on the issue of whether non-commercial rescue and rehoming centres will require a licence to operate. Over 90% supported this idea in a call for evidence.

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## News story: Rescue heroes given £1 million for life-saving equipment

Dozens of charities across the UK will benefit from new equipment to help volunteer search teams save lives more quickly and easily thanks to £1 million of government funding.

Today (23 December 2018) the Department for Transport revealed the 57 successful bids for the latest round of the rescue boat grant fund. The scheme was launched in 2014 to provide £5 million over 5 years to independent search and rescue teams working on inland waterways.

Over the past 4 years, 201 bids have been successful – helping a total of 98 search and rescue charities. The money has already paid for 65 new boats in addition to launch vehicles, rafts, safety gear, and other costs to support rescue teams. This year's pot will fund 15 new boats and a hovercraft.

Maritime Minister Nusrat Ghani said:

Our rescue boat teams are the unsung heroes of the UK's waterways. Their commitment and skill keeps people safe on and around our rivers, lakes and inshore areas.

Lives have been saved as a result of this scheme and our additional funding will ensure that these tireless volunteers and charities can buy the craft, equipment, and other resources they need to provide vital round-the-clock services.

Among the successful applicants of this year's fund was Hornsea Inshore Rescue, which made headlines over the summer when volunteers from the organisation saved a father and son who had been swept away by a riptide off Mappleton Beach, East Riding of Yorkshire.

Another of the recipients is Salisbury-based Serve On, which is being given more than £19,500 to buy a boat and other life-saving equipment. Last Christmas, volunteers from the charity were patrolling the River Avon to highlight to students the dangers of drowning, when they spotted and rescued a 22-year-old man who had fallen into the river and was at risk of succumbing to the cold.

Actress Joanna Lumley, an ambassador to the Salisbury-based Serve On charity, said:

The inshore and inland rescue boat grant fund is a good example of how government money can enable the incredibly valuable work that voluntary groups like Serve On do in their communities.

Also receiving funding is Wiltshire Search and Rescue team which was praised by emergency services in July last year for its role in finding an 82-year-old dementia patient who had been lost in the New Forest for 3 days.

## **List of Rescue Boat Fund winners 2018 to 2019**

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The bids for the latest round of funding were considered by an expert panel, chaired by officials and including representatives from DEFRA and the devolved administrations as well as expert advisers from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, RNLI and the Royal Yachting Association.