

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: UK response to atrocity and conflict prevention and the role of the Integrated Security Fund, HC 209

Tuesday 23 June 2026

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 23 June 2026.

[Watch the meeting](#) (this evidence session may include content that some viewers may find distressing)

Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Monica Harding; Noah Law; Brian Mathew; David Mundell.

Questions 1-77

Witnesses

I: Nathaniel Raymond, Executive Director, Humanitarian Research Lab, Yale School of Public Health; Dr Kate Ferguson, Co-Executive Director, Protection Approaches; Matthew Smith, Chief Executive Officer and Founder, Fortify Rights.

II: Baroness Chapman of Darlington, Minister of State (International Development and Africa), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; Will Hines, Humanitarian Director, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; Kate Viner, Deputy Head and Senior Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Lead, ISF Transition Unit, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Nathaniel Raymond, Dr Kate Ferguson and Matthew Smith.

Q1 Chair: We are now starting this session on the UK's response to atrocity and conflict prevention, looking particularly at the role of the Integrated Security Fund. We are extremely privileged to have three witnesses in front of us with whom the Committee has worked over many years. We really value the work that you do—at great personal cost, I have to say. We hear you and we try to amplify you whenever we can, because we do appreciate what you do. I will start by asking you to introduce yourselves and say a little about the work that you do in this field. Matthew, could I start with you, please?

Matthew Smith: Thank you so much. I am Matthew Smith, CEO and founder at Fortify Rights. We are an international human rights organisation. We essentially do three things in the area of atrocity crimes: we are investigating atrocities; we are engaging Governments, institutions and others on solutions; and thirdly, we do what we refer to as strengthening work. We are working to strengthen community-based responses to mass atrocity crimes. Uniquely, our team comes from places where we work. The team at Fortify Rights comprises survivors of genocide, war crimes and other crimes, as well as human rights defenders from the communities and places where we work.

Chair: Our inquiry in the last Parliament did a report on atrocity prevention based on how valiantly people like you in Myanmar tried to make the world aware of what was going on there. It led us into an inquiry in which we worked with Dr Kate Ferguson as our specialist adviser, so thank you for all that you have done in that space.

Dr Ferguson: Thank you so much. I am Dr Kate Ferguson, the co-executive director of Protection Approaches. We work to prevent identity-based violence. We were founded in 2014, and ever since then we have had a core programme on atrocity prevention, which has been aimed specifically at strengthening the UK's approach to mass atrocity crimes. Yes, I served as specialist adviser during this Committee's inquiry on the UK's approach to atrocity crimes.

Nathaniel Raymond: I am Nathaniel Raymond, executive director of the Humanitarian Research Lab at the Yale School of Public Health and lecturer in epidemiology. I am here in my personal capacity, not representing Yale University. The Humanitarian Research Lab uses the fusion of very high-resolution satellite imagery and other remote sensing data in combination with open-source information to detect threats to civilians in near real time, to provide decision support information to humanitarians, and to document alleged crimes against civilians and provide evidence for accountability.

Chair: Thank you. I will alert anyone watching this that Nathaniel has given us some written testimony, which we have now published. I draw



people's attention to it because it documents the detail and the timeline of how you were trying to raise with FCDO and with other organisations what was happening in El Fasher in an attempt to stop the genocide that went on there. We thank you for all the work you and your team did on that, and I urge people to read it if they are able to. Let me pass over to Noah Law.

Q2 **Noah Law:** Matthew, thank you for all the work you are doing. Could you outline the importance of atrocity prevention work to countries like Myanmar?

Matthew Smith: Certainly. I think few things in the world pose as grave a threat to humanity as atrocity crimes do. Taking Myanmar as an example, Myanmar is a place that is home to the world's longest running civil war. For 78 years the Myanmar military, in various iterations, has waged war against the people of Myanmar. Right now, there are approximately 3.7 million people—I believe that is the latest UN figure—internally displaced in the country, largely because of atrocity crimes.

Taking a wider look, including the refugee population there are about 5.3 million people displaced since the coup attempted in 2021 in Myanmar. For the people of the country, we are documenting airstrikes, shelling, village burnings, torture, arbitrary detention, forced recruitment and other acts that essentially amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Myanmar military is, of course, responsible for genocide against the Rohingya population, war crimes and other crimes and atrocities nationwide.

