

Press release: International Trade Secretary Visits Thailand to Develop Trade Links

International Trade Secretary, Dr Liam Fox, will become the first UK trade minister to visit Thailand in 15 years when he arrives in Bangkok today to boost trade with the country.

Thailand is the second largest economy in South East Asia and bilateral trade with the UK increased by 2.8% to £5.6bn between 2015-2016. Currently the majority of UK exports are in machinery, vehicles and mechanical appliances.

Dr Fox will seek to expand this relationship, and raise the prospect of Thailand holding democratic elections, when he meets leading businesses and Thai Ministers, including Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak, his counterpart Sonthirat Sonthijirawong, the Thai Minister of Commerce, and Dr Pichet Durongkaverroj, Minister of Digital Economy and Society.

Thailand is implementing its “4.0 industrial strategy”, with a particular emphasis on moving towards a digital economy, from rolling out high-speed internet access for all villages to setting up a big data analytics centre.

The Secretary of State will showcase how UK’s world-class digital sector can support this strategy, following a recent visit of Thai digital companies to the UK, as well as promoting the capability of UK companies in areas such as financial services, and transportation.

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While in the country Dr Fox will announce that the UK’s export credit agency, UKEF, has doubled the finance available for British businesses wanting to export to Thailand to £4.5bn.

UKEF will welcome applications for support from UK companies exporting to Thailand and for Thai buyers of UK goods and services. For the first time UKEF support will now be available in Thai baht, allowing buyers in Thailand to “buy British, pay local”, making exports from the UK even more competitive.

Following the lifting of the ban on British poultry, Dr Fox will also announce an export win for UK company Aviagen on the visit. Based in Stratford upon-Avon and Newbridge, the company will generate £40 million of extra exports over the next five years by exporting grandparent breeder day-old chicks and hatching eggs into the Thai market.

International Trade Secretary, Dr Liam Fox, said:

The UK's trade with Thailand is growing steadily, but there is still huge untapped demand for British goods and services across the Thai economy, which is growing strongly and has a large middle class.

The IMF predicts 90% of global growth in the coming years will come from outside the EU, and this Government is putting the UK in a position to benefit, particularly by boosting export finance and showcasing British companies to the Asian market.

As an international economic department we will continue to use visits such as this to help businesses of all sizes forge ties and cultivate relationships with potential buyers and investors in growing markets around the world.

The Secretary of State will meet with members of The British Chamber of Commerce and Thai businesses to discuss how they can forge new links between the two countries.

Press release: UK to save 50,000 people from threat of landmines worldwide

Sudarana, a 20 year-old woman trained as demining technician by the UK charity The HALO Trust at work in a paddy field in Sri Lanka. Photo credit: Russell Watkins / DFID

The UK will help to save an extra 50,000 vulnerable people from the threat of landmines worldwide, as more children than ever die as a result of these "cruel, indiscriminate killers", International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt announced today.

To mark International Mine Awareness Day, Ms Mordaunt warned that in far too many countries children live in fear and risk their lives every day to go to school or play with friends because years of devastating wars have left land littered with lethal, hidden mines.

According to the latest figures, 2016 saw more child casualties than ever before and the highest number of total fatalities on record for more than 15 years. More than 8,600 people were injured and more than 2,000 people were killed during the year by landmines and other explosive devices left behind by conflict.

From today, UK aid will help save the lives of 50,000 more people in South Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Burma and Cambodia by clearing mines from over five million square metres of land – the equivalent of over 19,000 tennis courts – and through educating vulnerable people about the dangers of landmines, keeping entire communities safe from maiming or death.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

It is unforgivable that more innocent children than ever are being maimed or killed by landmines which have been left behind by decades of devastating wars. One wrong step on the way to school or during a game with friends can cost a life or cause a lifetime of pain and suffering.

Today we are extending UK aid support to help save an extra 50,000 people in future years by educating them about the dangers of mines and also by decontaminating land littered with the devices. This will allow the poorest people to grow crops and their children to walk to school in areas which were once off limits.

