

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Women, peace and security, HC 782

Tuesday 16 December 2025

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Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Janet Daby; Tracy Gilbert; Monica Harding; Noah Law; Brian Mathew; Sam Rushworth.

Questions 73-149

Witnesses

I: Chris Elmore MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; Al Carns DSO OBE MC MP, Minister for the Armed Forces, Ministry of Defence; Stuart Mills, Head of Global Issues, Ministry of Defence; and Emily Maltman, Head of Gender and Children in Conflict Department, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Chris Elmore, Al Carns, Stuart Mills and Emily Maltman.

Chair: We now start our final session of the International Development Committee inquiry on women, peace and security. We have two Ministers in front of us, and some of their team alongside. Thank you all for making the time. Could you please introduce yourselves?

Al Carns: I am the Minister for the Armed Forces.

Stuart Mills: I am Head of Global Issues at the UK MOD.

Chris Elmore: I am the Minister for Multilateral, Human Rights, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Emily Maltman is the deputy director for conflict issues in the FCDO.

Q73 **Chair:** Thank you all for coming. Minister Elmore, we are now 25 years on from adopting resolution 1325. Could you outline how much progress the UK has made towards implementing the women, peace and security agenda?

Chris Elmore: I would be delighted to. Thank you very much for inviting us this afternoon. The key thing is that we are the penholder in relation to this. I know the Committee will know this, so I am stating some obvious facts. During the course of the 25 years there have been, from memory, nine additional resolutions in this space, and obviously we have been at the forefront of those decisions within the UN. I am glad you have posed the question. If you will forgive me, I will read through some of the work done to date, because it is important that the Committee gets some examples of that.

One area is around like-minded partners and groupings leading an agenda in the multilateral space, which is quite important. From memory there are 115 countries that have launched a national action plan up until 2023, which shows the in-country progress that is being made around the world. The national action plan has been in place since 2006; it is currently under its fifth iteration and is now being reviewed ready for next year. That work forms part of broader crises in places like Sudan and Palestine. So whether in the multilateral space, at home or working in country-specific work, across the course of those 25 years we have really been at the forefront of the women, peace and security agenda.

Chair: Minister Carns, do you have anything to add?

Al Carns: Yes. When I reflect back on my military career, we see this root and branch within the MOD. Almost every element of the single services, whether it be a command and control headquarters or something else, usually has a human security individual who has been trained, which obviously covers WPS within that. Throughout my career, and especially in the latter half when I have been slightly higher up the



command chain, I have seen this absolutely front and centre of all our planning. It is always in the considerations in all the estimates we do.

Chair: You are seeing it front and centre in UK defence?

Al Carns: In UK defence. In particular, internally within UK defence, but we also have a multitude of different programmes globally, helping other countries to consider both human security and women, peace and security as a key aspect of our outputs.

Q74 **Sam Rushworth:** You have talked about the role the UK has played in further resolutions, treaties and so on, at that level, but would you be able to say more about the tangible aspects of 1325? What is the UK doing to make a difference on the ground on resolution 1325? If you were to put resolution 1325 into layman's terms, and explain it to a member of the public, what is the UK doing tangibly, not just at the level of treaties and international diplomacy?

Chris Elmore: There is the tangible support around women's rights organisations, and putting that front and centre of the agenda, which is something that would be very much UK-based, but also globally. There is then a significant list of work in-country, whether that is Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Yemen or Afghanistan. Some are obviously linked to active conflict, some are around diplomacy, and an element of that would be around women being at the table for peace negotiations.

Forgive me, but I do not think it is about putting it into layman's terms. It is about trying to show the tangible benefits as to what WPS is about, and being able to say to somebody, "Well, the reason why the UK plays such a significant part in this work is because we are there for peacebuilding, prevention, and trying to make sure that we have this space in the UK as an important part of how we tackle peace and security in the context of women." So it is quite a broad piece of work that is being done, either in-country, in the UK, or at the UN.

I hope that helps build on it a little, or a lot—I do not know, Mr Rushworth; it is entirely up to you—but it is about a broader piece of work that has been happening across the FCDO for the last 25 years, where we can say that we have supported X country, done this piece of work in-country, and made sure we have kept the agenda going right the way across with continuing resolutions. As much as continuing resolutions may not seem particularly significant—I know that is not what you are saying—actually being the penholder, being in the room, turning up to these conversations and making sure the language is not diluted around the WPS space is incredibly important. Some of the evidence that your Committee has published also shows that the UK being in that space really matters.

Al Carns: Women in leadership and decision making and how we enhance that and help educate and communicate the benefits of it to others is the critical component. It is quite difficult to put your finger on



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it, but as a small example we have trained over 400 personnel in our human security adviser courses since 2018, and about 110 regular and reserve people are involved in that.

Within our own organisations in the UK there are individuals who are trained in the human security space, and it is also really about trying to help other countries realise that, by allowing women into leadership roles and diverse groupings, you get much greater benefit in the output. Especially in the military space, it is a critical component of any aspect, whether that be planning, security or peacekeeping; it is critical to have that voice and that representation. I have seen the military come a long way internally within the UK, but I have also seen, where we have actively engaged with other nations to bring women into leadership roles, whether it be in east Africa, west Africa or indeed Afghanistan, this critical component has paid dividends time and time again.

Q75 Noah Law: Ministers, when do you expect there to be an update to the UK women, peace and security national action plan?

Chris Elmore: I hope there will be an update to the plan in the spring of next year, 2026. On a very genuine cross-party basis the thing to say is that we are in a position where there have been multiple national action plans across different Administrations, whether that is under the last Labour Government, the coalition, the Conservative majority, or now the new Labour Government. That has been a consistent theme, and we will keep that work moving into 2026 and beyond, to be clear.

Q76 Noah Law: If there is that consistency, why is it that we are looking to refresh the strategy now, ahead of the current strategy period end in 2027?

Chris Elmore: It is partially because there was a review towards the end of the last Government, and the decision was taken in the context of not publishing because it was the previous Government's, so we are doing this review now to make sure it is refreshed and ready for the next round. That is quite a sensible approach so that we are actually refreshing it live, and we will engage civil society and parliamentarians. In fact, the work is happening right now, and it will continue in the run-up to spring next year.

Q77 Noah Law: Would you consider providing a draft copy of that work to the Committee for comment in confidence, if possible?

Chris Elmore: We can consider sending a draft. I am happy to look at that as part of a wider piece of work on the consultation. I do not want to say yes definitely, in that context.

Chair: Go on, Minister, spoil us.

Chris Elmore: I will come back in writing to the Committee if you will allow me, Chair. I am sure if we can work through that in some way, I would be glad to try to facilitate it.



Q78 **Tracy Gilbert:** Minister Carns, is the MOD using the uplift in defence spending to further the WPS agenda?

Al Carns: In the defence spending and strategic defence review, my view is that WPS and human security is already root and branch throughout defence. It might be useful just to give you a little flavour of some of the stuff that we are doing, because there is a really good story to tell here, and I genuinely mean that.

In the last six or seven years we have seen this tilt, and here are just a few specific activities that we have conducted. We have done WPS peacekeeping training for over 250 service personnel in Vietnam. Last week we hosted the European Orientation on Global Security meeting—a dedicated course for women leaders across NATO—which went down exceptionally well. Last month a human security adviser travelled to Abuja to facilitate a symposium on gender and security services in Nigeria. We had a trilateral conference on women, peace and security with Japan and Norway in August, we gave technical support to Uruguay on women, peace and security and the national action plan, and a gender symposium with Nigerian security forces. Women, peace and security and human security training has been delivered to service personnel in Kazakhstan, Bosnia and Indonesia, and we delivered technical support to Brunei on women in defence. I can keep going if you want me to, but there is another seven or eight. This comes into our line of thinking everywhere we are engaged from a defence perspective.

Q79 **Chair:** Minister Carns, how do you describe a woman leader who would be invited to one of these courses?

Al Carns: That is a really good question. I will have to get back if there is a specific description.

Chair: What do you think it should be?

Al Carns: It should be any woman who wants to realise her ambitions or deliver change in any walk of life. That could be in the private space, all the way through to—from our perspective in defence in particular—the security and national defence architecture, usually, of the country. Also any individual that may benefit from the courses that we deliver, upskilling them to give them more of a say and more input across the world.

Q80 **Chair:** When it comes to WPS, one of the things that I did not get clarity from when you were giving the examples in your opening question was whether you were talking about embedding it with our defence staff, or in the countries where we are trying to support them.

Al Carns: It is a bit of both. We have really good structures in place internally. Almost everything I mentioned there was about going out to our allies and partners—like-minded nations—trying to help them realise the advantage of having more women in leadership and indeed in mentoring roles within their national security architecture.



To give a small, slightly tactical example, for a woman in the Afghan security forces in Afghanistan this is a game changer on both information and understanding of the cultural context, all the way through to actually making the patrol or the deployment more secure because you have individuals who can understand the nuance and add a different view to what is quite a male-dominated society. That is a small example.

- Q81 **Chair:** I was thinking more about the women in Sudan who are running the emergency support rooms, and getting them round the table in the peace negotiations. Would the work of UK defence in this area include women like that, or do you think it will include women like that going forward?

Al Carns: It should absolutely include women like that, and I will take that away and have a look into that specific detail and get back to you, unless the team can pull that out now.

- Q82 **Tracy Gilbert:** Why did the strategic defence review not mention women, peace and security in the agenda?

Al Carns: I actually looked through this and it is because it is already there—it is so ingrained in our thinking. I will give an example. I was the chief of staff of the UK Strike Force, which is a big maritime two-star headquarters. I had a dedicated human security officer there, and within their role was the women, peace and security piece. When we were doing a plan or estimate on anything from a maritime task group to a non-combatant evacuation, that individual provided the insight from their training and experience. It is just that we are so far on now that it is part of the DNA.