There have been quite a lot of solutions to this attempted, but the devastation that it has wreaked is economic, political, physical, spiritual—all of the above. I think the one solution that has not been fully attempted in the context of Myanmar is accountability. No one from the Myanmar military or armed groups has faced international justice and accountability—not a single person. We believe that that is partly why mass atrocity crimes in Myanmar are continuing in the way they are. There is entrenched impunity in the country. People's lives have been completely up-ended, particularly since the coup in 2021. We believe that with some accountability, even a stronger international push towards accountability, it will change the decision-making calculus of the military elite.

Q3 **Chair:** Matthew, what could accountability look like?

Matthew Smith: Well, we have a semblance of it now unfolding with the Rohingya genocide case at the ICJ, which is of course important and historic. Then there is also an ongoing investigation by the ICC. However, these two efforts are very narrow. As important as they are, they are focusing exclusively on accountability for a particular set of crimes that occurred in 2017.

Chair: I was going to say that it is also retrospective.



Matthew Smith: Precisely, yes. Moving forward, there is some concrete action that the UK could take. We have been advocating for state parties to the ICC to make a referral, to refer the whole situation in Myanmar to the prosecutor at the International Criminal Court through article 14 of the Rome statute. Going back to 2021, the National Unity Government of Myanmar lodged what is called a 12(3) declaration, essentially giving the court jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute atrocities there. Considering the Ukraine context, for example, and Russia's full-scale invasion into Ukraine, within days there were 43 ICC member states that banded together to refer the situation in Ukraine to the prosecutor. This enabled a full investigation into the crimes, which is ongoing. Of course, it is not a silver bullet, but in the case of Myanmar we do believe that an effort like that would change the decision-making calculus of the military regime.

Q4 **Noah Law:** Matthew, you mentioned that the lack of accountability is one of the reasons why this is such an acute issue in Myanmar. I am wondering to what extent you think that that is the case the world over for atrocities—that it is that lack of accountability through, for example, courts of international law. We are very aware of other instances of that. What makes it particularly acute in Myanmar? Is it that narrow focus that you mentioned or something else?

Matthew Smith: I do agree with that. I think impunity is a global scourge, and international justice and accountability is, of course, in its infancy if we consider the wider lens of history. In Myanmar, we have interviewed defectors, particularly since the military coup in 2021, and some defectors, including some high-level defectors, have shared with us the thinking of the military. There is quite a lot of work that will have to be done towards international justice, but we do know that the military right now is emboldened. They are emboldened to continue with their atrocities, bombing, conducting airstrikes on displacement camps, on churches, on hospitals, on schools and massacring civilians. They are doing this because they believe they can get away with it. So if the tides can change and if Governments can band together to begin signalling that this is unacceptable, that this has to stop and that people will be held accountable, we believe it can change the dynamics in Myanmar in particular.

Q5 **Monica Harding:** Matthew, can I ask—and I think this will become a theme throughout this afternoon—about the supporting actors in this: the countries that surround Myanmar geographically or that are interested in Myanmar, and where you expect that push for accountability to come from? Is it from the usual suspects and, in that, is America present or not present? What about the other Europeans, and what about China?

Matthew Smith: There are, of course, powerful states that do not want groups like Fortify Rights working on atrocity prevention, including my home Government, the United States. I think this is evidenced primarily through President Trump's sanctions of the International Criminal Court, which effectively criminalises giving evidence of mass atrocity crimes to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the court. That is something that we are addressing in US federal court now.

More broadly, there are two ICC member states in south-east Asia, Cambodia and Timor-Leste. Timor-Leste could be an important country to lead an effort from the region, but it certainly does not have to be regional. In the case of Myanmar, any number of ICC member states, or a single member state for that matter, could refer the situation to the court to ramp up pressure. Coincidentally, an article 14 referral is something that I believe the former Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt recommended earlier this month. It is also something that the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights has recommended to ICC member states. It could come from a number of places.

Q6 Chair: Are you seeing any movement on that?

