

## **Press release: PM call with Taoiseach: 19 February 2018**

A No 10 spokesperson said:

The Prime Minister spoke to Taoiseach Leo Varadkar on the phone earlier this evening.

They spoke about the recent phase of political talks in Northern Ireland and of their disappointment that an agreement had not yet been reached to restore an Executive.

Both leaders recognised the progress and serious engagement made by the parties.

The Prime Minister said she believed there was scope for agreement and reiterated the UK Government's priority was still to get devolution up and running again in Northern Ireland.

They agreed to continue to stay in close contact as the parties reflect on the best way forward to re-establish devolved Government in Northern Ireland.

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## **Government response: UK concerned over State of Emergency in Ethiopia**

The UK has been following closely the past week's events in Ethiopia. We share outgoing Prime Minister Hailemariam's view that this is a concerning time for a country that is our friend and our partner. We welcome the commitment to an orderly process of political change in line with the constitution, as well as his repeated support for a continued reform process.

Against that backdrop we are, however, concerned and disappointed by the decision to impose a new State of Emergency. It sends a discouraging signal to the international community and foreign investors. We strongly hope that the announcement does not signal a reversal in Ethiopia's recent moves towards reform, and that it will be in place for as short a time as possible. In implementing the State of Emergency, we urge the Government of Ethiopia to ensure that human rights and the constitution are respected. Widespread use of detention powers and internet blockages should be avoided.

We call on the Government to ensure a rapid, peaceful, transparent and constitutional transition to a new leadership that continues and accelerates the reform process. The UK is a long-term friend of Ethiopia and we continue to stand ready to support a purposeful and progressive reform agenda.

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## [News story: UK and US launch innovation fund for ideas to save millions of lives in conflict zones](#)

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt and USAID Administrator Mark Green

The UK and US have joined forces to find the next technological breakthrough to save and transform millions of lives in the world's most dangerous conflict zones.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt and USAID Administrator Mark Green announced the new Humanitarian Grand Challenge at an event held at the Overseas Development Institute today (Monday 19 February).

The Challenge fund will provide grants to help get innovative technology projects off the ground, and will provide further support to expand projects that prove the most successful.

This new fund is the latest of the Grand Challenges, which are a tried and tested way of leveraging the power of businesses, and it is expected to attract tens of millions of pounds in private sector funding.

It aims to drive innovation in the aid sector, with a call for projects to focus on developing new ways to deliver water, sanitation, energy, health assistance and life-saving information in hard to reach conflict zones.

In a departure from traditional forms of aid, this will see new low-cost technology being produced for the most remote places and extreme conditions.

The 'Saving Lives at Birth' Grand Challenge – which was backed by DFID, USAID and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – attracted more than £60million in private sector investment and has already helped save 10,000 lives.

Successful projects backed by previous Grand Challenges have produced an electronic nose to smell tuberculosis from patients' breath, a maternal and child health app for people in Burma to give birth safely and give their children the best start in life, and low-cost microchips to diagnose diarrhoeal diseases.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

If we are to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals and help all those who need humanitarian support then we need to do things differently, and we need to lever all hands to that cause.

Our new Humanitarian Grand Challenge will create cutting-edge technology and leverage the power of the private sector to help respond to conflicts which will save lives, improve conditions for the most vulnerable and make humanitarian responses by the UK and US more effective.

The Challenge fund will give grants of up to £150,000 for innovative technology projects to get started and a further £600,000 so that successful projects can grow even bigger.

The £11million fund will be administered by Grand Challenges Canada and is equally funded by DFID and USAID, with each organisation providing £5.5million.

The event followed a strategic dialogue between Ms Mordaunt and Mr Green where they discussed how to work together to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse in the global aid sector and the action the UK has already taken; how best to boost economic development and help the poorest countries stand on their own two feet, and how to boost security at home and abroad.

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## [News story: Nigel Halkes Reappointed as Deputy Chair of VisitEngland](#)

Prior to his appointment as Deputy Chair of the VisitEngland Advisory Board, Nigel has served a four year term as a Board Member of VisitEngland during a time of major change for the organisation. Nigel has made a significant contribution to VisitEngland, including the establishment of the Discover England Fund and the outsourcing of the Quality Assurance Schemes to the AA. He has also served on the Audit Committee of the British Tourism Authority.

Nigel is an experienced Non-Executive Director with a portfolio spanning the public, private and charitable sectors. He sits on two PLC board and is a Trustee of the EY Foundation and the Polka Theatre for Children. Nigel was formerly the Managing Partner Markets for EY in the UK & Ireland, responsible for major clients, including hospitality and leisure businesses.

The role is not remunerated. This appointment has been made in accordance

with the Cabinet Office's Governance Code on Public Appointments. The appointments process is regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Under the Code, any significant political activity undertaken by an appointee in the last five years must be declared. This is defined as including holding office, public speaking, making a recordable donation, or candidature for election. Nigel has declared no such political activity.

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## Speech: Chef Moha shows the way

Last Wednesday, I was in Asni, a small village in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains at one of the Education for All dormitories. Those of you who have read my blogs before will know about EFA, but for those who have not, a quick explanation.