- Q83 **Tracy Gilbert:** The Government's shift towards hard security and military investment has been criticised for neglecting aspects such as conflict resolution and human security. Do you think those are fair criticisms?

Al Carns: No, I do not; the two are the same. I am a firm believer, in some of these cases, particularly perhaps as we look to Ukraine, in the "fight and talk" strategy. Within that talking space we have to accept that our adversaries—Russia in particular—have used sexual violence as a weapon of war. For example, we work with Op Interflex to train everybody who comes through Op Interflex in women, peace and security, and bringing more females into the military to provide diversity thinking and leadership. If you look at Ukraine, it is a fantastic example of how we have many more women in defence.

- Q84 **Tracy Gilbert:** Will the MOD commit to ensuring that the UK supports conflict prevention and peacekeeping missions, integrates gender expertise and includes women mediators?

Al Carns: We should, but the practicalities of delivering that will need to be thought through by the team. In any mediation piece or negotiation, I would always support having the most diverse team you can, because



then you end up with the diverse thinking that tends to provide the best solutions to complex problems.

Q85 **Tracy Gilbert:** Will you commit today to ensuring that female mediators and gender experts will be represented in any future multinational force to Ukraine?

Al Carns: Yes, 100%. From our perspective, it will be part of the coalition of the willing. We need to allow Ukraine to win the peace first, but as part of our coalition of the willing we will have human security advisers within there ensuring that diverse groups, and indeed women, are integrated into the future security structures of Ukraine as we move forward, but the Ukrainians will need to lead, with our help.

Q86 **Chair:** Minister Carns, alongside that will you be doing a body of work around safeguarding and respect? I know our own forces do not have the best record on keeping women safe within our forces, so what will you be doing in parallel to encourage people to encourage women and to make sure they are treated with respect?

Al Carns: When I was the Minister for Veterans and People, I sat down with various different groups, one of which was Women in Defence. We would take a plethora of all different ranks from very senior down to the other ranks, and we would just hear their experiences. Some of those were negative; the majority were positive.

The key for us is to make sure those negative experiences are completely and utterly moved out of defence. We have to make defence the most warm and welcoming place for anyone to join. I will just use a small example. If you join the military as a young female and you have an issue, and let us say you are a private, and that issue is coming from your immediate superior. If you are in a new environment and away from home, where do you go? This has been the problem: it is actually quite difficult to circumnavigate that command chain without fear of reprisals, a fear of an issue within command, or indeed just your right to speak up in quite a hierarchical and direct organisation.

In the last job we embarked on two key programmes, the first of which was our violence against women and girls taskforce. We are now running two pilot programmes on two bases in the UK that provide an alternative—what I would call a safe space—so that if anyone is having an issue in the military system, and that could be from a senior rank right down to the bottom, they can pop to the right or the left out of the command chain and go and speak to people. And those people are trained in dealing with these issues, so they can be highlighted either back into the command chain at a different level or, indeed, dealt with in another way.

The second thing that we are delivering, and Louise Sandher-Jones is moving this forward now, is the tri-service complaint system, which primarily is for if a complaint hits a certain threshold, it is taken out of



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the chain of command to allow a parallel system to deal with it, because we do not want people marking their own homework.

Those two initiatives are groundbreaking. I am going to be really honest: they are with the VAWG taskforce trials and development at the moment. But from my perspective these will hopefully grow over time to become very effective mechanisms to ensure that no one feels unable to talk or highlight a concern within the military.

Q87 Chair: Is that something you would roll out to international partners, or encourage them to adopt?

Al Carns: Absolutely, and this is where we had all the NATO female leaders come together. The UK is leading in some of this space, but we are not ahead in everything. Some of the Nordic countries have a lead on us, and we are learning this collaborative approach to learning best practice in this area. We need to get to a space where, as a young female or an individual from a diverse background having joined the armed forces, there is no issue or impact on you because of your gender or indeed your diverse background.

Q88 Brian Mathew: There was that tragic case that came to court recently with the suicide of a girl.

Al Carns: Gunner Jaysley Beck.

Brian Mathew: That is right—in Wiltshire. Presumably that has helped to expedite what you are talking about?

Al Carns: Absolutely. If you read it, it is a tragic case about a woman stuck in the command chain and not really feeling she can go anywhere. That is exactly where we have designed this from. It obviously happened some time ago. It does not make it easier to deal with, but there has been a lot of action since then, and since this Government came in we have doubled down to create the VAWG taskforce and the tri-service complaint system.

We have also embarked on a zero-tolerance policy. We have taken our defence serious crime unit, and our victim support unit is now in place, and in a lot of cases the service justice system provides some very effective measures both to look after victims of unwanted sexual behaviour or sexual crimes and to deal with them in a far faster way than our civilian justice system. There is a lot of cross-pollination discussion going on between the two about best practice and capturing the correct levels of data.

Q89 Chair: One of the criticisms that we have received from witnesses while doing this inquiry is that the UK talks good talk, but with the cuts, its ability to actually deliver is going to be greatly reduced. Minister Elmore, what is your commitment specifically to women, peace and security with the cuts looming?



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Chris Elmore: There are two strands to this. First, there is the broader political directive from Ministers and from the Department about this being a key priority for us. Obviously, the Foreign Secretary has made some significant statements in the last two or three weeks around the whole women, peace and security agenda. But in the context of going from 0.5% to 0.3%, forgive me, Chair, but I always forget which American amendment it is where you plead the fifth, or whatever it is. I do not mean that, but the reality is the allocations have just not been decided upon yet. They will be taken early in the new year.

Q90 **Chair:** What is your involvement in making sure of that?

Chris Elmore: The decisions are obviously taken with Baroness Chapman, who is the Development Minister. My role is then to try to work through with the Department on where we then work with priorities, on which I will hopefully see some papers early in the new year, or as soon as I can receive them.

The broader point is that I cannot sit here and pretend there is no impact in terms of the 0.5% to 0.3%, but decisions still need to be taken. However, it is a personal commitment from the Foreign Secretary and Baroness Chapman and, indeed, myself as the Minister responsible for women, peace and security, to make sure that we keep this as high as possible up the agenda, including in this new world of trying to find additional funders, making sure that we play a role within the multilateral space, and making sure we use specialisms and specialists within the FCDO to offer support in-country, and to make sure that we are there at the UN conversations.

I hate to talk about language a lot, but one thing I have learned in my three months in this role is that language really does matter in the UN space. So if any other country is not pushing the whole language around WPS, the UK is. I do not want to be very repetitive in this, but it is worth repeating that part of our broader commitment is to make sure that we are not just at the table, but we are pushing and making sure the language around gender in particular does not come out of any of these processes.

So there is a bit of "to be confirmed", but there is broader political will where we are still moving forward, and that includes the review of the national action plan and making sure it remains a priority in the international space.

Q91 **Chair:** My concern was that because Lord Hague was absolutely fantastic on PSVI and then Lord Ahmad was very passionate about this agenda, and because they are both Conservatives, there might be a political stepping away from this agenda. But you are giving me assurances that that is not the case.

Chris Elmore: Not while I am the Minister, and I am definitely not a Conservative, Chair, as you know very well.



Q92 **Chair:** I do know very well. So are you able to say that you will be ringfencing money for this?

Chris Elmore: I do not think I can, because first I need to understand what the budget allocations are, and I would never ever want to mislead a Committee of the House or indeed the House. But I want to try to offer some reassurance that we are trying to look at how we are working to deliver. It may be that people move within teams or that people have different names. I am not making any guesses here; I am just saying there may be wider changes within the 0.3% decisions, but there will still be a very clear focus on WPS. In fact, in a very literal sense, it sits within a different Department from women and girls, so there is a very clear, defined unit and team.

It is not that I do not want to tell you what that looks like once the changes have gone through with the FCDO and with ODA changes, I just do not yet know. We are working through that now, but in terms of a political priority, particularly on peacebuilding and security, I was at the rollback conference in Paris in November, where I made the UK's political will and commitment very clear in this space, and equally talking about where we have significant success, which is linked to Northern Ireland.

In the other vein, where we have been able to help get women at the table on peacebuilding and long-term security situations, there is actually significantly higher success if women are at the table. As the Minister responsible for women, peace and security, I am giving the commitment that we will always keep that agenda high and always be there to make sure we can offer facilitation, either in-country or with support to particular countries. As you will be aware there is a growing list of them in terms of where global conflict is, I am sorry to say. But we will also make sure that we are offering that skilled, official-level support to other countries that is not about ODA funding, or where somebody sits in a Department or within a team in the Foreign Office, but it is actually those specialists that are there on the ground offering the support.

Chair: Lord Ahmad said that cuts to this agenda would have devastating consequences and real-world impacts faced by women and girls. In the five years that I have chaired this Committee, whenever I see money going directly to women it is always best spent and it is always best value for money. What we as a Committee are seeing, and I am sure, Ministers, you are seeing, is around the world these conflicts are very much now targeted at women and children. As you rightly say, Minister, to give those women a seat at the table negotiating their own peace is really what we want to see, so I hear what you are saying about cuts and allocations, but I also hear—and will hold you to the fact—that you are going to be a champion on this, and I thank you for that.

Q93 **Brian Mathew:** There have already been cuts, so I would like to ask about the impacts of high staff turnover and staffing cuts on the programme and policy delivery.