Matthew Smith: We thought we were through one particular ICC member state, and unfortunately that has not come to fruition. We are, needless to say, very grateful for this hearing and for the opportunity to have this conversation about it. It would not necessarily have to be a single state; it could be a coalition of states. It also does not really require state resources. It is not as though an ICC state party is committing to a long-term trial. This is really a letter that would essentially be sent to the prosecutor acknowledging that there are serious atrocities unfolding in Myanmar and bringing those atrocities to the attention of the court. Of course, there is quite a lot of other work to strengthen international justice more broadly, but as a first step this could be quite important.

Q7 Noah Law: Matthew, turning to the work that the UK is supporting, what is the value of countries like the UK investing in atrocity prevention in Myanmar?

Matthew Smith: It is crucial—particularly now, in a situation where aid cuts have been so devastating. There are humanitarian aid cuts, and cutting humanitarian aid to a group like the Rohingya, for example, in Bangladesh works against atrocity crime prevention. In that sense, humanitarian aid is not unrelated to atrocity crime prevention. Generally, efforts from the UK to prevent mass atrocity crimes in Myanmar are crucial. There are not enough states committing to this, particularly in this day and age, so if greater attention can come to atrocities in the country right now, I think it could make a difference. Certainly, there is an ongoing resistance nationwide that has been calling for accountability.

It is worth mentioning, as well, that it is not just the military regime in Myanmar. There are resistance armies in the country that have also committed mass atrocity crimes. Our team in particular has been dealing with that as well and working for accountability in those areas.

Q8 Chair: Matthew, I am sorry to pull you back. I paraphrase, but you said that there is a reluctance for states to call out genocide and atrocities.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

That is quite an extraordinary position to be in. Why is that happening?

Matthew Smith: I think it is perhaps for political reasons. If we cannot diagnose these problems—if we cannot diagnose genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity when they are happening—we cannot hope to prevent them.

Chair: Exactly.

Matthew Smith: Yes. I think there has been this—

Q9 **Chair:** When did you see the rot starting to come in, that people stopped calling it out? I know in Bosnia and Srebrenica it took a while, but nothing like the scale of reluctance that we are seeing right now.

Matthew Smith: Sadly, I have encountered this for the last couple of decades with respect to Myanmar. I have been working in the country for the last couple of decades, and certainly when the Rohingya genocide was unfolding there was enormous reluctance. It took many years, in fact, for states to acknowledge that genocide was occurring against the Rohingya population. There is this desire, I think—particularly in ASEAN, although it has been waning a bit—to engage the Myanmar military over the years as if it were a good-faith actor, when we know from history and certainly from the blood on the military's hands that this is not a good-faith actor. There are bodies, individuals and organisations in Myanmar who are and who deserve to be supported and engaged. The National Unity Government and other resistance efforts throughout the country right now would be included in that.

Q10 **Noah Law:** Matthew, you have mentioned aid, particularly to refugees, as a means of prevention. You have mentioned that as a key driver. You have mentioned the role of international law. What else could the UK do to prevent future atrocities in Myanmar?

Matthew Smith: I think that right now there are a number of human rights organisations that are struggling. The funding cuts have been quite dramatic over the years, and there are groups working on atrocity crime prevention that need support, even including Fortify Rights. We have had two independent charities, including one based in the UK, that have pulled funding from Fortify Rights because of our criticism of China's human rights record. They interpreted it as a risk. We would like to see Governments, and for that matter foundations and charities, willing to support mass atrocity crime prevention regardless of the home of the perpetrators, more support for mass atrocity crime prevention, and more support for organisations that are on the frontline doing the difficult work. They are going to be doing this work regardless. It is much safer and much more effective when they have the financial support to do that work. We would definitely recommend that.

Q11 **Noah Law:** What, in practice, has been the impact of these cuts on your organisation and others undertaking this atrocity prevention work?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Matthew Smith: We have certainly lost considerable funding, and other organisations have as well. It makes the work a little bit more difficult. It does require resources to remain safe. It requires resources to collect reliable and credible evidence of mass atrocities. We are continuing that work, but we could be doing much more if the pendulum would start swinging in the other direction, and we hope that it will. More broadly, these efforts to protect civilians, to empower communities, to support community-based responses to these atrocities, to support the communities that are closest to where these things are happening, require resources. For that work to continue, we hope that we can see the pendulum move back in the other direction to supporting this work globally, not even just in Myanmar.

