

Opening statement by Gareth Thomas of the UK for the Yemen Consultative Group meeting, 15th November Lancaster House

Your Excellency, President Saleh,
Ministers from the Government of Yemen
Ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council
Heads of Delegation
Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome to Lancaster House.

The UK was delighted to accept the offer to host this meeting and we were deeply honoured that HE President Saleh decided to lead the Government of Yemen delegation.

I would like to start by congratulating HE for his recent election victory which was a milestone in Yemen's democratic development.

I was fortunate to have visited Yemen only last week and was struck by the sense of optimism following the elections.

The elections have clearly stimulated a heightened level of debate about Yemen's future and the challenges it is facing.

Your Excellency, your leadership and open participation in the debate during your campaign must be commended.

I sincerely hope that this meeting will be remembered as the moment when the Government of Yemen

and the donor community came together to pledge their commitment to achieve a more prosperous and secure future for the people of Yemen.

Over the next two days we will hear about the scale of the challenges Yemen is facing:

unemployment, rapid population growth, impending water shortages and uncertain future revenues from oil.

The Government will also outline its vision, plans and reform efforts to address these challenges.

There is clearly an opportunity for a strong partnership between determined Yemeni leadership and steadfast international support to take on these challenges together.

This meeting is particularly important as it has brought together the Gulf States with other donors.

This has been a valuable opportunity for us all to work together.

It is in short a valuable opportunity for us all to work together.

We are all grateful to His Excellency the Secretary General of the GCC for the personal leadership he has shown to make this meeting a success.

The issue of reform in Yemen is one area where everyone recognises the need for change.

The Government of Yemen has prepared its National Reform Agenda and several significant steps have been taken over the last six months to put it into practice.

Both the donors from the Gulf States and the OECD donors are keen to see progress on the governance reforms.

Successful implementation of these reforms along with the prepared plans for Poverty Reduction and

Investment should lead to more economic growth and prosperity for the poor as well as better access to jobs, education, health and justice.

I also expect that throughout these improvements we will see an improvement in the place of women in Yemeni society,

with enhanced opportunities to receive education, healthcare, employment and participate in political life.

The UK Department for International Development,

on behalf of Her Majesty's Government of the United Kingdom,

stands ready to support the Government of Yemen and its people to achieve the goals of poverty reduction and enhanced stability.

In 2005 the G7 countries made a commitment to substantially increase aid to address poverty in the poorest countries.

As such I am happy to announce that the UK is planning to significantly enhance its programme of assistance to Yemen from £12m in 2007 to £50m a year by 2010.

This will mean an overall indicative programme of £117m, or roughly \$225m, during the lifespan of the Public Investment Programme.

This is in direct response to the level of poverty in Yemen and our confidence in the Government's commitment to poverty reduction,

making improvements in governance and fighting corruption.

I am also pleased to announce that the UK will enter into the necessary discussions **to agree a ten year partnership with the Government of Yemen.**

This is a signal of the UK's willingness to remain engaged in Yemen in the long term and improve the predictability of our aid flows.

Your Excellency, I would like to commend some key members of your cabinet who have demonstrated a strong commitment to poverty reduction and reform and have been close partners with my team;

HE Mr Al ArrHabi, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation who has provided strong and constant leadership on the Development Plan and National Reform Agenda;

HE Dr Al Kirby, Minister of Foreign Affairs who has done much to raise Yemen's profile with the international community and particularly among the Gulf states;

HE Dr Al Jowfy, Minister of Education who has demonstrated excellent leadership in the education sector and across the Government in terms of how to maximise public and donor funds.

HE Al Agberry, Minister of Justice who has presented his plans for justice reforms, I know my team is working with closely to provide the necessary technical support for the Government to achieve this

HE Dr Al Assaly, Minister of Finance who is leading efforts to make essential improvements in the management of Yemen's public finances

And finally HE Al Sowfy, Minister of Civil Service

Whose efforts to reform the Yemeni Civil Service I heard about last week

I know you also have other Ministers who are highly committed to improving Yemen and

I look forward to meeting them during the course of this meeting.

To conclude, I hope this meeting will be remembered for years to come as the turning point in Yemen's development and the beginning of sustained improvements in the lives of the people of Yemen.