

## **Speech by International Development Secretary Priti Patel**

Your Royal Highness, ladies and gentlemen - good evening to you all.

We are here tonight because we recognise that landmines are a global scourge that must be tackled.

There are no boundaries as to who mines hurt and inflict suffering on...these are indiscriminate weapons of war that maim and kill, long after the fighting has stopped.

But ultimately, mines hurt the poorest hardest, in the very places where people are already marginalised and excluded.

Tonight we are saying, on behalf of the men, women and children around the world who live in places where they fear to tread, more must be done...and more will be done.

### **Destruction of opportunity and hope**

I have seen the efforts to tackle this threat first hand.

In Afghanistan more than 5 million people live with the risk of landmines,

And earlier this year I visited a Halo Trust Centre in Kabul where this great bastion of British expertise train local people, often husband and wife teams, to decontaminate land and educate communities about the risks of mines.

Words simply can't pay sufficient tribute to how meticulous, painstaking and amazingly brave they are in carrying out this inherently risky work.

And I was deeply moved to meet these men and women, from communities that have been devastated by decades of war.

Even now the fighting has stopped, the land around them remains a deathtrap; parents live in constant terror for their children.

They dread their child being killed or suffering a life-changing injury. Because of course in these very poor communities people who are disabled or psychologically harmed by landmines simply can't access the kind of support they need to even contemplate what their future might hold.

In the end it's not just the fatalities and the terrible, immobilising injuries landmines cause – it's the destruction of opportunity and hope, that has scarred so many families.

### **The legacy of Diana, Princess of Wales**

But it doesn't have to be like this – Global Britain has a historic role in tackling the indiscriminate and lethal legacy of landmines.

That role was, of course, embodied by the efforts of His Royal Highness' late Mother, Diana, Princess of Wales.

Twenty years ago she brought landmines to the world's attention with her courageous walk through an Angolan mine field. And in direct response the world came together to sign the Mine Ban Treaty – now one of the world's most widely accepted treaties - 162 countries have joined it.

The UK was one of the founding signatories to this treaty and since then we have become one of the world's leading donors on mine action.

In the last three years alone, the UK – working through partners like Halo and the Mines Advisory Group - cleared land from mines equivalent to over 4,500 football pitches.

It is fair to say that these achievements would not have happened without the late Princess' global advocacy on this highly neglected issue.

### **Another landmine emergency**

But twenty years on from the historic Ottawa Treaty the world faces another landmine emergency. Landmines are once again being used as a weapon of war in places such as Syria and Yemen.

In 2015 alone almost 5,000 people were injured and over 1,600 people were killed by landmines and other explosive devices left behind by conflict – including hundreds of children.

This is more casualties than we have seen for a decade.

A large part of this is down to Daesh who are cynically using mines to directly target civilians, especially those who want to return home after fleeing the conflict and Daesh's regime.

We cannot and will not accept this.

We have a moral duty to act - and it is in our national interest to act.

Britain is committed to shining a light once again on the human side of the damages these devices bring,

And to giving a voice and hope to those wounded and physically and mentally broken by conflict and mines.

So this evening I can announce that the UK will triple our funding for mine action over the next three years, taking our total spend to £100 million over the next three years.

This will allow us to clear 150 square kilometres of contaminated land.

We will work in countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan and Cambodia – helping to deliver real and lasting peace and stability in these places.

And by doing so we will honour the work of those who have come before us and provide hope to future generations.

It is for causes like this that we have made our commitment to the overseas aid budget.

This is one of the many ways that UK aid can, and is, making the world safer, healthier and more prosperous for us all.

It is my sincere hope that by working together we can once again focus the world on this vital, but still under reported and under invested in issue.

I am in no doubt that where Britain leads, others should follow.

Through the enduring support of UK aid, we will bring hope to so many places where there has been despair.

And ensure that millions more people can go about their lives, no longer fearing to tread.

Thank you.