

Tigray and the Ethiopian Civil War

In the midst of a humanitarian crisis in Tigray, we urgently need to provide as much support as we possibly can. But thanks to the Government's aid cut, **we are fighting with one arm tied behind our back.**

The ongoing civil war in Ethiopia, primarily between Ethiopian government forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands; the internal displacement of at least 4 million; and at least 9 million in need of desperate help.

The UK used to be a world leader on giving humanitarian assistance and aid to countries who needed it

In the last year, tens of thousands of civilians have died as result of airstrikes, massacres and man-made famine. We are also troubled by reports of ethnic targeting and the establishment of concentration camps.

The publication of the Joint Investigation by the UN Human Rights Office and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, which found that "there are reasonable grounds to believe that all parties to the conflict in Tigray have, to varying degrees, committed violations of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity."

The Liberal Democrats also share serious concern with the potential danger of ethnic violence spreading to and including areas of Sudan and Eritrea.

The UK used to be a world leader on giving humanitarian assistance and aid to countries who needed it, like Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen. The Government has now turned their back on the world's poorest, by cutting international development spending from 0.7% of Gross National Income to 0.5%.

Tens of thousands of civilians have died as result of airstrikes, massacres and man-made famine.

It's time for the Conservative Government to abandon the cruel and misguided decision to cut the international development budget.

The UK's influence in the Horn of Africa, and therefore our ability as an actor making the case for a diplomatic solution, has been hampered by the Government's decision to abandon the international development spending target.

In new policy passed by members today, Liberal Democrats are calling for:

- Restoration of the 0.7% of GNI target for international development

spending – including support for humanitarian relief, via independent agencies, and support for Ethiopian and Tigrayan refugees.

- Prioritisation of the eradication of sexual violence in conflict.
- Working with permanent members of the UN Security Council, and other international partners such as the African Union to:
 - push for negotiations to reach a sustainable peace
 - secure humanitarian access
 - Investigate human rights abuses and war crimes
- Using Magnitsky sanctions against those who are perpetrating violence or preventing humanitarian aid from getting to those who need it.
- Work closely with neighbouring countries in an effort to prevent spill over of ethnic violence to the wider region.

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The Government urgently needs to step up their diplomatic response to this disastrous conflict by increasing aid spending for humanitarian relief, engaging with international and regional partners such as the African Union, and working with all parties to pursue a ceasefire.

We have a moral responsibility to stand up for the fundamental liberal principles of equality, human rights, peace, democracy and the rule of international law.

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Author:

[Sewage dumping stinks](#)

England's rivers and lakes are in a terrible condition due to sewage discharges.

Water companies are responsible for this mess, not consumers.

Water companies discharged raw sewage into our rivers and lakes 400,000 times in 2020. That's the equivalent of 3 million hours of discharges.

This is particularly worrying given the increases in the use of our waterways by wild swimmers, paddle-boarders, kayakers and canoeists.

Just 14% of UK rivers are in a good state, and more than half of England's rivers failed to pass cleanliness tests.

The Conservatives have failed to tackle the sewage problem; they **watered down proposals to reduce sewage discharges in the Environment Bill**. While this

Government eventually caved to pressure and amended the Environment Act to do something about sewage discharges, it was nowhere near enough.

Water companies discharged raw sewage into our rivers and lakes 400,000 times in 2020.

The Government's proposals have no meaningful targets or timescales for reducing sewage discharges by water companies and sets no duties on water companies to clean up the mess they've already made.

Water companies are responsible for this mess, not consumers. Bill payers should not be paying to clean up the mess.

In our new policy voted for by members today, Liberal Democrats are calling for:

- a Sewage Tax to force water companies to contribute from their massive profits to cleaning up the damage caused by sewage discharges.
- reducing the number of licences the Environment Agency gives to water companies permitting them to discharge raw sewage into waterways.
- setting meaningful targets and deadlines for water companies to end sewage discharges into waterways.
- adding local environmental groups onto water companies boards, to support water companies in their duties to protect and enhance the environment.
- The promotion of a "public benefit company" model for water companies, so that particular economic and environmental policy objectives are also considered when running the company rather than just a return for shareholders.

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In 2020, water companies made £2 billion in profit – a Sewage Tax would have raised £340 million to help clean up our rivers.

Water companies would be prevented from passing the cost of the Sewage Tax onto consumers by Ofwat.

The Conservatives have allowed water companies to pollute our waterways with raw sewage for far too long. It's time to stop them.

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Author:

Rebuilding Trade & Cooperation with Europe

At this dark moment, our security depends on urgently forging a relationship that works with our closest neighbours. Countering the grave threat posed by Putin means we must stand tall with our European allies instead of needlessly antagonising them, while working closely together on issues like energy security, trade and helping Ukrainian refugees.

The Conservatives are simply incapable of making the choices that will improve people's lives.

We cannot afford to be disunited in the face of Russian aggression. For too long, our ties with Europe have been defined by petty squabbling and the government's overly ideological approach. British people and small businesses who are tangled in red tape are paying the price and they deserve better.

It's time for a different approach. **The Conservatives' dogmatic approach has damaged our standing on the world stage, our relationships with our closest neighbours, and our economy.**

The Conservatives are simply incapable of making the choices that will improve people's lives.

Liberal Democrats want a way forward which works for Britain – that cuts down red tape, reduces costs for businesses and makes people better off as a result.

Europe represents our closest neighbour and our largest trading partner.

