



## Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

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The Executive Director,  
The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and  
Child Health  
Helga Fogstad  
20, avenue Appia  
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Switzerland

9th December, 2020

### ***PMNCH Call to Action - Protecting the Progress for Women, Children and Adolescents during COVID-19***

Dear Ms. Fogstad,

On behalf of the UK government, I commit that the UK will step up to the challenge of protecting the health and rights of women, children and adolescents in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 is a crisis of almost unprecedented complexity and scale. It knows no borders and has changed the lives of everyone in ways we never imagined possible.

I welcome the attention this summit is giving to the needs of women, children and adolescents around the world – they will be the hardest hit. As we all link our ‘virtual hands’ to profile their needs, I assure you that the UK will keep the needs of women, babies, and children front and centre in all that we do.

We risk a reversal of decades of progress, not just in health but also in women’s rights and empowerment. I do not ever forget that behind each number is a woman, a baby, a child, an adolescent.

The UK Government has made a commitment to end the preventable deaths of mothers, newborns and children by 2030. This commitment is even more important in the COVID-19 era.

Like the PMNCH Call to Action, this commitment requires the creation of strong health systems, safe water, good sanitation and hygiene as well as nutrition. At its heart is the realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights, an area we champion boldly. Our commitment is backed by our track record of action: the UK spent an average of £1 billion per year on reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health between 2013 and 2017.

We have committed up to £1.3 billion of new funding to tackle the health, humanitarian, and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. The Prime Minister has made it clear that equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines is essential and we have committed up to £500 million for COVAX, which will provide up to 500 million people with vaccinations in 92 countries.

The day of the Lives in the Balance Summit was the eve of Universal Health Coverage day. The survival of women, babies, and children depends on health systems that are affordable, good quality, and accessible by all.

The UK supports programmes across over 40 countries that strengthen health systems to drive Universal Health Coverage. Our programmes have adapted their support to the COVID-19 realities in each country.

One example is our regional Women's Integrated Sexual Health programme, working in 27 countries and targeting services to those most at risk of being left behind. For example, by using mobile phones and operating fee waiver schemes for the poorest.

We support many of the world's leading health agencies, such as the World Health Organization, the Global Financing Facility, UNFPA and UNICEF. All have adapted to COVID-19 – giving more technical assistance to governments, addressing frontline financing gaps, supporting reproductive health supply chains, tackling increased gender-based violence and violence against children.

Female genital mutilation rates are also rising and the UN Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation, which we support, has helped mitigate the increased risks from school closures and lockdowns.


The Call to Action highlights the protection and promotion of sexual and reproductive rights – we are proud champions of this in its most comprehensive form. We do not shy away from the more sensitive issues like access to safe abortion and support grassroots organisation such as the Robert Carr Fund to work with marginalised groups.

The wellbeing of the world's women, children and adolescent requires support beyond health programmes.

Firstly, nutrition. Our new partnership with UNICEF will improve the management of acute malnutrition and we continue to work with the Government of Japan to help deliver a successful Nutrition for Growth Summit in 2021 to help mitigate the longer-term impacts of COVID-19.

Secondly, water, sanitation, and hygiene. I am delighted this is part of the Call to Action. At a minimum, clean water and sanitation should be present in every health facility around the world. We partnered with Unilever on the £100 million Hygiene and Behaviour Change Coalition in 37 countries.

In conclusion, the UK is proud to be your partner. We are responding to PMNCH's Call for Action – as I hope I demonstrated during the Summit. All of us, as members of the PMNCH have a vital role to play in reaching the needs of women, children and adolescents. I affirm the UK's commitment and I look forward to continuing our partnership.

*Yours sincerely*  


**Wendy Morton MP**  
**Minister for the European Neighbourhood and the Americas**