Landmines are deadly devices, that have no place in today's world. No one should be forced to live in fear of losing a limb, their life or a child to these cruel, indiscriminate killers.

In addition to today's announcement, UK aid has:

- Cleared mines from 140 million square metres of contaminated land across the world, including in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.
- Helped eradicate landmines from Mozambique – a Commonwealth country – by clearing every deadly explosive device from roads, bridges, schools and villages, making the country completely mine-free.
- Supported The HALO Trust to hand back Afghanistan's most deadly province for landmines to its governor, after making 39 million of square metres of land safe once again.
- Matched pound for pound £214,000 of public donations to the Mine Advisory Group's (MAG's) 'Walk Without Fear' appeal – through UK Aid Match – to double the impact and help return land to almost 8,000 people in Angola, 20 years after Princess Diana walked through a landmine littered field to raise awareness of the devastating impact they have on innocent lives.
- In an event last year with HRH Prince Harry, the Department for International Development (DFID) made a £100 million commitment to make

15 million square metres of land safe again over a three year period. Today's announcement of £3 million of UK aid to South Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Burma and Cambodia for a three month period is a new allocation from this existing support which will be delivered by the Halo Trust, MAG and Norwegian People's Aid.

- The £100 million also includes:
- £12.6 million in 2017/18 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.□
- £60.4 million for demining programmes in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20 in Angola, Burma, Cambodia, Iraq, Laos, Lebanon, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Vietnam, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.
- £20 million for Afghanistan in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20 delivered by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS).□
- £4 million for mine action in Sudan for 2018/19 and 2019/20 which will be delivered by UNMAS to clear 500,000 square metres of land in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States, open 1,000 km of priority routes for humanitarian aid delivery and provide education to 200,000 vulnerable people about the dangers of landmines.
- In addition to this, through UK Aid Match, the UK Government matched pound for pound public donations to MAG's demining appeal. DFID will be continuing its programming in Asia and Africa including Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Somalia and South Sudan.
- According to the latest statistics from the Monitor which provides research and monitoring for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC), in 2016 8,605 mine casualties were recorded, of which at least 2,089 people were killed. Following a sharp increase in 2015, the casualty total in 2016 marked the highest number of annual recorded casualties in Monitor data since 1999 (9,228) and the most child casualties ever recorded (4,152).

Speech: Moving from Peacekeeping to Development in Haiti

Thank you very much Mr President, and may I join colleagues in congratulating

you on your Presidency and thanking the Netherlands for theirs. Thank you also to the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing, and it was very good to have news of his visit in March and to see how much the mandate is being actively implemented.

The United Kingdom welcomes the continued progress in Haiti. We're particularly interested in the development of the National Police, the Penal Chain Committee initiative, efforts to strengthen the rule of law, and like other speakers, we applaud the work of the New Approach to Cholera.

It's very good to see the dedication and support that MINUJUSTH has offered to the Government of Haiti in its task. We have been very interested in the way that the Government is establishing a solid and sustainable foundation for long-term political stability, security and development in Haiti. As the Under-Secretary-General said, Mr President, this is a real vote of confidence in the country.

It's good to hear of the active implementation of the Mission for Justice Support, and we now look to the Mission to deliver a smooth transition to a non-peacekeeping UN presence.

In particular, we support the Mission's efforts to hand over responsibility for rule of law, human rights and security sector reforms to the UN Country Team and to the Government of Haiti by October 2019, and we want to ensure the transition is a success. To this end, the United Kingdom urges the Government and the UN to take the following three steps:

Firstly, the Government needs to take ownership for the delivery of critical reforms that will have a lasting impact on security and development. In particular, Mr President, I would highlight the need to protect the independence of the Haitian police; to pass new legislation to empower the judiciary; to ensure human rights are protected through strong state institutions; and to empower women to be political leaders.