Q12 **Chair:** Matthew, I believe everything that you are saying, but I am still somewhat incredulous. You would think the absolute basics that states should be supporting are maternal health rights, nutrition, WASH, and preventing mass murder. Are you seeing a back-away from atrocity prevention and then calling out the consequences of that across the board, or are there just particular states that have been supportive in the past that are now backing away because of political or financial reasons?

Matthew Smith: Well, certainly the happenings in various parts of the world have drawn attention away from Myanmar, and that has been a problem for many years. That is not to say that other conflicts in other situations should not be receiving the attention that they are receiving; it has just been an unfortunate reality for the people of Myanmar that atrocity crimes occurring there over the years have not received the same attention that other places have received. I think that is part of it.

I think the Myanmar military has demonstrated a certain durability over the years that is unique—more than 70 years, with a few democratic blips along the timeline. For the most part, this has been a place that has been ruled with impunity, really. Melting that giant ice block down is going to take some time. We do believe it is possible. Certainly, our hope comes from the people of Myanmar themselves. The amount of work that is happening right now to restore democracy in the country is extraordinary on local levels between various groups throughout the country—levels of co-ordination we have not seen in quite a long time. That does give us hope, but things like sanctioning the International Criminal Court send the completely wrong message internationally to perpetrators or would-be perpetrators of mass atrocity crimes. What it says is that if you commit mass atrocity crimes, you can get away with it and there will not be a court that will take you down. Those tides need to turn.

Q13 **Monica Harding:** Can I just return to focus on the UK itself? Has there been enough focus from the UK in the last decade on Myanmar particularly? Often when we ask the Government whether they can sort this country out, they say, “We cannot be everywhere all at once. We do not have the budget to do all this.” What would be your response to that?



Matthew Smith: We are very grateful for the UK's intervention at the International Court of Justice Rohingya genocide trial. We have Rohingya members on the team at Fortify Rights who are grateful for that. Certainly, the Rohingya community wants justice and accountability, so when states came forward and supported The Gambia's effort in that case, that was very meaningful. That was positive.

On this issue of an ICC referral, again, it does not require resources. It is not a silver bullet, but it is a step in the right direction. The world needs to be moving in that direction with regard to the atrocities in Myanmar. I certainly understand that certain states cannot be everywhere all at once, but there are efforts that can be undertaken, particularly when we are talking about mass atrocity crimes. Few things in the world pose as grave a threat to humanity as mass atrocity crimes, so it should be elevated to an importance when they are occurring. It is not as though states are being asked to fund a million and one various programmes in a place. This is about crimes that are international because they offend the conscience of humanity. I think the gravity of them would require more attention than what they are currently getting.

Q14 **Chair:** Let's be clear: we are talking about crimes against civilians, in the vast majority of cases.

Nathaniel, could I turn to you? Building on what Matthew has told us, your work has been focusing on Sudan, and a lot of the interventions that I have seen and the evidence that you have documented and shown to parliamentarians here has been around El Fasher. I wonder whether the changes within FCDO have helped or hindered the UK Government's ability to amplify the very powerful evidence that you were presenting to them. Do you basically feel that the FCDO did as much as it could to try to stop the genocide that was going on in real time, which you were literally showing them satellite images of?

Nathaniel Raymond: To answer the second part of your question first, no, they did not do everything they could. Specific individuals in the atrocity prevention team in specific moments acted honourably, and in some cases heroically, to attempt to do what they could—within political constraints, however, that prevented the assets of the atrocity prevention team from mattering. At the end of the day, the atrocity prevention team was in a command environment on a ministerial level in which there was political capture by the risk of affecting the relationship with the United Arab Emirates that would be required to be confronted if the threat to El Fasher was to be addressed. In short, the atrocity prevention team was a bright light in a dark sky of, basically, an absence of political will to deal with the strategic alliance of the RSF's main military enabler, which made the massacre in El Fasher possible.

Q15 **Chair:** To summarise, you are suggesting, or your evidence is indicating, that the FCDO decided to take the relationship with the UAE over calling out the mass atrocities that you could document were going on?



