Foreign Secretary statement on International Development: 19 March

19.3.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

The Foreign Secretary made a statement to Parliament on the Government's revised approach to international development and Official Development Assistance (ODA) allocations.

Thank you Madame Deputy Speaker.

Alongside the Written Ministerial Statement published this morning, I want to update the House on the Government's revised approach to international development and Official Development Assistance allocations.

Madame Deputy Speaker, national security is the first duty of government and this country faces the most serious security situation for a generation.

For too long under previous governments our defence investment was cut back.

And so last year this Government took the necessary decision to deliver the biggest increase in defence spending since the Cold War.

A decision whose importance has been demonstrated again in recent weeks as UK jets fly defensive operations in the Middle East, while our Carrier Strike group has been preparing to head to the High North.

In order to fund the additional defence spending, we also had to take the hugely difficult decision to reduce our development budget over the next few years.

Moving to the equivalent of 0.3% of Gross National Income (GNI) by 2027.

And that was set out by the Treasury in the Spending Review last year.

Allies such as Germany, France and Sweden have made similar choices.

And this for us is not an ideological step. It is a difficult choice in the face of international threats.

And the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have confirmed it is our intention to return to 0.7% when the fiscal circumstances allow.

Our country has a strong, long history leading international development across the world.

And let me be clear, our commitment to international development remains a central part of our foreign policy – a reflection of both our values and our national interest.

It is a fundamental part of our moral purpose to stand up against global disease and hunger and to support those trapped in crises caused by conflict or climate change.

We also know that preventing conflict, instability and crisis, displacement and migration, supporting security, economic development, growth and trade, and building global partnerships are all the right things to do.

But they are also directly in the UK national interest.

Because as we have seen all too clearly in recent years, instabilities and crises across the world have a direct impact on us here at home.

So we have looked hard at what we prioritise and how we work.

Using the challenge of a reduced budget to find solutions that increase impact.

Focusing on what secures best value for money for taxpayers which reflects UK values and the UK national interest,

And what will seize new opportunities to bring real change for people's lives.

So, first, we will prioritise support for countries and communities facing the worst humanitarian need – those affected by war and crises - committing £1.4bn a year to tackle human suffering in some of the worst humanitarian crises.

70% of all geographic support will be allocated to the most fragile and conflict-affected states.

That includes fully protecting funds for Ukraine where people were left in freezing conditions this winter.

For Palestine where civilians continue to suffer immensely in Gaza.

For Sudan – the worst humanitarian crisis of the twenty-first century.

And in the light of the current crisis in the Middle East, I have taken the decision this week to add Lebanon to the countries whose funding will be fully protected next year.

That does mean that direct bilateral aid funding for other countries will be reduced.

We've taking the decision to withdraw from traditional bilateral funding for G20 countries.

Countries like Yemen, Somalia and Afghanistan will remain humanitarian priorities. They will see direct grant reductions although we will continue to support multilateral programmes which operate in those countries too.

Countries like Pakistan and Mozambique will remain development priorities but their direct grant funding will be significantly reduced and instead we will run partnerships for investment.

Including growth funding through British International Investment and investment to tackle climate change, or leveraging direct UK expertise to help them improve capabilities and raise funds directly themselves.

Secondly, we will focus on areas that maximise impact, transform lives and build stability, creating jobs and economic opportunities as the path out of poverty.

And saving lives and improving health through backing proven global partnerships where the UK has strong engagement and expertise.

For example, our partnership with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance where we're investing over £1.2bn, and which will save the lives of millions of children around the world.

And investing £850m in the Global Fund which is expected to save up to 1.3 million lives, averting up to 22 million new cases of HIV, TB and malaria.

And investing in climate action that protects people and prevents future crises.

Over the next three years the UK will aim to spend around £6bn of ODA as International Climate Finance – covering mitigation, adaptation and a focus on nature.

And using different instruments and levers we will aim to deliver an additional £6.7bn UK-backed climate and nature investments and to mobilise billions more in private finance.

