



British Broadcasting Corporation
Broadcasting House, London W1A 1AA

From the Chairman

Sarah Champion MP, Chair, International Development Committee
Dame Caroline Dinenage MP, Chair, Culture, Media & Sport Committee
Dame Emily Thornberry MP, Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons
Palace of Westminster
London SW1A 0AA

5 November 2025

Dear Ms Champion, Dame Caroline and Dame Emily,

May I start by thanking you for your recent letter and for your continued support for the BBC World Service. Trusted news is essential in times of global uncertainty and increasing disinformation and I welcome the opportunity to restate the value of the World Service as a vital national asset.

The BBC World Service reaches a weekly global audience of 313 million across 43 languages, and the BBC's total global news reach is 418 million people on average per week - the world's biggest news organisation. It is the most widely recognised British cultural export amongst all demographics and a cornerstone of the UK's global influence. The BBC World Service's journalism cuts through misinformation and disinformation, safeguards security and promotes British values.

However, even maintaining — let alone growing — that global influence is under threat.

The BBC World Service operates in a fiercely contested global media landscape. While trust in our journalism remains high, rival state-backed broadcasters are expanding their media investment. China and Russia are spending an estimated £6-8 billion on media activities and seeking to foment social unrest and use disinformation as a tool of war. In doing so, they are buying influence. Recent research demonstrates the media spend of states such as China can be linked to a rise in positive attitudes towards China by audiences across the world. It is vital that we counter the propaganda by states like China with accurate and impartial news.

The BBC also faces substantial financial pressures. Income from the licence fee has declined by 30% in real terms over the past decade, resulting in difficult decisions for both our UK services and the World Service, including the closure of Arabic and Persian radio services. As we have set out to your committees, where the BBC World Service has retreated, state-funded media operators invest and grow. Radio frequencies and TV slots we previously occupied have been taken over in Sub-Saharan Africa and MENA. For example, Russian media company Sputnik picked up the formerly BBC World Service FM frequency in Lebanon when BBC Arabic radio closed.

Despite these challenges, the ambition remains high. We have a clear long term plan for growth. However, the cost of remaining competitive in global markets continues to rise – due to increasing inflation, a requirement to invest heavily in digital technology to serve changing audience habits and the large spend of competitors.

We welcome the UK Government's increased contribution of £137 million to the World Service budget for 2025/26 — a 31% rise from the previous year — which has helped mitigate deeper cuts and allows us to maintain our global presence and impact. We are also acutely aware of the difficult decisions faced by the FCDO and HM Treasury, and are grateful for our ongoing constructive relationships. Their support will be essential in the months and years ahead.

We are currently in discussions with the FCDO following the summer 2025 Spending Review. While the outcome remains uncertain, we are requesting £165 million in 2026/27 and £168 million in 2027/28. Again, this investment would enable us to maintain our position in the market, and result in us reaching an estimated 480 million people globally by the end of 2027/28, with targeted activity in the regions of most importance. Our plan includes increased efficiency and a lower cost per user than today.

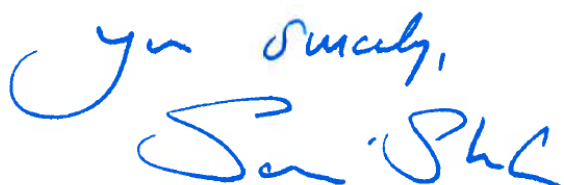
But we want to go further. The BBC can reach one in eight people in the world – a billion people – in ten years. With significantly more investment we can:

- strategically grow reach and influence across the world with targeted activity in global geopolitical hotspots
- use AI translation and tech to enable the scaling of languages and regionalisation
- serve people in geographical regions of conflict and crisis
- grow significantly among key audiences such as women and girls, young people and audiences of need
- increase the Service's efficiency and value for money

We can radically increase how the UK supports global security and increase UK influence. To deliver this, we need a secure funding base. The current funding model—partially reliant on the UK licence fee—places the BBC World Service at risk and is increasingly difficult to justify to domestic audiences. The BBC Board supports the position that the UK Government should consider resuming full responsibility for funding the World Service, as it did for the first 80 years of its existence.

Without secure and sustainable funding, we are reporting on an increasingly dangerous world, with one hand tied behind our backs. But with the right support, the BBC can deliver more. We can adapt to the fast-moving and ever-shifting nature of threats across the globe. We can counter Russian and Chinese narratives and promote the democratic values we all hold dear.

We are grateful to the Committees and to you, their Chairs, for your continued support. Do please let us know if there is further information that we can provide.



Samir Shah
BBC Chair