Nathaniel Raymond: 100%.

Q16 **Chair:** Okay. Why?

Nathaniel Raymond: Because it was easier. To fully protect the people of El Fasher required four steps. One is a statement by HMG that the risk of genocidal killing was imminent. They had that intelligence. They did not say that. Even saying that without mentioning the UAE would have been a powerful protective act by HMG. That did not occur. It was platitudes and tweets and press releases about both sides needing to constrain the fighting and allow humanitarian aid. In some cases, there were specific mentions of RSF, but there were no mentions of the imminence of threats at specific junctures, most notably in April of last year with Foreign Secretary—at the time—Lammy chairing a conference here in London. As Zamzam fell, as Zamzam burned, as women and girls were taken to be sex slaves, the Foreign Secretary said nothing at that time and he was warned. As my statement shows, I spoke to his senior staff while they were in Chad. They called me and we warned Foreign Secretary Lammy's personnel at the highest level that the threat to Zamzam was real, a clear and present danger and imminent. There was no statement before the fall of Zamzam, despite that intelligence. That is one example of many. So that is the first step.

The second step is then saying what the pin in the grenade is, so to speak. In this case, the pin in the grenade was the United Arab Emirates. The advanced UAVs, artillery systems, command and control, electronic warfare and mercenaries that made the RSF victory in El Fasher possible were directly coming from the United Arab Emirates, and they knew that. There was no effort to confront the UAE directly, which would have been the inhibitive atrocity prevention action to stop the flow of the decisive weapons to the genocidal killers.

The third step is to create what Foreign Secretary Cooper has now begun to do—and thank you, Foreign Secretary Cooper, for building a coalition around atrocity prevention. Unfortunately, we cannot turn back the hands of time, but those efforts would have been needed earlier.

The fourth and final step is the irony that the UK—and this is a statement of the UK's essential critical value—as penholder on the UN Security Council elements within FCDO led, and I think deserves plaudits for leading, the effort to pass UN Security Council resolution 2736, which was the most substantive atrocity prevention step. HMG deserves all the credit in the world. However, what occurred is we then saw and, based on confidential source intelligence, received direct communications from the UAE to the leadership of the RSF upon the passage of 2736, telling the RSF to hold its assault. We could see from space, 450 miles above the earth's surface, these vehicles grind to a halt at the moment we were receiving that message.

In submarine warfare, there is something called a Crazy Ivan, where when a submarine is being followed it turns suddenly to see if anyone is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

behind it. That is exactly what the RSF forces here did. They pulled a Crazy Ivan because Abu Dhabi, according to our source, ordered it.

During that period, tens of thousands of El Fasher civilians, if not over 100,000, had their best chance to escape. We watched them crowd the roads in trucks and on foot and donkey carts and run for their lives. That pause was their last escape chance during a siege that was three times the siege of Stalingrad and three-quarters the siege of Leningrad during world war two. It was at that moment they made a break for it. When the UAE and RSF assessed that there would be no enforcement of 2736, that it would not have an effect on the backers of either RSF or SAF, they began the attack again. It was at that moment that the bright window of what 2736 provided fell apart because of a lack of political will to see it through. To see it through would have required confronting an ally of both the United States and the United Kingdom.

Q17 Chair: So you would support what Matthew Smith was saying: that if there is accountability on the international stage it definitely has a direct effect, but not using that effectively emboldens people to continue with the killing?

Nathaniel Raymond: Correct. In this case, the greatest form of accountability—it will sound pedestrian but it is true—would have been a threat to people going to duty-free shop in Dubai. It did not have to be ICC or ICJ. It had to be a threat to mall shopping or going to Jumeirah beach.

Q18 Chair: Yes. Let me read a little from the written testimony that you have given us. I urge people to read it in full—it is published on the Committee's website—because it speaks to the hypocrisy that you are talking about. It says, "FCDO said nothing about the sacking of Zamzam, despite the Foreign Secretary hosting a multinational donor conference on Sudan at the very moment this atrocity was occurring. HRL"—your organisation—"is not aware of any UK statements being released. To put the scale of this atrocity into perspective, the estimated population of Zamzam IDP Camp was at least one-third to half the population of Gaza—estimated to be at least 500,000 to as high as 1 million people."