Secondly, we look to the UN to be a well-integrated organisation on the ground to ensure an effective transition by implementing the Joint Work Plan. In particular, there should be a strong focus on collaboration between the Country Team and the Mission; support from the Peacebuilding Fund, as other colleagues have said; flexible and coordinated partnerships between mobile teams and the Country Team; close coordination with other international and bilateral partners; and I join others in looking for an overall focus on what progress can be made on the Sustainable Development Goals. The May report to the Secretary-General is eagerly awaited, Mr President. We hope it will set out the progress needed to deliver an integrated and sustainable transition in the next eighteen months.

Thirdly, the two-year exit strategy needs to demonstrate clear progress against the benchmarks the Secretary-General has set. The responsibilities from the Mission to the Country Team is a complex one, and makes the transition a more complex one than it inherently is. We hope the Mission, in consultation with the Government, will be able to develop the indicators needed under these benchmarks. Using clear and realistic milestones will enable us to

track progress, and while noting that many colleagues and the Under-Secretary-General spoke about the fragility of the transition, we believed that if there are such milestones and benchmarks, it will reduce the risk associated with the exit strategy. In particular, the exit strategy needs also to be clearly aligned with the UN Development Assistance Framework.

In conclusion, Mr President, it is critical that Mission and Government work together in the spirit of solidarity, mutual respect and trust. Where the United Kingdom can help, you can count on us to do so.

And I would like at this point, if I may, just to mention the history of sexual exploitation and abuse that has sadly happened in Haiti, and to say that we will work with the Secretary-General to ensure a zero-tolerance policy throughout the whole of the UN.

There is now a limited time available to meet the transition target of October 2019. We hope for the adoption of a clear transition plan that will set out how we will move from peacekeeping to development, and we thought what the Under-Secretary-General said on this was very encouraging. We do however urge the Secretary-General to be realistic and clear about division of responsibilities across the UN system. It is ultimately the Government of Haiti's leadership that will make the transition a success.

But as other speakers have noted, where we are now does presents us with an enormous opportunity, not just for the Government of Haiti but for a success for the UN family and in peacekeeping generally.

Thank you.

[News story: ESFA marks its 1st birthday](#)

Eileen Milner marks ESFA's first birthday:

"As we joined together, a year ago today, to form one agency, the organisation has embraced many changes.

We have implemented apprenticeship reforms including the apprenticeship levy, we have also begun the implementation of the National Funding Formula for schools.

We have continued improvements to our school estate, in the last financial year our free schools capital team have opened 41 new free schools, UTCs and studio schools.

Meanwhile, over the last 12 months, our Priority School Building Programme

has seen 48 schools open in their rebuilt and refurbished buildings. In addition, 4 national college buildings were opened providing specialist training facilities for high speed rail and nuclear industries.

Resulting from area reviews in the FE sector, this year we have supported the implementation of a further 31 merger recommendations and the conversion of 18 sixth form colleges to academies.

We have so far supported over 482,000 people through the National Careers Service, giving impartial information, advice and guidance to ensure direction on career paths when not knowing where to turn.

National Apprenticeship Week 2018 was a huge success, on the first day we trended number 1 on social media, getting higher mentions than the Oscars.

The Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge for Schools project has engaged 1,617 schools this academic year, surpassing its targets on numbers of teachers and parents engaged.

We have issued 2018 to 2019 funding allocations to around 1,100 colleges and providers and 2017 to 2018 allocations to 7,614 academies and 152 local authorities and we continue to increase scrutiny and oversight of the sector to ensure assurance of how public money is used.

This year has seen the development and roll out of our financial prevention strategy and the move to better joint working with the Regional Schools Commissioners. We continue to work on the implementation of T Levels and with Mayoral Combined Authorities and our providers on the devolution of the adult skills budget in 2019.

I have now been in post 5 months and am certain that ESFA is ideally placed to tackle the challenges and opportunities ahead. We look forward to continuing to work closely with all our partners across the sector. Collaboration will be key in ensuring future improvements to the education and skills agenda.

In the coming months, we will publish our inaugural annual report which will show further progress and the impact we are making.”