Al Carns: I can lead from my perspective. Anywhere defence goes, anything defence does, we have human security and therefore women, peace and security bedded in, inculcated into that. The point you mentioned, Chair, about the increase in violence around the world and the reversal of so much good that has been done in the last 10 or 15 years, whether that be Afghanistan, or Russia's use of sexual-based violence, kidnapping large swathes of children, which it has a record of doing, is a huge dismay. What I can in particular reassure the Committee on here is that yes, there is a requirement to reshape our defence to deal with hostile state actors, but we will never forget the requirement of human security or women, peace and security, for the simple reason that diversity makes us stronger.

Q94 **Brian Mathew:** Minister Carns, you have the benefit of a rising budget, and I am interested in hearing more.

Chris Elmore: Al very kindly stepped in for a second. The first thing to say is we have actually increased the budget in this field by £3.5 million this anniversary year, so there is specific additional support around women peacebuilders and women's rights organisations. Then in a very practical sense—and again, the Chair knows me well: I am not keen on repetition but I am going to keep to this point because it is so important—we have not actually deprioritised it within the Department. So in terms of the UN space we are still pushing the agenda forward and where we have been able to we have actually put in the additional funds of £3.5 million.

I completely understand there is this wider situation over the 0.5% to 0.3%, but in terms of the political priority—which the Chair rightly cross-examined me on—we have actually been able to keep the political priority of saying that we are pushing forward with the funding programme we have in this space this year, multilaterally and internationally. I am not then trying to pretend there will not be difficult decisions when we get into the next round, but that bit is not yet clear.

Chair: I do not think Brian is talking about money; he is talking about the potential 25% staff cuts that are careering towards us.

Chris Elmore: In terms of FCDO 2030? Sorry, I thought it was about money.

Chair: No.

Chris Elmore: I beg your pardon. In terms of FCDO 2030, staffing reductions and all the other things that go within it, we have just gone through a process with the most senior level of staffing. The review will now move further across the rest of the Department. This goes back to my earlier answer to the Chair that some of these are HR discussions, as you can appreciate, and it would be inappropriate for Ministers to be involved in those discussions. Nor should Ministers be saying, "I want this



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person working here or this person working there.” That is not how these processes work.

Chair: But policy decisions are your decisions, and you need staff accordingly.

Chris Elmore: Absolutely, and hence that is why I am working very hard as the Minister for Multilateral, which includes human rights, rule of law, women, peace and security, women and girls, and so on.

Chair: You have all our pet topics, Minister.

Chris Elmore: I am sure I do, yes, and I have a funny feeling that will be exactly what the chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee will tell me as well. As part of that work it might be that people shift and that there are title changes. There will be between a 15% and 25% staff reduction. It does not mean everything comes out of the multilateral space. My role within this is trying to make sure it clearly remains a political priority, and Emily and other senior officials in the Department know that my view on this, almost from day one, has been that it remains a really important part of my work, along with other elements of my portfolio including the geographic, so it remains a priority.

Q95 **Brian Mathew:** You mentioned the Budget earlier. Presumably the two come together without having your cake and eating it.

Chris Elmore: The reality is that the restructuring has not yet taken place; it is ongoing, but it has not yet taken place. The only change has been around the most senior levels of director general and director, so the additional work on restructuring will take place. I suppose the element of my role in this is the prioritisation, and I want to ensure that there is still a robust service department team working in the WPS space. It does not mean that there cannot be streamlined provision, that there cannot be removal of duplication within particular service areas or that we will not have a WPS provision post the changes, but I cannot know what they are yet, in the context that the restructuring has not happened.

Q96 **Brian Mathew:** Okay, but other than us holding your feet to the fire, how will the Government ensure that they can still measure evidence and report on women, peace and security delivery, domestically and internationally, if gender expertise within Government is lost?

Chris Elmore: To answer the question back to front, first, very clearly I hope it will not be lost. To answer the first part of your question, we will still report to the House, to Committees, and through annual reports. All those things will remain in place. I would hope that the Chair and the Committee would then hold my feet to the fire—as you used the phrase—if we suddenly stopped reporting, or if we were not giving out the information. My clear expectation and the Foreign Secretary’s clear expectation is that we will carry on reporting and making sure that we play as full a part as possible within this agenda. I completely take the



question, but I am just saying that we will report, keep updating and being scrutinised, rightly, around this space and this agenda.

- Q97 **Chair:** Minister, one of the problems that we have, and therefore I assume you have, is that the data capture is not actually as granular as you would probably want it to be. If that is something that you could take away to look into, we would be grateful. We had a Nigerian foundation woman in front of us a couple of weeks ago talking about the work she does, and from the development of projects, she makes sure that she knows how many disabled women from a certain town she is able to provide support to, for example. We have found it very difficult to get similar levels of information from the FCDO, largely because it does not seem to be captured. So at the time when you are likely to lose gender expertise, it would be really helpful to try to hold on to what you have and how impactful you are being.

Chris Elmore: I am more than happy to take that back, Chair.

Chair: Thank you very much.

- Q98 **Noah Law:** This question is to you both. As the leader and penholder in various multilateral platforms such as the UN Security Council, what role does the UK play in holding to account other countries that fall short on their WPS agendas?

Al Carns: It is probably worth while talking about what we have in the UN from our perspective. We have 23 military staff officers to the UN peacekeeping abroad, which is Cyprus, Somalia, Lebanon, South Sudan and the DRC. We also hold some critical positions in those countries—for example, the UK military staff officer and gender protection adviser—and we hold that lead within the DRC under MONUSCO. So we are holding these countries to account in a lot of ways through education and communication, which tends to be the best way, where they see the benefit of it.

There is something about data capture, and you mentioned it earlier to Minister Elmore. Interestingly, when I looked at my pack a couple of days ago, I said, “We need to think about how we are measuring the effectiveness of what we are doing, so it is good value for the taxpayer, and then we can reinforce success.” So we have taken that away as well to collectively pool the data, and we can therefore work out what is working and what is not and indeed learn from our mistakes. So we are taking that on and moving that forward.

- Q99 **Noah Law:** How easy is that? Because we have seen, for example in Nigeria, some of the work on these programmes—there are probably parallels—but some conflict situations and cultural differences around this are pretty idiosyncratic.

Al Carns: It is really difficult, but we can have some measurement of effect. It may be just a statistic of how many people we have trained, how many people we have seen and, if they conduct surveys at the end



of the courses, have they seen it is valuable? It would be very difficult to track, but how many of these women actually end up benefiting from the course and in positions of responsibility or enhanced responsibility? We need to think about how we can do that effectively and then put it in place. It will take time to build the data, but it is really important.

Q100 Noah Law: I have perhaps a different spin on this question for Minister Elmore. Do you feel that the UK prioritises its diplomatic relationships over holding countries to account on this agenda?

Chris Elmore: I genuinely think the UK makes sure that the language stays in the Security Council and does not drift. What we have been able to show, with diplomatic heft rather than diplomatic relations, is that we have always been able to keep this high on the agenda. Obviously each of the nine resolutions—10 substantive—have been in the context of getting everybody into the same place and keeping the language there.

There are undoubtedly challenges around language; there is no point in me sitting here and suggesting otherwise. But in response to more recent conflicts we have always been able to keep language in and keep women, peace and security on the agenda, and we have not wilted from that at any point. We are always conscious of our diplomatic relations with other countries. To date I cannot say it has not been a challenge—of course it has, language can be challenging—but at the same time we have been able to deliver on that and keep achieving it.

Q101 Noah Law: Are you feeling that where you are driving through the middle some of that is cosmetic, in your view, or does it affect the nature of the agenda and the people you can reach in doing this work?

Chris Elmore: We are reaching and supporting a lot of women in-country, which is the key point of this work. There is a multilateral agenda, of course, but we are actually offering a lot of support on the ground. As I said earlier, in too many countries as conflict escalates—we have more conflicts now than since world war two, which I find a horrifying reality—that work goes on. Forgive me Mr Law, what was the phrase you used? It is not piecemeal, it is done in a—

Noah Law: Cosmetic.

Chris Elmore: Thank you. It is not cosmetic; it is done in a very real way, and countries value our engagement in this space and accept that no matter the challenges, if I can put it like that, we step up to the plate in this regard on WPS.

Emily Maltman: May I add a point of detail?

Chair: Please—I love having a woman's voice on the panel.

Emily Maltman: I am very happy to, although my deputy is a male and he would have done this just as well. On holding countries to account, beneath the Security Council there is a women, peace and security



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shared commitments group, which is a group of countries that have invested, think the same and support the women, peace and security agenda. It is a mechanism for supporting accountability for the WPS commitments through the Security Council, and it allows countries that have spent two years on the Security Council in a temporary role to continue to play a part in that group. It helps the body of countries that are active, so it is a sort of critical-mass approach, if you like.

Q102 Noah Law: The UK has been criticised for not leading specifically on accountability mechanisms—for example, for Afghan women, not recognising the concept of gender apartheid within international courts. Why is this? Why has the UK not done more to support women and girls in Afghanistan, for example?

Chris Elmore: We are doing quite a lot of work in this space in Afghanistan. UK aid reaches vulnerable women there using outside agencies, obviously where we can, in the context of the Taliban now running the country.

On the wider point around humanitarian assistance, we have reached 885,000 women in the context of Afghanistan in 2024-25 with health hygiene items, critical reproductive and maternal healthcare and wider support on urgent needs of women and girls. In this particular space we are in very challenging circumstances, and obviously I am not trying to say it is not, but we are actually very much using UK aid to make sure we are supporting women and girls in Afghanistan.

Q103 Noah Law: Perhaps you can fully rebut some of these points on the record. What has been lost in these challenging times in terms of what we have been able to do to support women and girls in Afghanistan?