British people and small businesses who are tangled in red tape are paying the price and they deserve better.

The blunt reality is that fine-tuning and tinkering on the edges of our trading relationship with Europe will not be enough. It will not provide the stability which will boost the British economy.

Today Liberal Democrat members have endorsed a four stage roadmap to establish the UK's future trading relationship with Europe, benefitting British businesses and families. It starts by acknowledging that ties between the UK and Europe have been deeply damaged by years of haggling and will have to be forged in a new way gradually over time.

The four-stage plan is as follows:

- Taking immediate action to improve links with our European neighbours,

including building closer ties in education by reforming the government's Turing scheme.

- Further steps to build confidence and establish stronger relationships with Europe, including seeking cooperation agreements with EU agencies, returning to Erasmus Plus and seeking to reach a UK-EU agreement on asylum seekers.
- Deepening trade with Europe, including by negotiating greater access for our world-leading UK food and animal products to the Single Market, securing deals on sector-specific work visas and establishing mutual recognition of professional qualifications.
- Once the trading relationship between the UK and the EU is deepened, and the ties of trust and friendship are renewed, aim to place the UK-EU relationship on a more formal and stable footing by seeking to join the Single Market.

[Read the full motion](#)

Liberal Democrats are the UK's most pro-European political party.

We believe **Britain's best future is at the heart of Europe** – and our long-term ambition is to see the UK in that place once more.

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Author:

[Catching Up on Our Children's Education](#)

Teachers have been off for over 267,000 days due to Covid since the return of school in September, meaning children have lost out on the equivalent of 1.5 million teaching hours in just this school year.

They have suffered enormous disruption to their education and spent months isolated from their peers.

Most children in the UK have lost half a year of schooling, 5% of their entire time in school, which we know has exacerbated educational inequalities and had a devastating impact on mental health.

The pandemic has put a huge strain on children and young people's mental health. They have suffered enormous disruption to their education and spent months isolated from their peers. With 1 in 6 children now suffering from a mental health condition, providing catch-up funding is an important way to take this pressure off children.

There are also huge impacts for the economy – children could lose earnings of up to £46,000 each over their lifetimes.

Concerns over their children falling behind as a result of the pandemic is one of the top concerns of parents as we begin to emerge from the pandemic. The Conservatives have let down parents and children by failing to invest in catch-up classes to make up for lost learning throughout the pandemic.

Children in the UK have lost half a year of schooling, 5% of their entire time in school, which we know has exacerbated educational inequalities.

This Government lost £16bn of taxpayers' money due to fraud and error in Covid loan schemes. Yet **they only committed £4.9 billion to our children's catch-up**. Not even one third of the £15 billion recommended by the Government's former Education Recovery Commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins.

Part of the reason we've seen the disadvantage gap grow during Covid is that many children from less-disadvantaged families are already getting extra tutoring or classes outside of school. As we recover from the pandemic, it is right that closing the disadvantage gap is a top priority for the Liberal Democrats.

In our new policy passed by members today, we are calling for:

- the Government to immediately commit the full £15 billion to catch-up funding for children, in line with the recommendations from the Government's former Education Recovery Commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins.
- the Government to distribute £5 billion of this funding to Catch-Up Vouchers worth £200 a year for 3 years, given directly to parents for all 8.3 million children in state-funded schools.
- £400 a year of vouchers for disadvantaged children eligible for the Pupil Premium or those with special educational needs.
- £600 a year of vouchers for pupils with special educational needs who are also eligible for free school meals, and looked-after or previously looked-after children.

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This policy puts money directly into parents' and carers' hands to spend on whatever their children need most: tutoring in reading, writing or maths; music lessons; swimming classes or other physical education. And the 2 million most disadvantaged children would get double vouchers, so they can get the extra catch-up education they need.

For looked-after children, the vouchers would go to their foster parents or to the local authority, with a duty to spend them in the child's best interests. And those children would get triple vouchers, so they get the extra catch-up provision they need.

Our Catch-Up Vouchers could make an enormous difference to millions of

children. We know it's vital to make sure all children get the catch-up support they need – **they deserve the best chance for a bright future.**

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[Action to Improve Air Quality](#)

Air pollution is to blame for nearly 40,000 deaths each year in the UK.

Everyone has the right to clean air, but it's a right many people in the UK are unable to realise. The Conservatives have repeatedly failed to take meaningful action to address this killer.

1 in 4 pupils attend schools in areas over air pollution limits.

Our national limits for nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter are set at **four times the level of the World Health Organisation guidelines.** 1 in 4 pupils attend schools in areas over air pollution limits. And the UK has broken air pollution limits for a decade, **costing the NHS billions to treat people affected.**

We need to ensure that the right to clean air is one which people can realise.

That's why today Liberal Democrat members have passed a new policy calling for:

- The implementation or extension of **Clean Air Zones**, like that in my local authority of Bath, which was the first in the UK outside London.
- The introduction of legally binding **national limits for particulate matter and other pollutants** at or below current WHO guidelines.
- Funding to support buses, taxis and private hire vehicles to **switch to clean fuels.**
- Increased funding to local authorities to tackle air pollution.
- Empowering local authorities to:
 - Install more pollution sensors near major roads and at every urban school.
 - Publicise local air quality issues including publishing live pollution levels from their pollution sensors.

[Read the full motion](#)

Reducing air pollution is vital for the health of everyone in the UK,

particularly children.

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