[News story: Grave of a Seaforth Highlander rededicated 100 years after he was killed in World War 1](#)

Ken and Kath MacDonald with the Reverend Paul van Sittert and members of the Royal Regiment of Scotland at the service. Crown Copyright, All rights

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The resting place of 21 year old Serjeant John MacKenzie MM of 1st/6th Battalion, The Seaforth Highlanders has been marked 100 years after his death in the Great War. A rededication service has taken place at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Anneux British Cemetery near Cambrai in Northern France.

The service was organised by the MOD's Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services.

Rosie Barron, JCCC said:

Serjeant MacKenzie stands out as an exceptional soldier even amongst a generation where so many paid the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom. It has been an honour to organise this rededication service in his memory and to know that his family's search for him is now at an end.

Serjeant MacKenzie enlisted at the outset of the world war 1 and served throughout the conflict until he died on 25 March 1918, shortly after the start of the German Spring Offensive. He fought in the Capture of Beaumont Hamel in 1916 and later that year was awarded the Military Medal and French Croix de Guerre. Just prior to his death, Serjeant MacKenzie was awarded a Bar to the Military Medal.

The location of Serjeant MacKenzie's grave was discovered after painstaking research by his great nephew, Ken MacDonald, and his wife, Kath MacDonald. They discovered that Serjeant MacKenzie had been wounded and taken prisoner by the Germans. He later died of his wounds and was buried in a mass grave in the village of Inchy-en-Artois. After the war, his grave was moved to Anneux British Cemetery, where he was buried as an 'Unknown Soldier'. With his whereabouts unknown, Serjeant MacKenzie was commemorated on the Arras Memorial.

Further research by the MOD's JCCC was undertaken to corroborate the evidence the family provided and the identification of the 'Unknown Soldier' grave was confirmed to be that of Serjeant John MacKenzie MM.

Ken MacDonald lays a wreath at Serjeant MacKenzie's grave on behalf of the family. Crown Copyright, All rights reserved

Ken MacDonald said:

Since my wife and I visited France 22 years ago and saw John's name on the Arras Memorial, we have never given up hope of finding his grave. It feels today like 1 of my 3 great uncles has come home. We're very grateful to the MOD's JCCC and CWGC for arranging the rededication service, and to the relatives of other Seaforth

Highlanders who joined us for the service.

Ken and Kath were accompanied by his sister, Mary, and 4 other family members in attending the service. Nine members of The Royal Regiment of Scotland were present at the rededication service to remember Serjeant MacKenzie. Also remembered were Serjeant MacKenzie's brothers, Donald and Kenneth, both of the 1st Battalion, The Cameron Highlanders who are both still missing on the battlefields of Northern France.

A new headstone bearing Serjeant MacKenzie's name has been provided by the CWGC, who will now care for his final resting place in perpetuity.

Melanie Donnelly, CWGC said:

100 years after he was killed, Serjeant MacKenzie's grave in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Anneux British Cemetery is now marked with a headstone bearing his name. He was a brave young man who made the ultimate sacrifice and we are honoured to be able to play a part in the re-dedication of his grave today. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission ensure that all those who served and fell are commemorated by name and we will care for his grave and the memorials on which his two brothers are commemorated, in perpetuity.

The rededication service for Serjeant MacKenzie took place as part of a series of services organised by the MOD's JCCC this week. The first was the burial of an unknown soldier of The Royal Scots at Bailleul Road East Cemetery in Belgium earlier today all the services are to be conducted by the Reverend Paul van Sittert CF, Chaplain to 4th Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland

The Reverend Paul van Sittert, said:

It has been a privilege to officiate at the rededication and burial services of graves for these remarkably brave world war 1 soldiers. Their courage, sacrifice and service to our country is an example that should never be forgotten. The Kohima epitaph rightly reminds: that for our tomorrow they gave their today.

The burial of an unknown soldier of The Royal Scots at Bailleul Road East Cemetery in Belgium (note this is not the grave of John MacKenzie). Crown Copyright, All rights

The burial of two unknown soldiers of The Royal Scots and an unknown soldier of an unknown regiment were laid to rest on Wednesday 28 March at St Mary's A.D.S. Cemetery in France. The burial of an unknown Argyll and Sutherland Highlander will take place later in the day at Woburn Abbey Cemetery, also in France.