Chris Elmore: We have been very clear about some of the legislation in Afghanistan around vice and virtue, where we have condemned the erosion of women's rights. We have tried to challenge the Taliban around reversing decisions on restricting education for women and girls, which has been done very publicly. We very regularly raise the issue of women and girls at an official level, including with visits into Kabul. UK Ministers do not have that direct level of engagement, but we have it at an official level. We have continued to be a long-standing donor.

Forgive me, I am not going to try to rebut if people are making accusations, but there is a lot of support and facts on what the FCDO is doing, and doing as well as it can in the challenging context of how Afghanistan is run and by whom, and what their views are on women and girls, which clearly would never be supported by anybody in this Parliament, I would have thought. But still in that context we try to encourage dialogue. We challenge where we are able to, condemn where we can, and make sure aid gets into some of the most challenging and difficult countries in the world to get aid into.

Q104 Tracy Gilbert: This question is a follow-up on that, and to Emily's point



as well. How do we measure impact in a way that is meaningful? How do we look at outcomes for women and the impact on women's lives, from the penholding and persuasion point to the actual delivery on the ground? Is it measured in any way? What are your thoughts on how we would measure it?

Chris Elmore: We use organisations like Save the Children, UNESCO and UNICEF that report on how they use the funding to support women and girls in Afghanistan. That is how we do the reporting. Emily, is there anything you want to add to that?

Emily Maltman: It is the same everywhere. It is about trying to use the partners that we have to capture that data picture. But it is a challenge to have consistent data across different countries because the contexts and the programme partners are different.

We try to measure impact through the WPS national action plan, but I will be honest: it is challenging to do that consistently year on year, with so many things changing. We try to make sure that we update Parliament through the different annual mechanisms that give a sense of where we think we are having an impact on the ground, and where there are still real-world challenges, like in Afghanistan.

Q105 **Tracy Gilbert:** Other than other organisations feeding us that data, what do we do as a Government to measure that impact?

Emily Maltman: Drawing on those inputs, we will also add our own analysis from our missions in different countries to build that picture.

Q106 **Tracy Gilbert:** On Noah's point, how do we know that it is not cosmetic?

Al Carns: The reality is that what has happened in Afghanistan is a tragedy; let us not shy away from the issue. Hope has been blanketed out for a large chunk of women and girls in Afghanistan. The charities that are working in-country are doing an amazing job, sometimes at great risk, to help those most in need.

The ability to draw accurate data out to then accurately understand the impact is very difficult, but it is a worth while thing to continue to do because there are a lot of people out there that need help. So there is a little bit of, "Yes, we can't put our finger on the specific data," but the gut instinct is that this is having an impact, and we must continue to do it.

Q107 **Chair:** Minister, as a very practical thing, if we are sending delegations—unofficial, official, whatever level of engagement we have—do we always make sure that there is a woman on the delegation? I would like to hear the answer from both your perspectives.

Al Carns: We have an increase in rising one-star females in the military. We are 1% up, and there is actually quite a large proportion, and we try to make sure there is multi-gender representation whenever we engage. Sometimes that is not possible, but we try whenever we can.



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There is a bit about whether it is superficial, as we mentioned before, in how we deal with some countries. I always say it is better to be in the tent than outside it. How do we attach women, peace and security and human security to almost everything we are doing? I tend to find, whether that be bilateral trade with a country all the way through to a joint planning exercise, when you bring in on the side of that—maybe not the central premise, because in some cases that can have an effect on how much people engage with you—once they see the benefit of it they tend to buy into it, and then they adopt it. So by being in the tent we can enforce change. It takes a bit longer sometimes.

Chair: Yes—it is about getting a woman inside the tent as well.

Al Carns: Agreed, 100%.

Chair: Not to mention the amazing empowering effect it will have on women and girls in that country.

Chris Elmore: Just to see it, yes.

Q108 **Chair:** Exactly. What is the answer from the FCDO's perspective?

Chris Elmore: The short answer is we always try to, as best we can in the context of officials within different missions, and equally we try to have women in the room with our own internal workings. I am very keen on making sure that we have women as part of ministerial meetings and external dialogue, and as part of stakeholder group conversations that are not just about women—so a far broader conversation within my various roles and responsibilities within the Foreign Office. We try internationally and then we try-plus in the context of internally within the FCDO.

Q109 **Noah Law:** I have a further question on accountability. The UK has faced criticism for not taking stronger stances across multilateral platforms like the ICJ. How would you respond to some of those criticisms, particularly in the context of women, peace and security?

Chris Elmore: Do you mean the International Court of Justice?

Noah Law: Yes.

Chris Elmore: We supported arrest warrants in Afghanistan, where they have been them. We work in the context of the court as best we can. We are very supportive of it in a very literal sense in terms of our role within the human rights sphere, which also sits under me. This is an absolute priority of the human rights space from the Prime Minister down, and the International Court of Justice making sure that we are a significant role holder and supporter of this work is actually quite important, not just to the FCDO and the MOD, I am sure, but to the whole Government.

Q110 **Chair:** We have done a number of sessions on Sudan, and every time it has reinforced that it is a war on women. Why has it taken the



Government so long to consider imposing human rights sanctions on Sudan?

Chris Elmore: The second round of sanctions in relation to Sudan were announced on Friday. This is an absolute personal priority for Baroness Chapman, for the Foreign Secretary and of course for all Ministers, and for the FCDO more widely. I would agree with you on the scale of the atrocities against women and girls and, in my understanding, on boys as well, in terms of children, and using sexual violence in this context.

Since the Foreign Secretary has come into office, in terms of the priority of the FCDO—I do not want to list the initiatives because I feel like that would be condescending to the Committee and that would never be my intention—including today, there is the IID meeting hosted with Denmark, the Foreign Secretary requested the emergency session of the Human Rights Council and the normal session of the Security Council was was not an emergency session, but it was brought forward. The Foreign Secretary and Baroness Chapman have been at the very forefront of making sure that they are frequently talking to people internationally, and the Secretary of State raised it with Secretary Rubio last week in Washington.

I can talk about the here and now, and it is absolutely a priority for the Foreign Secretary. We are working with the Quad to work, from the statement in September, for a humanitarian cessation in violence, which you will know, and to try to find a longer-term peace. We have now, and will continue to have, a huge amount of work to do, if we can get to that place, in terms of how we recover. A significant part of that is obviously around women and girls. The Prime Minister has committed to continuing aid levels, and we have increased that aid to £129 million—forgive me if I have the figure wrong; I can correct it if needs be—and that means we will have that support as much as we can on the ground. But equally we are using near neighbours to offer support for people who are moving as refugees, and dealing with the consequences of the most horrific sexual violence that we have seen.

Q111 **Chair:** This Committee very much welcomed the Foreign Secretary's commitment around ending violence against women and girls and the WPS, but it almost highlights that it should not be down to an individual's priorities; it should be embedded within our policies when we bring in sanctions, for example. Going back to your opening remarks, do you think it is timely that we have a review of the threshold for when we bring in sanctions—the level of atrocities that is reached before we actually become more proactive?

Chris Elmore: The difficulty in that context is that sanctions are taken at different levels based on what we are sanctioning. You will know from all your years in the Commons that we do not comment on what we are sanctioning next or why we are sanctioning it.



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However, and it is a big however, sexual violence in conflict and violence against women and girls undoubtedly forms a part of an atrocity level, shocking as it is, that then forms part of the decision-making process. But I would not want to give the Committee the wrong impression, that we will have a certain threshold for X or Y when, actually, we will take them—I am sorry to say this—as conflicts develop and increase, and in terms of their length and impact.

Q112 Chair: The concern is that it then becomes subjective, and that very much depends on who is making the decision, and whether it is through gendered eyes that that decision is made or not. Too often around the world we see women being horrendously abused and assaulted, and it is not seen to meet the threshold of shooting a male soldier, for example. I was trying to push you on trying to bed that into our policies going forward.

Chris Elmore: I can see the sense in doing a piece of work around that. I do not think I can commit to it in the context of the whole Department, but Minister Doughty is the sanctions Minister, and I am sure he would be supportive of the fundamental principle of what you are saying. The broader challenge is that it is taken by conflict—by what is in front of us. However, I take the point that it could in theory be a personal commitment from one Minister but not the next. I would hope not, because it should be all Ministers, and all parties working in this space. But I accept the challenge that you are putting to me around how we try to mainstream that thinking, and I will take that back.

Q113 Sam Rushworth: I have some questions about the meaningful participation of women in processes. The UK's national action plan commits to supporting women's "full, equal, meaningful and safe participation" in peace processes. Is that because the Government feel that women should have equal rights to access in the way that men would in the sense of gender equality? Or are there ways in which women's participation in peace processes is instrumentally important, because women play a unique role in peace processes?

Chris Elmore: I will read you the opening line from my pack, Mr Rushworth, which still shocks me four months into being a Minister in this Department. "When women meaningfully participate in peace processes, the resulting agreement is 64% less likely to fail and 35% more likely to last at least 15 years, yet only 9.6% of negotiations in peace processes involve women."

Chair: Make our argument, Minister

Chris Elmore: Yes. I say that in the context that it should be about equality, and there are tangible benefits to having women at the table. The best example of this in the UK context is Northern Ireland. As much as I and, I am sure every member of the Committee, would put the late Mo Mowlam on a pedestal, I do not just mean Mo Mowlam; I mean the very many women who worked at the entry level of negotiated peace in



Northern Ireland pre-1997, under the Major Government, working through decades of peace work, coming up to the Good Friday agreement and actually now in the current Northern Irish context. There are examples globally of where women are frankly better at this than men for a whole host of reasons, so there is a fact for the record, Chair.