Then you go on, "I believe FCDO, including the Atrocity Prevention Team, UKUN, and Sudan team, prioritised HMG's economic, security, and diplomatic relationships with the UAE above preventing the intentional starvation, forced displacement, and the genocidal slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians living in El Fasher and its surrounding communities. The failure across two successive UK administrations to stop the El Fasher massacre from occurring appears to be the result of a leadership commitment by HMG to place the strategic relationship with the UAE above the international legal obligations to prevent genocide the UK and UAE are treaty bound to uphold." Do you stand by that?

Nathaniel Raymond: I stand by every word of it.

Q19 Chair: Are you able to provide this Committee with any evidence that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

would verify these positions?

Nathaniel Raymond: Yes.

Chair: You could write to us on it, or if you want to give it now that would be most helpful.

Nathaniel Raymond: On the critical moment, one example, to provide specific evidence, is from a meeting I had at FCDO headquarters on 15 May 2024. I shared with them information we had that, until this statement was released a few minutes ago, had not been public: that HRL, through commercial data, had accessed phones of the RSF. We found that these phones were moving through Bosaso, Somalia, and through Addis Ababa. As you can understand, we did not make our exploitation of that phone data public because it was essential to be able to conduct early warning operations by knowing where they were moving with their telecommunications.

One phone in particular moved from Addis Ababa to Abu Dhabi in four hours. That is critically important, because there was no commercial flight at that time between Addis Ababa and Abu Dhabi. Additionally, there was no air traffic control transponder data showing a plane flying that route. What that means is that likely a military vehicle with its transponder off was transporting people who had recently been inside high-level forward operating base headquarters for the RSF in Zalingei and Nyala. These phones, when they would arrive in Abu Dhabi, moved to locations that were shell companies controlled by Abdul Rahim Dagalo, the operations chief of the RSF. Those shell companies were engaged in mineral processing and import/export.

I shared that information with the FCDO. They asked if I would release it. I was struck by the request on multiple levels. In particular, why does the epidemiology department at Yale School of Public Health, not SIS or GCHQ, have to release this intelligence? What is the rationale? Well, the rationale, as it was explained to me, is that the Government of the United Kingdom was under pressure, threats from the UAE, if they confronted the UAE on its support for the RSF. We were basically asked to triangulate to provide political top cover for 10 Downing Street.

I supported the underlying goal of the request. We were in common agreement on the need to show evidence, in this case dispositive evidence, of the direct operational relationship between the RSF and the United Arab Emirates, which this phone data did indicate. However, there were operational security risks by showing this data, which would preclude us from being able to use it for future warning. What we decided as a team was to reveal weapon systems that were consistent with weapons systems known to be either in the UAE arsenal or to have links to the United Arab Emirates as a way to demonstrate these ties, consistent with the request from FCDO, without basically losing a critical information asset to be able to predict attacks.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

It was a difficult balance-of-consequences decision, but the request, which I think was meant by the personnel to do the right thing, showed the fundamental political capture at the high level of the British Government that they were actively concerned about a direct reprisal of some form by the UAE if they held them to account. I want to say to this Committee that we need to reflect on the fact that a public health lab at an American university is being asked to do the work of statecraft.

Q20 Chair: You have mentioned both No. 10 and former Foreign Secretary Lammy. Do you think it was at that political level, rather than the civil servants, that had the reluctance to act or were actively trying to protect relationships with the UAE?

Nathaniel Raymond: I believe the civil servants of the atrocity prevention team in particular were attempting to, as we say in America, throw the kitchen sink at it. They were attempting everything they could do, but they were doing so within a box of political constraint. In the US military, there is a term, "the bedrock principle of command accountability". My concern about the release of the statement from me and my colleagues at HRL today is that the equivalent of captains or majors in the Foreign Office will be thrown under the bus, so to speak, for decisions that were taken by the equivalent of generals. They lived in the political world that they lived in and they worked within those constraints, in some cases admirably, but the fact of the matter is that the bedrock principle of command accountability means that the buck must stop with the leadership. It cannot be the responsibility of a three or five-person team to try to turn the whole ship of state. Independence in atrocity prevention, particularly independence about the sharing of intelligence, is critical. Without independence, all the technology and all the resource investments mean very little.