And that includes measures to help countries to recover when disasters hit. For example, as risk insurance in Jamaica enabled rapid payouts following Hurricane Melissa.

Third, we will support women and girls, and we will invest in line with our values even where other countries have changed their development approach.

So I have taken the decision to make support for women and girls not just a priority for development but a central theme across the work of the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office.

That means work to prevent violence, to champion women's political and economic participation, and to keep children learning even during conflict.

So we will continue with support for things like help for survivors of horrific rape and sexual abuse - the kind of dedicated funding I announced recently in Sudan for women that have endured the most appalling and traumatic experiences.

And at least 90% of our bilateral ODA programmes will have a focus on women and girls by 2030.

And in an age of disinformation we will also increase our funding to the BBC World Service by £11m extra a year.

Fourth, we will support and help reform international institutions to unlock greater finance for development and the innovation that can go far beyond UK aid and traditional grants.

That means backing the most efficient and effective bits of the multilateral system to multiply our investment because

Multilateral Development Banks are the largest source of development and climate finance, able to lend to partner countries on the most affordable terms.

That includes the World Bank's International Development Association, where each pound we invest unlocks £4 of additional finance and where we have increased our contribution by 40%.

We are also working to double the amount of money the Multilateral Development Banks can provide, listening to our partners and backing Africa's institutions to raise far more money at scale.

Our £650m contribution to the African Development Fund will allow them to leverage up to £1.6bn in grants and concessional loans, including issuing bonds on the London Stock Exchange for the first time.

And we will use our shareholder role, our seat at the table to press for innovation and reform, increasing the voice and representation for low-income and vulnerable countries, and pursuing debt relief too.

Because the global financial system needs to deliver a fairer deal for developing countries and their citizens.

And because the UN must continue to play its indispensable role, but also to be more efficient, effective and coherent.

We will refocus on core priorities in line with the UN80 reform initiative.

Fifth, we are transforming how we work.

Responding to the clear need for partnership not paternalism.

My colleague the noble Baroness Chapman – the Development Minister – has set out a series of shifts in the way we work.

To be an investor, not just a donor.

Because our partners want to attract finance, not be dependent on aid.

Through British International Investment – our finance institution – driving growth and innovation, and unlocking private capital.

And that's why in Ethiopia earlier this year, I signed a joint agreement for energy transmission projects worth £300m, enabled by a British International Investment company that delivers UK investment across Africa.

The kind of modern partnership that also helps Ethiopians find work at home rather than considering dangerous international migration overseas.

Also reforms to strengthen systems rather than providing services, so countries can thrive better without aid.

For example, because our partners want to educate their children themselves rather than us trying to do it for them, helping support teacher training and curriculum design.

And we are moving from providing grants to providing expertise, drawing on the best of British know-how, mobilising UK strengths from inside and outside government.

From world-class universities, to specialists in the tech sector and the City of London, the Met Office and HMRC.

For example, in Ghana, tax expertise helped Ghana generate an additional £100m in revenue to invest in education, health and priorities.

And finally, backing local solutions rather than remote international approaches because organisations locally know their populations best and are closer to those in need.

Allocating a reduced budget inevitably leads to hard choices and unavoidable trade-offs.

So we're focusing aid on the people and places that need it most.

And we will still be a major player and expect to be the fifth biggest funder in the world.

And we will still use international leadership – such as our 2027 G20 Presidency – to shape the global agenda for development.

And we will continue to use our other policies and levers so that lower-income countries benefit from trade and growth.

And tackling flows of illicit finance and dirty money which harm developing countries most and fuel crime on everyone's streets.

Madame Deputy Speaker, this modernised approach to international development and our allocation of ODA reflects our values and our interests.

Because our driving force has been, and continues to be, working for a world free from extreme poverty on a liveable planet.

Clear that prosperity and stability in lower-income countries matter for outcomes here at home.

For the cost of living, for the security of our borders, for the resilience of our economy and upholding our UK values across the world.

And clear that the UK's sustained commitment to international development is about delivering both at home and abroad.

I commend this Statement to the House.

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