Q114 Brian Mathew: May I throw an example at you from when I was working in Darfur a few years ago? It shows exactly what you are saying. We were working with both men and women on WASH, setting up water committees and so on. We specifically asked that we had women's meetings as well as men's meetings. At the men's meetings we found a lot of, "Thank you very much indeed for this wonderful project," and so on. At the women's meetings, real issues came to the fore about how, when the pipes had been washed through, fights erupted between members of different tribes. It was the women who witnessed that. When it came to seeing how the whole project moved forward, they made the simple point that women from each tribe must be represented on the management committees. That worked really well until the horrors that have come.

Chris Elmore: Sudan is an interesting point, because we have been offering technical and diplomatic support to help establish Sudan's largest anti-war, pro-democracy work. That involves working with 200 women as part of the national conference, and you would probably have been involved in some of that work before you became a Member of the House. It reinforces the point, wrongly, but only women in Sudan would understand that issue because of the hierarchical, patriarchal nature of some of the village life, community life and tribal life that men would not play a part in.

As I mentioned, I was at the conference in Paris where we heard from a female Colombian senator who spoke about the process leading up to 2016 and since, and how they simply see things in a completely different way. She talked about how men were frankly having some sort of epiphany, as it was that time of year, and of, "Oh, I didn't think of it like that." So there are many examples of where women being at the table lead to better negotiations, longer-term peace, and a far better political settlement moves forward and actually lasts longer—statistically, anyway.

Q115 Sam Rushworth: It is not my job to mark the Minister's homework, but I am greatly encouraged by the answer given. It was my work life before becoming a Member of Parliament, so I have seen this up close. What is the UK Government doing to ensure that women's participation goes beyond symbolic inclusion? I am asking about both at grassroots level and in peace processes.

Chris Elmore: That is our role in the multilateral space, trying to make sure of that, whether it is on resolutions or working with the UN on the peacebuilding and prevention work that we support, either through funding or through actual people on the ground who are working directly in-country. Sudan is a good example. I suppose in some ways you are



asking me if we put our money and expertise where our mouth is. The short answer is, yes, we do that and we will continue to do it.

It will probably form part of our work on WPS moving forward to ensure that—to Minister Carns’ point—where we can and where we are able to, we will work towards women being at the table. Quite a solid example of this, and it is tiny progress, is Syria and the work that has been happening there. This is not about direct UK involvement; it is about the important part of transition. There is now a female Cabinet member, and female Members of Parliament or representatives have been appointed. It is about setting the global agenda on this idea where peace is delivered, no matter how tentative or fragile, that the UK then plays a part in the international space to say, “Well, you need women at the table.” That forms an important part of it.

Recently, I was in Qatar where the Syrian Cabinet Minister was there talking about rebuilding and reconstruction. There was an incredibly powerful conversation with the Somalian Deputy Prime Minister, and what struck me was that she was talking about things that I know are really very much everyone’s issues, but they are also women’s issues and they would not have been raised if she had not been in that conversation and part of the reconstruction of Syria.

Al Carns: There are benefits of equality, yes, but primarily performance. There is also a communications issue here, where the more women you have in these places, the more hope you give to a whole swathe of people who look up, emulate, and realise that they can achieve their ambitions. I fully support it. If there were more women in the system, there would be less war. That would be my view. Statistically, we can see it is actually correct. Our Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff, the second-highest person in defence, is female. This is a great signal to all those individuals in defence that you can make it to the very top. I will be really honest: that would have been unthinkable 10 or 20 years ago, so it is moving in the right direction.

Chris Elmore: I was at the UNGA high-level week in September and, even in the UN space, some leading military personnel working in the peacebuilding and peacekeeping areas are now led by senior female officers. It matters. I hate virtue signalling by design, but it is not about virtue; it is actually saying that women do these jobs, they do them very well indeed and it actually means that there is a better outcome. I completely agree with Minister Carns’ point. I am convinced there would be far less conflict in the world if more women were running it.

Q116 **Chair:** On that point, we have been talking about the inevitability of war, conflict and then peacebuilding. Could you both speak a little about the UK’s involvement in preventing conflict, preventing atrocities, and particularly how you would centre that around the work that you do with women and girls?



Al Carns: I can start. The best way to prepare for and prevent conflict is to be ready for one. It sounds quite counterintuitive, but a strong defence reduces the likelihood of conflict. We could argue that the way in which the withdrawal from Afghanistan was conducted sent a signal to the world that the west was weak and, along with a multifaceted variety of reasons, triggered a conflict in Ukraine, which has plunged more people into poverty than any other conflict probably since the second world war, because of the impact on food, fuel, energy and inflation alone. I am a firm believer that a strong defence capability really prevents the likelihood of conflict, but also the forthright nature and the balance of our coalition, allies and partners and our ability to act when we see those international norms being broken.

Q117 **Chair:** How are you trying to centre women in that work?

Al Carns: It is really important that we have senior women throughout our civil service within the Ministry of Defence, and within the Ministry of Defence serving population. Earlier, I mentioned the Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff. We have some really senior and super-effective women in the Army, Navy and Air Force, and long may it continue. We have to increase our inflow of females into the military. Part of that is a communication and education issue, but it is also societal. We want lots of people with STEM to come into the military, but we do not have the right STEM courses in the right place to get females qualified to feel that they can then join the military and add value in some spaces.

Q118 **Chair:** That is our military; I am thinking about where we are working internationally. What are you doing to involve women from civil society in preventing atrocities?

Al Carns: We are working with the CMCC on the piece around Gaza, where we have females there providing support and understanding. They are the interface between the military, civil society and, indeed, the charitable organisations. I have a whole list of countries that we are working in, including technical support to Brunei on women in defence, which is all about educating and communicating to them the benefits of having empowered women in the right positions to add diverse ways of thinking and performance, and to send a message to a large chunk of the population that you can also contribute to national security.

We have trilateral engagement with Japan and Norway coming up in August. We do so much on this. We have a gender conference with the Nigerian security forces. We are working in Kazakhstan, Bosnia, Nigeria and Indonesia. Defence has established and delivered a flagship training course on human security and operations that includes women, peace and security. We have Outreach Group, our specialist military team of subject matter experts that delivers human security and women, peace and security training to partners globally. We delivered a UK-funded international chiefs of defence conference in December 2024, which really focused on women, peace and security. It specifically convenes all the



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military leaders on this topic so they can then run the train-the-trainer package and start spreading it through our partners and allies.

Q119 **Chair:** Let me go one layer down. Minister Elmore, a few years ago this Committee met the mothers from Srebrenica where men were raging around, killing, raping, and starting conflicts. They have mothers, sisters, wives and aunties. What is FCDO doing to empower those women to try to prevent conflicts happening in the first place?

Chris Elmore: The key statistic, Chair, is that since 2019 we have invested £56 million in over 1,000 women's rights organisations in over 100 countries globally. The money, resource and expertise I talked about in earlier answers is something that we are playing a role in directly on the ground. Part of our work with the International Civil Society Action Network includes working with women's rights groups and organisations in Iraq, South Sudan, Turkey, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and east Africa. There is a list.

Chair: We would be really grateful for that list from you both. It is interesting.

Chris Elmore: We can happily supply that.

Chair: Thank you.

Chris Elmore: To slightly expand on the UN space as well, it is quite important that I go back to this issue around language because, as much as it sounds like the same answer, it matters. As part of the agenda around peacebuilding and ensuring early intervention, we do a lot of work on prevention at an earlier point. If we can have women in that space, it means that they will see things that men do not. For example, around arms mobilisation, they will see physical things taking place that the men do not.

Chair: The mothers of Srebrenica said, "Follow where the people move." If people are starting to move, you know you have a problem. If domestic violence goes up, you know you have a problem.

Chris Elmore: Yes, exactly. We do a lot of in-country support with women's rights organisations. That term is quite wide-ranging, but it is about having women on the ground and looking to have this work around peacebuilders being there as an early indicator.

Q120 **Chair:** We find that prevention and early intervention are infinitely cheaper, but it is not as sexy for Ministers. As the cuts go forward and the choices are made, I am concerned that when we seem to have an aggressor on the hill, that early work is overlooked.

Chris Elmore: In the three months I have been in role, I have met with Elizabeth Spehar, the UN Assistant Secretary-General, at a UN space in New York and here. We have had the conversation around trying to



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ensure that peacebuilding and prevention form a really important part of the wider UNAT agenda, where a lot of this work takes place.

On a practical level, in the Security Council, along with other partners, we are making sure that we have women briefers, trying to support those women to come forward, and briefing them in the very highest multilateral space. Again, it is actually part of the multilateral, hyperlocal in-country work and making sure that we keep that space highlighted in a UK context.

Q121 Brian Mathew: Earlier in the conversation, the word epiphany was used. I might throw another epiphany at you, which I saw myself while working in Guinea-Bissau. It was not just the women. We talk about women and girls, but also children can have the most profound voice in terms of their vision. It is their future and sometimes if the voices of children could be brought in to solving conflicts, we would blow these bloody conflicts away.

Chris Elmore: I cannot disagree. One of the areas I have been looking at over recent weeks is around the whole provision of recovery for children in conflict. I had some very good conversations with Action for Children around modern warfare and the impact that it has on children. I feel like I have had far too many conversations in the last three months about children being raped and I do not have to be a father to know that that is just unimaginable. That forms part of a daily cycle in my life as a Minister that should not exist, but it does.

Chair: The fact that some men think that is something that is acceptable for them to do is just extraordinary.

Chris Elmore: Chair, as you will appreciate, Ministers, particularly in the Foreign Office, read diplomatic telegrams from ambassadors, high commissioners and various other people. Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Edinburgh has been in the DRC. She is a huge supporter in this space and a real champion for this work. A line that struck me is that women lie in the street in the DRC waiting to be raped because that is the expectation. The DRC is doing lots of good work on this in trying to tackle sexual violence in different spheres, but where sexual violence is used against women, girls and boys, children, I cannot comprehend it.