In many rural communities, girls stop going to school at the age of 12, as secondary schools frequently have 'gaps' in their daily timetable (so a pupil may have classes from – for example – 0830 – 1000, but then no classes until 1300). Whilst it may be OK for a boy to roam the streets whilst they are not in classes during those 'gaps' it is less socially acceptable for a girl to do so. This results in many girls not going to school. EFA is tackling this problem by building dormitories for the girls near to their schools. The dormitories are run by house mothers who make sure that the girls get well-fed, schooled and looked after.

But life is hard for the girls. When the first EFA dormitory was established 10 years ago, it was hard to persuade families to allow their girls to go. Now demand far exceeds supply as the benefits of education all the way up to the age of 18 become increasingly clear (83% of EFA girls go on to university – a strikingly high figure!) so EFA have had to apply very strict criteria to their intakes. Only the girls from the poorest families in the poorest villages are admitted to the dormitories.

Two months ago, I was sitting in Chef Moha's restaurant in Marrakesh chatting to him about another project, when it occurred to me that if he were to offer a cooking Master Class for the girls, it would be a ray of light in their lives. Chef Moha did not even hesitate. "Yes. When?" was his immediate reply.

Fast forward to last Wednesday.

I stayed in the Kasbah Toubkal on the Tuesday evening, a fabulous hotel which is beautiful at the best of times. But in the snow, it takes on a magical aura. You feel as if you are cut off from the rest of the world, perched on an outcrop at the end of the valley. To the right, higher up into the Atlas, the shoulders of Toubkal himself jut up into the sky, white-clothed and robed in snow, he is a wonderful mountain – I look forward to climbing him soon. To the left, the valley has a wonderful Spartan feeling – like something out of Ten Years in Tibet. The air is pure and clean and the night skies something

else. If you haven't yet been: go!

On the Wednesday morning, we drove down to Asni, arriving before the lorry bringing the provisions, tables, cookers and plates. Chef Moha rang to say he was en route. Though the dormitory was sleepy, you could sense the anticipation rising. The lorry arrived and the girls, Embassy team and Dar Moha employees formed a line, like ants scurrying back and forth from the entrance to the kitchen. Soon the kitchen was full to overflowing and still the provisions rolled in.

A cheer went up: Chef Moha had arrived. The Dormitory filled like the tide coming in – imperceptibly until you looked and the room was full to bursting. The tables were laid out – 10 girls had been chosen as the Master Class pupils. I was chef Moha's sous-chef. The girls were so excited, it was absolutely wonderful.

I was very nervous. Although I bake bread and croissants and enjoy cooking, I would not call myself a chef. Cooking with such a luminary was very scary!

But Chef Moha made light of it all. Barking out instructions. Laughing and joking with the girls. Twirling ingredients and dropping dollops of magic onto the food. Before I had a chance to really take it all in, the food was cooked and ready.

Food for 150 girls and a dozen or more hangers-on appeared. Tables were laid. Plates and glasses brought. Food was served. It was all so slick and beautifully done, that I didn't really even notice how it was done. The girls and guests sat down to the most wonderful food.

But it was not the food that I will take away – delicious though it was. There were two other things which had a bigger impact on me. Chef Moha gave us a lesson in much more than cookery. He is a mega-star in Morocco. Everyone I speak to has heard of him. Yet never, not for one second, did he exude any of the prima-donna type behaviour we have come to expect from mega-stars. He was modest, down-to-earth. Humble. He took selfies with the girls. Put up with my mindless banter with great good humour. He laughed, joked and set the whole dormitory on fire with happiness. That is real leadership. He is a true Ambassador for Morocco. A person to be proud to know and be humbled by his selfless generosity.

And the other thing was the happiness of the girls. I have never seen 150 people look so utterly blissed-out happy for such an extended period of time. They loved it. When they burst into a spontaneous song of thanks to the Chef, it brought tears to my eyes – literally. It was such a simple thing to do, but it brought so much pleasure and enjoyment to so many people who don't have many joys in their lives: they brushed shoulders with a mega-star and he embraced them with his warmth. It was glorious and it reminded me of how much in our daily lives we take for granted.

And that brings me back to EFA. Many of us take universal education for granted: we should not. We should remember how lucky we are.

What could possibly be more important than ensuring that girls get a decent education up to the age of 18? Giving them that enables them to realise their own potential. Failing to do so risks locking them into a cycle of poverty, early marriage and lost potential, potentially robbing a country of the economic potential of 50% of its population.

EFA offers girls a route out of that cycle. The lives of the girls at EFA have been and will be transformed by the power of education. EFA offers them and their communities an exciting, new and different future, releasing their potential for the benefit of Morocco. That is why I am proud to support EFA and why I was so happy to have been able to bring a little bit of joy and happiness into the hard lives of 150 young people yesterday.

The British Embassy is proud of its ongoing association with EFA. We will be entering a team into the Marrakesh Atlas Etape on 22 April which is raising funds for EFA. More details are at: <https://www.marrakech-atlas-etape.com/>. We look forward to seeing you on the course!

More generally, helping girls to continue their education is essential for Morocco's economic development, so if you have ideas about how we can help, please get in touch and let us know!