

National Audit Office report on UK ODA spending shows government's approach to aid budget is failing – Preet Gill

Responding to today's National Audit Office report on UK ODA spending, Labour's Shadow Minister for International Development, Preet Gill, said:

"It is clear that the government's approach of spending huge chunks of the aid budget through departments other than DFID is failing.

"The government needs to urgently step up transparency across all departments to ensure every penny of our aid works towards eradicating poverty overseas.

"Rather than using it to plug gaps in other departmental budgets, Labour will put a freeze on the proportion of aid spent by departments other than DFID."

Ministers wilfully disregarded evidence Saudi Arabia was violating international humanitarian law – Emily Thornberry

Emily Thornberry MP, Labour's Shadow Foreign Secretary, responding to the judgement by the court of appeal that British arms sales to Saudi Arabia are unlawful, said:

"This devastating judgement proves everything Labour has been saying for years: that Ministers have wilfully disregarded the evidence that

Saudi Arabia was violating international humanitarian law in Yemen, while nevertheless continuing to supply them with weapons.

“What we now need is a full parliamentary or public inquiry to find out how that was allowed to happen, and which Ministers were responsible for those breaches of the law. This also shows beyond doubt why we need the root-and-branch reform of our arms export rules that Labour has promised, so these decisions are never again made by Ministers in such a careless, reckless and arbitrary way.

“And immediately, the government must suspend all arms sales for use in the conflict in Yemen until there has been a full and independent, UN-led investigation into all breaches of international law.”

New tax gap figure

John McDonnell MP, Labour’s Shadow Chancellor, commenting on HMRC figures showing that the 2017/18 tax gap was £35 billion, said:

“The tax gap is another reminder of the scale of tax evasion in this country under a Tory Government – and it is likely to be an underestimate since it does not capture much tax avoidance or profit-shifting.

“But the gap is also the product of the Government’s savage cuts to HMRC, which have deskilled and undermined a key part of the civil service.

“A Labour Government will be uncompromising in tackling tax avoidance and evasion, and will implement a comprehensive policy programme to achieve this aim.”

Ends

Notes to Editors

- HMRC has today released figures estimating that the tax gap – “the difference between the amount of tax that should, in theory, be paid to HMRC, and what is actually paid” – is £35 billion. HMRC accepts that the tax gap is a product of miscalculations, as well as “legal interpretation, evasion, avoidance and criminal attacks”. This amounts to 5.6% of total theoretical tax liabilities, an increase of 0.1% from the last figure released in 2016-2017. See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810119/Measuring_tax_gaps_2019_edition.pdf.
- Labour’s Tax Transparency and Enforcement Programme (2017) is available here: <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Tax-transparency-programme.pdf>. This includes a General Anti-Avoidance Rule and a suite of other measures to tackle avoidance and evasion.
- HMRC had 104,000 staff in 2006, and had approximately 60,000 by 2019 (figures from the Public and Commercial Services Union). It is estimated by PCS that 17,000 years of experience were lost to HMRC from redundancies in 2017.
- Labour’s 2017 manifesto committing to giving HMRC “the resources and skills necessary to clamp down hard on those unscrupulous few individuals and companies who seek to avoid the responsibilities that the rest of us meet”: <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/labour-manifesto-2017.pdf>.
- Labour also costed the hiring of “more tax collection staff”: <http://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Funding-Britains-Future.pdf>

Mohammed Morsi's death should be subject to a transparent and open investigation – Fabian Hamilton

Fabian Hamilton MP, Labour’s Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, commenting on the death of former Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, said:

“Mohammed Morsi’s death should be subject to a transparent and open investigation.

"Anybody found responsible for the death of a previously elected head of state must be held accountable and brought to justice. It is unacceptable that the British government and the Foreign Secretary haven't pressed the Egyptian authorities to fully investigate his death. Meanwhile, successive Conservative governments continue to welcome President Sisi with open arms, despite his extremely poor human rights record. Tens of thousands of political prisoners continue to languish in Egyptian prisons, often in appalling conditions.

"Labour urges the Foreign Secretary to call upon the Egyptian government to work closely with the United Nations establishing the circumstances surrounding Morsi's sudden and unexpected death."

Government must get its house in order on climate change – Rebecca Long-Bailey MP

Rebecca Long-Bailey MP, Labour's shadow business secretary, responding to news that the UK and Italian governments are presenting a proposal to jointly assume the Presidency of the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, said:

"While Labour welcomes efforts to bring the climate conference to the UK, the government should start by getting its own house in order.

"The government must acknowledge just how disastrous Conservative policies have been for renewable energy in the UK, and take the steps needed to get the UK back on track to meeting its own climate targets."