I agree with you around the wider work of having children's voices heard. We do some of this work in the human rights context as well. In fact, I am doing some of this work tomorrow as it happens, and I can feel Emily nodding. We have this round of work going on tomorrow—I am sorry if my answer is too long, but I will end on this point—and I am very keen to make sure that we have more witnesses to this work on sexual violence and conflict at the table to explain what has happened to them so that we learn from it in a very practical sense within the Department.

Q122 Chair: We have the former ambassador to the DRC next to you, Minister. Would she like to comment on what we have done and what more could



be done on the specific example of the grotesque disempowerment of women and children?

Emily Maltman: The UK has been working on the challenge of sexual violence in conflict in the DRC for a long time—for far too long. As the Minister described, this is working at everything from the grassroots level, empowering women's organisations that are delivering on the frontline. They know very well what the issues are, have those contacts, and often do this work at great risk. They would probably do it without international funding, but they absolutely benefit from our funding to their organisations to be able to reach people in need.

Chris Elmore: It is £80 million, which is a huge sum.

Emily Maltman: Absolutely. There is a huge programme in the DRC to meet the needs but, unfortunately, the needs are huge and continual. Then, working up to the highest levels of Government, there are things they need to do through their own security forces to make it unacceptable, and to tackle the taboos in society around domestic violence and attitudes to women. All that takes time, but it is something the UK has continued to do over many years and, unfortunately, will continue to have to do. This year, we saw the handing over of the chairmanship of the International Alliance on Countering Sexual Violence in Conflict from Ukraine to the DRC. The DRC will be chairing this alliance of countries next year, which brings some challenges and opportunities to highlight the issues in the DRC, but also the responsibilities of the Government to step up.

Chris Elmore: We are taking the vice chair next year.

Chair: Great. Can you grasp it quite hard, please?

Al Carns: Yes. On top of that, since 2015 we have had the gender protection adviser role in the United Nations, focused particularly on the DRC.

Q123 **Chair:** A couple of years ago, this Committee did a follow-up inquiry on sexual abuse within the aid sector. The DRC was one of the examples that led us to do that, and UN peacekeepers were cited on many occasions. I have to say that the British forces were seen as the example of how to respond appropriately. Are you embedding zero tolerance in our work with international partners, particularly UN peacekeeping? How do you get countries to sign up to that?

Al Carns: We have a zero-tolerance policy which runs internally across all our military. It is primarily against any unacceptable sexual behaviour and it is dealt with at the most severe level. A lot of those changes came in after the Gunner Jaysley Beck case. We work with other countries to make sure they have a similar policy. In some cases, they do not mirror our version, but it is absolutely included in all our planning and engagement. That is primarily around human security which women, peace and security sits within.



Q124 **Janet Daby:** I want to pick up on what Minister Elmore was saying about women and children being sexually abused, and that some people were lying in the streets waiting to be raped. I am always concerned about context, and it would be helpful if you could explain a little more about that.

Chris Elmore: Part of the challenges in the DRC and other countries is that sexual violence against women in this context is so prolific, but it also includes girls and boys. I am saying boys, but it is not to take away from the unparalleled levels of abuse that women and girls face. We are seeing a rise in sexual violence being used against boys as a tool or mechanism of war. It is reality. It is happening in Sudan and in Gaza; there are rising levels in Ukraine. If you look at the rising levels of sexual violence, that is where we are heading.

Another element of sexual violence within conflict is that women are able to secure a dollar or two to buy goods and provisions. These are some of the challenges we now see in relation to conflict and sexual violence. It is a literal reality that none of us wants to see, but it is a weapon of war in a way that most of us would see as being unimaginable, but it is there.

Q125 **Chair:** Minister Carns, I do not understand it, but do you think that sexual violence has increased and that people feel they have more impunity to carry out this behaviour? Or is it because we are seeing more reporting and understanding of it, whereas before it was seen as a spoil of war?

Al Carns: In the military or internationally?

Chair: Internationally, in a military setting.

Al Carns: It comes along with the breakdown of national and human norms. Conflict desensitises people to the most extremes and, as a result, societal norms break down.

Q126 **Chair:** Are we seeing more of it happening because there are more conflicts?

Al Carns: It comes hand-in-hand. Once you remove the societal norms that a country is structured around, and the law in particular, and the likelihood of surviving a conflict is reduced, some people, groups and organisations use sexual violence as a weapon of war to enact terror. It is really unfortunate, but we see it across the world. Russia has actively kidnapped children. Just think about that; it is absolutely—

Chris Elmore: And is re-educating them.

Al Carns: Re-educating them to send them back, in some cases, to fight for them. It is absolutely horrifying.

Q127 **Chair:** Can I go back to my colleague's original question? Your budget has increased; the development money has decreased. It will be the development money that will do that prevention and early intervention.



Will you be looking to prevent conflict by doing more of the development work?

Al Carns: We are always trying to prevent conflict—that is primarily what defence does—but we have to be prepared if conflict were to break out. When we move from, in some cases, the previous 20 years of wars of choice to wars of necessity, there is a bigger bill when it comes to some of the capabilities we need to field. That is primarily when we look at hostile states. We have to make sure we can deter what are, in some cases, very significant threats posed by Russia and others. Everywhere we are, whether that be in Africa or south-east Asia, there is always a human security line alongside it. It is ingrained in what we deliver now.

Q128 **Chair:** Is that human security line empowering women in civil society?

Al Carns: Absolutely. It is women, peace and security that is docked in. We call it human security in the military and part of that is the women, peace and security piece.

Q129 **Chair:** How are you able to evidence that?

Al Carns: We can give you a list. It goes back to the statistics we talked about earlier. In some past cases, we have done a lot of work but we failed to capture the exact impacts of it. It is quite difficult to do in some cases, but we could make a better effort at doing so. My commitment to you today is that we will take it away and try to build up some of that data-based evidence so we can have a bit of a feel for how many people we are reaching, whether it is having an effect, and whether we are seeing positive or negative impacts, and second or third-order effects.

Q130 **Chair:** Thank you. My anxiety is amplified by the fact the UK integrated security fund is reducing and we do not know what its future is going to be. That was very much empowering the ambassadors and civil society groups to try to do the prevention work that you are talking about. Any reassurance you can give us about how you are going to be prioritising that would be hugely well received.

Chris Elmore: We talk in these very horrific terms, which need to be talked about, but if we do not talk about it, people do not see it and they can be a bit blind to it.

It is worth responding briefly to Ms Daby's question around some of the work we are doing in-country. For example, we have deployed specialist sexual and gender-based violence investigators via the UN in Sudan and have been able to convert in-country programmes to offer more support around gender-based violence. There is ongoing work. I would not want to leave the Committee with any impression that we are not there doing this work, trying to make sure that we have the investigative bit around criminal activity and that we will hold people to account, but also on the ground trying to offer the support within the sphere of gender-based violence, FGM, and all those horrific things that are taking place in Sudan.



Janet Daby: I appreciate that. That is sort of what I was getting at.

Chris Elmore: It is worth making that point, because we are there spending the money and making sure we have the specialist provision on the ground, not just in Sudan but in many countries across the globe. It is an important point to make.

Chair: Again, that ties into my colleague's questions around gender advisers when the staffing cuts are happening, and how you mitigate losing those specialist skills when it is so vital to have that voice at the table.

Q131 **Sam Rushworth:** I have a question about resourcing. With regard to the women in DRC lying and waiting to be raped, it is not a passive act. It is most likely a protective act.

Chair: It would probably be their children if it is not them.

Sam Rushworth: It protects the village. That, more than anything, highlights this point that I think we are all in agreement on about the vital role that women play, and particularly women at grassroots, where there is inter-communal conflict. I have sat with women in the Central African Republic who said to me, to paraphrase, "I was the one who faced down the barrel of a gun when they came for my village. And we were the ones who took the guns out of the hands of our boys when they went off." These are women who work together on an interfaith partnership and they asked me for sewing machines, because their sewing machines had been looted. That was the level of their poverty and how under-resourced they felt while leading a national-level interfaith platform.

Minister Elmore, a few minutes ago you mentioned some really impressive work in different organisations that have been funded. This is not at all a challenge to your personal commitment to this, but how confident would you be if we were to get that list and follow up with those organisations to ask if they are still being funded, and that we are still funding to the same extent that we were a few years ago?

Chris Elmore: The short answer is I do not know, because I have not met with them all. I do an awful lot of stakeholder engagement, as you would expect me to as the Minister responsible, but I would not want to sit here and say that everything would be all rosy and great, and they would be happy with everything. What they may say—without putting words in their mouths—is that they know there is a real commitment from within the Department, the team and Ministers. I completely accept you are not questioning our commitment to it, but equally, certainly in country-specific examples such as Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine, they would actually see funding protected and uplifted in many cases. They would also see where we have been able to offer as much support as possible, not just in terms of funding but also expertise.

In my brief experience in this role, I have been meeting with Foreign Ministers and ambassadors. They actually want the resource to do some



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of this work and to have longer-term programmes. It is not just about a programme that runs financially for five years and then, "Thank you very much—that's done," and that is the end of it. They actually want the specialist expertise of personnel on the ground to be able to learn how to do something or be shown how this can work in a different sphere. A lot of that is done through external partners that we'll support through our aid funding or through additional funding on women, peace and security or in the UN space. I do not know, but I would like to think that they would know the commitment is there and it is very real.

