

Bill Gates urges UK to invest in science as Brexit looms

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US philanthropist Bill Gates, of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation speaks at the Grand Challenges Annual Meeting 2016 in central London on October 26, 2016

US billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates urged Britain on Wednesday to step up investment in science and research as it prepares to leave the EU.

"The world needs innovative leadership now more than ever," the

Microsoft co-founder told the Grand Challenges conference in London attended by more than 1,000 scientists from around the world.

"The complexity of our most urgent global problems—extreme poverty, the persistence and spread of disease, feeding a growing world—requires that we invest in science and put our best minds to work on finding solutions."

Gates pledged to continue his own investment in British research and innovation, despite economic uncertainties surrounding Brexit, but said government support was vital to fight global pandemics such as the Zika virus.

"As the UK seeks to negotiate its exit from the EU, it is critical that the government steps up its investments in science and innovation if we are to meet the challenges of tomorrow—and grow the UK's economy," he said.

His comments come amid fears that British science may suffer if projects lose European funding after Britain leaves the European Union.

Pledge to increase spending

The calls were met with a pledge by Britain's International Development Minister Priti Patel to increase spending on research into global challenges including infectious diseases, humanitarian crises, and climate change.

The £390 million-a-year (\$477 million, 437 million euro) research package over four years will also focus on migration and human trafficking.



Britain voted to leave the European Union on June 23

Addressing concerns about the impact of Brexit, Patel told the conference: "We are leaders when it comes to research and development... we will continue to be so".

Virgin founder Richard Branson, also speaking at the event, echoed the call for investment to drive innovation.

"British scientists, engineers and innovators have been responsible for some truly transformative developments in health and poverty alleviation over the years but these changes are not possible without sustained investment," he said.

Calling philanthropists, government and business to play their part, he added: "These investments benefit British businesses as well as the most

vulnerable people in the world."

Gates was also backing an \$18 million international funding programme to combat Zika and other mosquito-borne viruses in Colombia and Brazil.

The funding, from the governments of the United States, Britain, Brazil and Colombia, as well as the Wellcome Trust and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, will finance trials of an innovative mosquito control method using the Wolbachia bacteria.

Wolbachia is a naturally-occurring bacteria found in around 60 percent of insect species, but not the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito which carries dengue and Zika.

Research has shown the bacteria can prevent mosquitoes transmitting viruses to humans.

Trials will be carried out in urban areas of Rio de Janeiro and Antioquia, Colombia, with researchers hoping to demonstrate a significant reduction in new cases of Zika, dengue and chikungunya.

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