# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **St David’s Day Ministerial Overseas Visits** |
| **DATE**  | **07 March 2024** |
| **BY** | **First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS**  |

The Minister for Health and Social Services, the Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip and I recently undertook overseas visits to India, Ireland and Belgium respectively. We had a series of engagements to promote Wales as an outward looking nation and celebrate St. David’s Day with our international partners.

The Minister for Health and Social Services visited India. As part of her programme, the Minister launched the year of Wales in India 2024 at the St David’s Day reception in Mumbai and attended meetings and events across multiple sectors, including healthcare and global responsibility. The Minister held talks with Tata Steel to reiterate our support for the steel industry in Wales. The Minister also held a roundtable with med-tech companies.

A key focus for the Ministerial visit was progressive policies on LGBTQ+ rights and combatting gender-based violence. The week started by meeting LGBTQ+ community members, including Pride organisers, diplomats, equal marriage activists and India’s first openly gay prince, His Highness Manvendra Singh Gohil.

The Minister also visited the state of Kerala, signing an agreement alongside the Chief Minister of Kerala to strengthen relations between Wales and the Government of Kerala. This will see 250 healthcare professionals from India come to work in NHS Wales.

The Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip reaffirmed our commitment to the Ireland-Wales Shared Statement during a trip to Dublin to mark St David’s Day. The Minister met the Irish Government’s Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development, and officials from the Department of Social Protection, to discuss how relations between the Welsh and Irish governments will continue to be strengthened.

During the two-day visit to Dublin, the Minister attended several cultural and business events. This included a St David’s Day reception with partners from across government, industry, education and culture in Ireland, as well as the Welsh diaspora community.

The Minister met with the National Youth Council of Ireland and two of its Climate Youth Delegates, who are seeking to build a relationship with the Future Generations Commission in Wales. A meeting was held with senior executives from the leading clinical research organisation ICON, which has been investing in Wales and expanding its workforce.

The Minister also met the Assistant Secretary General with responsibility for Arts and Culture, and the lead researcher on the Irish Government’s Basic Income for the Arts pilot, to discuss the strengths and challenges of such schemes.

On 28 February, I was in Brussels to celebrate St David’s Day. This was an opportunity to highlight Wales as an outward-looking European nation and our ongoing engagement with our European partners.

I had the opportunity to speak about the importance of Wales’ place in Europe and international engagement at an event hosted by Forum Europe. I met with the Minister President of Flanders to discuss progress on the Memorandum of Understanding between Flanders and Wales.

An important roundtable discussion was held with European wind developers and manufacturers, hosted by WindEurope. This included representatives from Renewable UK Cymru and the Celtic Freeport. It was a chance to reiterate our commitment to our renewable energy targets, raise the profile of opportunities in Wales and engage directly with major European wind energy companies.

To promote the importance and commitment to collaboration in research and innovation, I attended an event hosted by Universities Wales. All universities in Wales were represented and it was the perfect time to affirm our commitment to the Horizon programme and promote collaboration with other EU regions.

During the evening, I hosted a reception to celebrate St David’s Day at the UK Ambassador’s Residence in Brussels. More than 250 guests were invited, and notable attendees included Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives to the EU. The evening allowed me to emphasise the importance of Wales’ European partners, not just in terms of trade and collaboration, but the shared values we hold.

On my return to the UK, I jointly hosted a St David’s Day and Wales in India launch event with the High Commissioner at the Indian High Commission in London. This was attended by representatives from business, education, research, culture and local communities, providing a chance to hear about our Wales in India programme and to understand and discuss the existing successful ties between Wales and India.

In addition to overseas travel by Welsh Ministers, events to mark St. David’s Day took place in the USA, Canada, China, Japan, the Middle East and Europe, led by the offices in our overseas network. A trade mission to Australia also provided an extra opportunity to mark St David’s Day. We supported Wales Week in London through a variety of events and delivered an international marketing campaign with a focus on our values and a celebration of Wales. The US Ambassador to the UK hosted a reception attended by the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales. The Swiss and Hungarian embassies also held receptions as part of Wales Week, as did the Canadian High Commission.