Al Carns: The financial mechanism as a measure of effect would give you a false reading. In a lot of programmes that we run, we train up a swathe of people and expect them to take it on through the train-the-trainer package. I would not want to speak for Minister Elmore, but I have a feeling we would welcome work on how we measure the effectiveness, to make sure our taxpayers' money is being well spent in the most effective manner. If we start that and have it hold us to account, then over time we can gauge how much we are actually delivering. That is probably the most impactful thing we can do.

Chair: Would you welcome that?

Chris Elmore: We are looking at that in the Foreign Office context as well, so it is work in progress but, again, we can come back on that for the Department.

Sam Rushworth: What we know from looking at the budgets is that while certain country contexts have been ringfenced, there is a shift in funding away from bilateral and civil society funding towards the larger multilateral organisations. I suspect the answer would be that we would see contexts where funding for work that we all agree is absolutely vital for peace, security and prevention is actually being cut. Taking Minister Carns' point that we can measure things not only by their funding but by their impact, what work is being done to look at that and the impact on UK Government funding cuts on some of this work that we all have a consensus is absolutely vital.

Q132 **Janet Daby:** In terms of UK NAP, the Committee has heard evidence that the implementation of WPS needs to be stronger and address domestic issues including violence against women and girls, and the treatment of migration and refugee women. Minister Elmore, do you recognise this view, and will these issue be addressed in the upcoming NAP refresh?

Chair: The national action plan.

Chris Elmore: Acronyms appear to be my business now, Chair, as a Minister. I am sure Minister Carns—

Al Carns: They are part of defence.



Chris Elmore: Indeed, yes. I always thought there were some acronyms in whipping; there is nothing like it in the Foreign Office or maybe in the MOD, I do not know.

To come to the point, there is a broader conversation. You will be aware that the week before last, the Foreign Secretary announced a global tackling violence against women and girls action plan. There needs to be more information shared around that but it is—I would not say a personal commitment of the Foreign Secretary—a lifetime's work of the Foreign Secretary. Whether in Government last time, as Chair of a Select Committee, as Foreign Secretary or Home Secretary previously, or just as a human being, this has been her work for decades. In a global space, we are moving towards those conversations.

I know you asked about domestically, but I think it is about the wider tackling violence against women and girls strategy within the Home Office, and about seeing a reduction by half in that work just yesterday, which is probably lucky for me. I was listening to the response to the urgent question from Minister Phillips on the strategy, which I think is due to be announced shortly. I am not involved in any way, shape or form so I am not commenting; I am not involved in this sphere of work. What came across in some questions, particularly around migrant women, is that that funding, I believe, has been increased in the UK context. I do not know what the answer is for that, but I think she gave some assurances that we are not going to comment on the strategy before it is announced, but reading between the lines, the support is there and should continue to be there.

On the broader work, that will form part of the refresh next year and we obviously want to see the engagement from within civil society and parliamentarians around this work. Please feed that in as a Committee or as individual Members because we want that dialogue. I think it was the Chair or Mr Law who asked whether we could share some of that work. As I have said from the outset, we will try to make that work as best we can and you should give us your views.

Q133 **Janet Daby:** Thank you. You have touched on my next question. Witnesses to the Committee have highlighted that the WPS national action plan's commitment to a robust monitoring and evaluation framework is still needed. Do you have a plan to introduce this?

Emily Maltman: As we have said before, there have been, and in reality there will continue to be, challenges about gathering data, particularly data from different sources, countries and settings. In the NAP, we would like to build a mechanism that allows us to really measure not just the output level of things that we are doing but the impact of that. It is not an easy task to do when you are trying to change attitudes and push for reform, but we want to take the best mechanisms we have across the FCDO and Government to try to measure and use data better in the future.



Q134 **Chair:** Why is that? I would have assumed it would have been built into every project that we do, so why have we been so poor on that?

Emily Maltman: The challenge with women, peace and security in terms of how we deliver it is that it is delivered by lots of different teams in lots of different countries or through central teams as well. The design of that is not done by women, peace and security teams, so when we try to collect information from colleagues and implementing partners—

Chair: Who is it done by then?

Emily Maltman: The design of those programmes?

Chair: Yes.

Emily Maltman: In Afghanistan, for example, it will be done by teams working there and how they are doing women, peace and security throughout the different types of initiatives or interventions. It would be the same in Colombia. In a sense, the nature of women, peace and security is so broad that everybody is doing it everywhere, and so we do not commission a specific way of doing it in every place.

Q135 **Chair:** Going forwards, will you? That makes me very nervous, because in other topics where that happens it is scattergun, you are tripping over each other, and you are not learning from best practice. If the Foreign Secretary has a particular view on the direction of travel on the policy, how can you say whether the team in Argentina is or is not delivering on it? That also makes me nervous.

Emily Maltman: It is a challenge to globally track the delivery of a specific issue that is quite broad in terms of the attitudes, access to services and justice, and the security of women in these very different types of countries. The national action plan is where we make very specific commitments for the FCDO, MOD and other Government Departments that are part of that, to develop a clear mechanism for how we will measure those commitments within the national action plan. In reality, the national action plan will not be able to capture everything we are doing everywhere; it will be the best mechanism that we can design with the resources that we have.

Chair: Which other Departments?

Chris Elmore: I am not cutting across, but it might be helpful to mention obviously the Home Office, the MOJ, the NIO, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Scottish Government—it is about trying to make sure that we work across the devolved sphere as well.

Q136 **Chair:** Will there be a ministerial taskforce associated with that?

Chris Elmore: Yes. Part of this is a steering group, so we have that sort of work going on. It will continue into the new year as part of the review in 2026.



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Chair: Presumably, that board will be kept so that you can do your yearly or bi-yearly—

Chris Elmore: Yes, plus there is a shadow board within the civil service that keeps the operational work going as well, so it is two-tier in that sense.

Stuart Mills: From an MOD perspective, to ensure that we are getting the broadest range of views as part of the NAP refresh, we have already hosted two engagement sessions with civil society and various experts on WPS and conflict-related sexual violence.

Chair: UK civil society or international?

Stuart Mills: UK civil society and experts. We will be looking for other opportunities to consult, to get their expertise and make sure they are factored into our thinking. Recommendations from this inquiry will be vital as we shape the updated NAP as well, so we are trying to get a broader range of views and bring them into the updating process.

Q137 **Janet Daby:** That is great. In December 2024, it was reported to this Committee that 94% of the NAP's commitments are in progress. Do you have an update on that? What is happening to the other 6%? That would be very helpful.

Chair: We are never satisfied.

Chris Elmore: It is the same; it is the same figure.

Janet Daby: That is fine if that is the answer.

Chris Elmore: It is quite high, in fairness.

Janet Daby: We are still looking at that 6%, but it is very high.

Chris Elmore: It is always good to never be satisfied; that is very true. We will keep pushing where we can.

Q138 **Janet Daby:** Will the Government shift to annual reporting to Parliament to give parliamentarians a greater role to assess progress on the WPS agenda? Or is it something for you to think about and consider?

Chris Elmore: In short, it is something that we can think about as part of the review that will take place next year. It is also about trying to make sure we have the correct accounting mechanisms, but I will take it back.

Al Carns: The shorter the timelines, the more time we spend preparing the work to get evidence rather than delivering. There is maybe a discussion that we could balance this out. In particular, if we can get our methodology of measuring effect up and running, it will become far easier for you to hold us to account.



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Q139 **Chair:** Minister, as you tell us, you are only three months in post so I do not know if you know the answer to this or if Emily does. I am still a little concerned about why we do not have robust data for all the different schemes that we are running internationally. Is that a new thing since FCDO came on board? Was DFID any better? DFID had a reputation of being very good on its data capture and transparency. Has there been a change?

Emily Maltman: It is worth clarifying that every programme that the Government have that is ODA spend has gender and social inclusion markers—the GESI markers that you might be familiar with, from A to E and so on. Those are robust and have data, but GESI markers do not equate to women, peace and security and we do not have a GESI WPS mechanism that would do the same sort of data capture. It is overlapping and—

Chair: Could you? Is that the ambition?

Emily Maltman: Potentially. The data that we would capture from ODA spend through GESI would have some contribution to WPS, as we have said in all the interventions in the Committee, but delivering WPS and our ambition on that is not limited to ODA spend. That is a form of data, but there is all the other data about political and diplomatic engagement, and engagement at the UN. That bit is the harder mechanism to capture; the FCDO has continued to try to develop mechanisms for capturing that sort of political activity, but it is not an easy one to do in the same way that programmes are.

Q140 **Chair:** Are you capturing, for example, the schemes that Minister Carns was talking about?

Emily Maltman: Certainly in terms of the way that MOD is contributing to the monitoring mechanisms, yes.

Al Carns: There is also a slight difference—in some but not all cases—in the way the different Departments deliver, which may be through a charity or a second or third-order connection, whereas ours is often our own people delivering in conjunction with a host nation, an ally or a partner, which means it is easier for us, perhaps—the team are probably shuffling in their seats behind me—to capture the data and work out how we measure it.

Q141 **Brian Mathew:** On cross-departmental working—or lateral management, as I like to call it—civil society organisations have criticised the Government for a siloed approach to women, peace and security implementation. How specifically are you working together to ensure a whole-of-Government approach?

Al Carns: On the national action plan, you are working in conjunction with the FCDO. This is done at an official level, with officials at every level. It is well-connected. The delivery mechanisms are sometimes different. I do not want to go over old ground, but we need to work



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collectively to measure the effectiveness of our programmes to work out whether we are delivering them in the best way.

Chris Elmore: I can only really add about the ownership issue. We are talking about the Home Office, MOJ, MOD, FCDO and the NIO. We are criticised quite regularly around not engaging with the devolved Administrations, yet the Northern Ireland Executive and the Scottish Government form part of the co-ownership work. These things are always a challenge, but the work at official level with the shadow board is robust and very clear.

