

A Royal Air Force C17 aircraft has more than 120 members of Ghana's Engineering Company 1 to Mali's capital with vehicles and equipment. They will build accommodation and support engineering projects as part of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA).

The UK, concerned by the situation in Mali and the threat that violent extremist groups in the north pose, has responded to a Ghanaian request by making a C17 aircraft available this week.

Minister for the Armed Forces, Andrew Robathan, met RAF crew members working on the airlift at Bamako during a two-day visit. He said: "I came out on behalf of the government to see first-hand what is happening out here, where our troops are deploying, where there's a huge French presence and where there is a terrorist situation that actually threatens the United Kingdom as well.

"We have said we don't want to have troops on the ground but we are helping the French effort and we're helping the African effort as well. We're going to help train Malians with the EU training mission too."

"The evolving threat in Mali requires international partnerships, which is why the UK has been a firm supporter of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Mali as well as regional leadership from Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union and EU training to help rebuild the Malian army."

Mr Peter Jones, British High Commissioner to Ghana, said: "This is a moment where the international community is coming together for a shared challenge.

"Ghana is providing an engineering company to the African force, the AFISMA force, so we're very pleased that they have offered to do that in collaboration with other African countries.

"As you can see from this aircraft we've responded to a request to move their people and some quite heavy equipment for their engineering into Mali, so we're pleased to offer this transport

capability."

Colonel M'Bawine Atintande, Director of Public Relations for the Ghana Armed Forces, said: "Ghana is sending an Engineer Company that's more than 120 of all ranks. The company will play every specific role. We expect the forces to be there as long as it takes to solve the problem. Normally we stay in the six months and then rotate.

"The UK has given us so much support. Before AFISMA we have had so much support from Britain, including a training team. There is training assistance they have given us in preparing the troops for the mission so by and large the UK government has given us so much that we need in the mission.

"Our first President in the 1960s was a pan-Africanist. He was of the conviction that all African problems should be solved by Africans. Any problem in any part of Africa is as much a concern to us as it is to them. And so therefore it is very important that we should be in Mali to help them solve their problems."

RAF Squadron Leader Tom Walker, Detachment Commander for the team in charge of the airlift, said: "The team is from a broad range of branches and functions. While the C17 itself is clearly the core there are personnel from administration, the RAF Regiment and logistics branches -all working together to deliver this airlift operation.

"The Ghanaians have been really good. We've got shared historical links that make it very easy to operate with them but they are also a very professional armed forces and to be honest working with them is like working with the French or the Americans in that respect."

Flight Lieutenant Gareth Elliot, Officer Commanding for Movements, said: "The Ghanaians will be taking materials for accommodation which they will build, equipment for building roads and also a fleet of vehicles because they will need to be able to move around the theatre."