Q21 Monica Harding: You speak about two incidents. One was in May 2024 and the next was in October 2024. During that time, there was a change of Government. Is it your understanding that that attitude towards the UAE, or the pressure that was being put on the Government, was the same and that Ministers were acting in the same way despite the change of Government?

Nathaniel Raymond: I saw no difference between the Administrations, and the operational context of the response to the information we provided to the Foreign Office did not change. I will flag the 26 September incident when we had a briefing with UKUN in 2025, one month exactly before the fall of El Fasher. We had been told in 2024 that we should not say the city was falling unless we were absolutely sure. That is what the Foreign Office told us: to only say once, to warn once, when we were sure the city was falling. We had a UKUN officer there who was despairing about the lack of options from London and the lack of any options to stop what we said was an imminent fall.

As you can see, and we have shared it with the Committee, we wrote what we call the "five minutes to midnight" draft cable. We provided that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

officer with a direct memo to send to London, saying, "Contingency plans for a genocidal killing in El Fasher in a humanitarian disaster must be made by HMG right now. They are attempting to breach the last minefield. We can see breaching vehicles in position. The Joint Forces have been neutralised and now the city is about to fall. Here is what you need to send to London." We told that individual in the Foreign Office that there would eventually be a parliamentary inquiry. When that parliamentary inquiry, such as the one we are in now, occurs, they need to be able to have said on the record that they had done everything they could when the warning was clear, the intelligence was definite and the threat was imminent. To help that individual, we gave that individual the words to cable to London. We believe that cable was sent, but we don't know. That is something for a future parliamentary inquiry to determine, but you have our draft that we sent that individual.

Q22 Monica Harding: Just to be clear, had the UK Government called out the UAE, there would have been lives saved?

Nathaniel Raymond: Absolutely. The fact is that we cannot sit here and guess what would have happened, but we have evidence that shows the sensitivity of the UAE to any criticism and the sensitivity of the UAE to critical allies, such as the United Kingdom, holding them accountable. I think that it is essential for a future parliamentary inquiry to assess within Government documents what deliberations were occurring about the potential value of holding the UAE accountable and why that option was not taken. I think that is a probative line of inquiry.

Q23 Monica Harding: Do you have any evidence, or can you give us any understanding, of the pressure that the UAE was putting on the UK Government?

Nathaniel Raymond: Diplomats from other members of the Security Council and the United Nations would speculate about that pressure, saying it was economic. In my conversations with the Foreign Office, to be clear, they did not specifically say what the pressure was. They said that the pressure was significant. However, we do know that both the United States and the UK, and particularly the United States in October 2024, signed a major defence partnership with the UAE. It is one of only two countries in the world with which the US has an MDP, the other being India. The UK and the US have extremely close security relationships with the UAE. While it was never stated by the Foreign Office that that was what it was, that was the context that was happening at the time diplomatically.

Q24 Monica Harding: Can I return to your comments on Foreign Secretary Lammy during the Zamzam camp attack? What should have happened, in your opinion, at that point? What statement should the UK have made?

Nathaniel Raymond: He was in Chad at the time. That day they were returning from visiting the refugees from the Geneina slaughter in 2023. The world press corps was following his visit. He had the cameras. If I



HOUSE OF COMMONS

was the Foreign Secretary, I would have stood in front of those cameras and said, "We are receiving disturbing reports and confirmation of indiscriminate artillery bombardment with UAE-linked AH4 long-range precision artillery, and there are reports that RSF forces are moving in and around Zamzam. It is essential that RSF and its backer cease operations right now or face specific consequences."

Q25 **Chair:** Do you think he knew that?

Nathaniel Raymond: Well, I told his staff that. I told his staff while they were in the field. They had called me because they were unable to get through to the White House, and they asked for alternative contact numbers. I connected them with the State Department and the special envoy's office to attempt to facilitate their communication. In the meantime, I provided a brief to them that we considered Zamzam an urgent threat. It would be just about 10 days or less after that, in early February, when an initial incursion attack into Zamzam burned part of the camp, including the market.