Equally, the ownership level among Ministers means you have multiple Departments working in this space, which will form part of the 2026 review. The ownership and the collaboration are working well. External organisations and civil society need to work with us now in what comes out of the review ready for spring next year to see what we then deliver upon. In that sense, the level of Departments and devolved institutions working in this space is actually quite robust and strong and there is good co-ownership in that regard.

Brian Mathew: Emily, would you like to comment?

Emily Maltman: I have nothing further to add, but that official level collaboration remains strong.

Q142 **Brian Mathew:** Witnesses highlighted Canada's example of appointing a women, peace and security envoy to improve oversight and promote cohesion and accountability. Will the UK appoint a WPS envoy?

Chris Elmore: It is a very interesting point. Baroness Harman is envoy for women and girls. We now have a wider review of the envoy roles. I cannot commit to there being a specific WPS envoy, but it is part of the mix of this wider review that will take place early next year and forms part of my wider work with my ministerial responsibilities for WPS, PSVI, and for women and girls. Equally, making sure we have those envoy roles working and how they fit in within the WPS and other areas of the women and girls agenda will be crucial.

Q143 **Chair:** Minister, I would like to push you a little, because we have heard that this work is very much cross-departmental. Having an individual envoy who can liaise with all those different Departments and have that oversight would be extremely helpful. Everything I am hearing from you both is that this is an area that you are very committed to, so having that standard bearer would be a really useful thing.

Chris Elmore: We obviously have Baroness Harman as the envoy for women and girls, as I mentioned. We have the PSVI envoy role as well, which is part of the review. I am happy to take that back as part of the representative role and make sure that people are there to champion it. Fundamentally, as you will of course know, Chair, I am the Minister responsible for this, so I am fundamentally accountable for the decision making in that process.



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Q144 **Tracy Gilbert:** Minister Elmore, how do you ensure that gender mainstreaming and considerations of women, peace and security are implemented across the entire FCDO and not only around the teams that expressly focus on it?

Chris Elmore: Mainstreaming in this space is actually part of effective delivery of the national action plan—to assure collective awareness and responsibility across Government and the Department that ensures we are delivering for women and girls in this space in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. It is one of the areas where we want some mainstreaming, because it has such a tangible impact on what is happening in-country or within the Department.

The team will work within the Foreign Office on particular areas because they are of course specialists, but we want the mainstreaming to be there because what we do not want is for there to be support needed in a country or within a mission and we suddenly go, “Oh, no, we’re terribly sorry but we’re going to refer it to the specialist unit,” because what that does in the sphere of women is make it the secondary conversation again, which is not what any official or Minister wants across the NAP process, so it is very much mainstreamed with a purpose.

Q145 **Tracy Gilbert:** Again, in terms of cross-departmental working, we have heard that interventions that are successful at mainstreaming are not always leveraged across Government Departments. Why do you think that is?

Al Carns: From my perspective, internally within defence, we have our permanent joint headquarters and human security. We have the same in our single services. That trickles all the way down to a relatively low level in the commands. We have taken this really seriously. We have three dedicated policy teams at the strategic level that help us formulate this: the department of security policy, defence people, and the new violence against women and girls taskforce that was created under the last Government but, nevertheless, we thought needed more action. We have an Outreach Group that has 110 regular and reserve personnel who have this within their job description. We have trained over 400 people, and provided awareness training to over 500.

I can only speak from my experience, especially of the advanced command and staff course and the higher command and staff course. Human security and women, peace and security were included in the syllabus. We are hitting every command element that comes through, which is really important. From a defence perspective we are doing well, but we have further to go. We always have to do more, but we definitely take it seriously.

Chris Elmore: Within the NAP, we also make sure that this works across key Whitehall Departments, whether that is working in the multilateral space or within Government Departments, civil society and Parliament. We try as much as possible to include it within the commitments in the



domestic space. We do the best we can; we can go further and we will probably form part of that work next year. It is very important to have the mainstreaming while also sitting as a separate team, so that it can respond to some of the conflict challenges that are taking place, and they complement some work around PSVI, and women and girls. It works well and delivers on the ground, which is the crucial part of this work.

Q146 Tracy Gilbert: You have both given us quite a lot of reassurance today in terms of your personal commitments, but we have heard some criticisms about token mainstreaming that has to be done out of compliance, levelled at both the MOD and FCDO. How would you respond to those criticisms?

Al Carns: Do you mean compliance with our ability to enact both human security and WPS into our own Department?

Tracy Gilbert: Yes—that cross-departmental work and the notions of that.

Al Carns: We have to be an honest broker in defence and accept that we have more work to do. We are moving as hard as we can on the violence against women and girls taskforce as a tri-service. We have just put out an unwanted sexual behaviour survey. We have revamped our victim support units.

Interestingly—this is where statistics, damned statistics come in—the more people feel comfortable complaining about unwanted sexual behaviour, the higher the spike in complaints we have, which gives you, in some cases, a disproportionate view. It can result in an adverse reaction when, in reality, what we want to see is a spike with people being comfortable to complain and then, as they are dealt with more effectively, it becomes less and less. We have more to do, and we are moving as fast as we can. We have some great teams. We have a lot of resource behind us now, and I would like to see the oil tanker move a bit faster.

Chris Elmore: On some of the criticism, at the end of November the MOD and the FCDO led an event with the Foreign Secretary and Minister Jones around this work to put WPS at the heart of the agenda of both Departments. More broadly, I could take the criticism on the chin and just say, “Okay, that’s their view,” but actually what we are saying is that we will amplify women’s voices in peacebuilding, and step up efforts on ending sexual crimes in conflict. It is putting the words into action and doing that across different Departments and obviously internationally, which is the whole point of this.

It is now embedded in the work of the Department and will continue to be increased as we move to a new regime around 0.3% and with changes in staffing. We have to move to better targets, and push the agenda all the time around mainstreaming, so it is not just seen as piecemeal. Those things will actually matter because if you have that directive from the



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most senior levels within the Department and Ministers, then it needs to change the mindset. It does not mean that there will not be challenges and bumps along the road as we get to that, but in this particular space it is important for it to be mainstream, because then it forms part of everyone else's thinking, as well as having the unit sitting alongside it within the FCDO.

Al Carns: We have to be honest with ourselves. If we design a measurement of effect and we are not delivering, we should reappropriate the resource elsewhere to make sure we maximise delivery. Your help in supporting us with that would be good.

Emily Maltman: Could I add to what the Minister is saying about how we do it? The other thing around mainstreaming is, of course, supporting people to do it, so that people who might not have done it before, or who might be new to conflict settings, are thinking, "I want to do this, but how? What am I supposed to do?"

We have a series of different support interventions as it were. One of the main ones we fund right now is the help desk on women, peace and security. It is called Gender Peace and Security and is funded by the ISF, which has really pushed the boundaries in the national security space with colleagues working on national security issues inside the FCDO and in posts overseas. We have also created a whole different range of training opportunities.

More recently, we created a community of practice, which is an informal network of colleagues across the Department and across Government to get together, hear from external speakers and experts, have tools, and a shared online space where we can build that sort of peer-to-peer learning to make it real. It is about creating momentum as well and not just tokenism, as you said was the criticism.

Chris Elmore: There is money behind that as well, with £4.85 million of funding reallocated within the gender national security portfolio and, within that, £0.7 million for the help desk, which will help any HMG Department.

Q147 **Chair:** How much is that a year, Minister?

Chris Elmore: It is for this financial year, supporting the actual programme.

Q148 **Chair:** Is there any commitment to it beyond this financial year?

Chris Elmore: Once budgets have been allocated, it will form part of our decision making.

Q149 **Chair:** This is fundamentally my problem.

Chris Elmore: It's about what is next. Yes, I get that.

Chair: Yes. I am hearing that you are both very committed to this but,



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with respect, Ministers come and go. The budget may or may not be prioritised for this area and, from bitter experience, women's rights are hardest fought for and they are the first to go. For the last 25 years, we have signed up to the WPS agenda. We have collected pens along the way, but we still hear the examples that you have given us about the frontline and what it is like for women and children. How do we get a commitment that, if we are potentially moving away from gender specialists and specific funds, it genuinely is embedded in all the work of the MOD, the FCDO, the Home Office and other Departments, whichever one it is? That is the concern. Hearing that you have the ministerial team gives me some confidence that it will be embedded, but is there any way that the two of you can reassure the Committee that it is going to stay as a priority and, one hopes, be staffed and funded accordingly?

Chris Elmore: The first part of this is that it is a joint-led project across Government between the FCDO and the MOD, but then there are other Departments as well, which I will not repeat. It is about holding us to account in this space, which I understand you will. There is a genuine element of this with parliamentarians scrutinising the work of Ministers, whoever they may be—taking your point on the chin that Ministers come and go—but it is about that element of scrutiny and us being able to prove as Ministers and officials as we move towards increasing the targets on how you mainstream, making sure that it forms part of all this work, and that our reporting mechanisms are there to show that this is working.

Undoubtedly, there will always be challenges, criticisms, critiques—whatever you want to call them—around this process, but we need to set up systems that show this is working and give tangible outcomes. If it is not working we need, as Minister Carns said, to change it so that we continue down that line. There is then the scrutiny element of Parliament and Committees.

Al Carns: We will continue doing what we are doing. What I would like to ensure, and I have looked at this in detail, is that we can categorically say it is working. We have a lot of deep data at the moment that says it is, but I want to see some more granular data on that, and we can then apportion funds to where they have the most effect.

Chair: Thank you, Ministers, team and the Committee, for your time today.