You have to understand that our concern there—and this should have been the public concern of the Foreign Office—is that the people in Zamzam were so weak from months of starvation that, if they were forced to flee, they would die from exposure due to a lack of electrolytes in the desert heat on the road, which is exactly what happened. We had an imminent threat of people dying not simply from bullets but from the fundamental weakness that they were experiencing from an intentional campaign of starvation, causing them to expire on the road. I communicated that directly to the senior officials who worked with Lammy, who were with him in Chad.

Q26 **Chair:** Where I am struggling is that this Committee has recently done a report on international humanitarian law. If we believe there is an atrocity happening, as a signed-up member we have a duty to act to try to prevent that atrocity. Do you think that all the levers were used to prevent an atrocity, not just on that day but the subsequent days?

Nathaniel Raymond: No, not at all. Declaratively, no.

Q27 **Monica Harding:** Looking at Sudan today and what seems to be a threat in El Obeid happening right now, what would be your advice now to the Foreign Secretary?

Nathaniel Raymond: I thought deeply about the answer to this question this morning at breakfast, and here is the answer. It would be exactly the same advice we gave on El Fasher: warn. That has happened. Thankfully, there have been strong warnings in the past 48 hours on El Obeid.

The second thing is the fact that there has not been a statement on the UAE, and the fact that the main RSF attack mode right now is suicide drones that are linked to UAE support and fixed wing drones. To call out specifically those who are providing the main weapons being used in the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

current siege and attack on El Obeid would be a critical step for Foreign Secretary Cooper to take.

The third thing is to basically lay out, which has not happened, a set of public consequences on the RSF, SAF and its backers if the siege continues. The fourth is that we need to hear more about what steps are being taken for the current humanitarian situation inside the city, plus a second-order displacement rush out of El Obeid.

I want to say one thing about the physical terrain of El Obeid that people need to understand. There is one road in and one road out. The civilians there are basically caught in a funnel. As RSF is attacking from one side, the back end is where all the civilians will rush in the rainy season with high risk of cholera out of the IDP camps inside the city. The international community, led by the UK, should be talking very specifically about how they are going to prepare for a second-order displacement through that funnel, where we could have significant secondary casualties.

Q28 David Mundell: I, along with others, have repeatedly asked the Government about the role of the UAE, not just in Sudan but most recently in Yemen, and we are stonewalled in the answers as to what steps are being taken. What do you realistically think would change the situation? I fear that even your evidence today, or even a parliamentary inquiry beyond this inquiry, would not change the underlying position of the UK Government. What do you think would change their approach, in terms of the relative weight that they are giving to the relationship with the UAE compared with what has happened to civilians and others in Sudan and elsewhere?

Nathaniel Raymond: Frederick Douglass, in writing of the abolition of slavery in the United States, said, "Power concedes nothing without a demand". It never has. The situation you describe is the result of there being no demand from the British or American public whatsoever for their leaders to take action. Twenty years ago, it was the opposite. The very camps that became kill boxes in El Fasher were set up by the success of atrocity prevention in the Save Darfur campaign during the first genocide because students, celebrities and faith leaders were on the streets across the United States and the United Kingdom demanding a peacekeeping force in Darfur. Now, 20 years later, there is no such demand. To answer your question simply, if people in Manchester were burning Emirates jerseys, we would be having a very different conversation.

Q29 David Mundell: I am noting what you said. My next question is for you, Dr Ferguson. How does Mr Raymond's account compare with your experiences giving assessments and advice with the FCDO on El Fasher and other atrocities such as those that have taken place in Gaza?

Dr Ferguson: A lot of it chimes very much. There are obviously a number of meetings that we took separately, but throughout the number of years Nathaniel and I have often been in the same room or virtually in the same room. A number of the dates tally. I have very similar dates of



when I was in touch—or trying to engage, which is probably a more honest word to use—with ministerial offices, the Sudan desk team and the atrocity prevention team. I think that in addition to the high politics that Nathaniel has set out, there were other issues that inhibited stronger actions being taken, particularly around El Fasher but more broadly on atrocity prevention in Sudan.

Q30 **Chair:** What other issues?

Dr Ferguson: The ICAI report made public what I think a number of us had been concerned about for a long time. The ICAI report says that there was an options paper on civilian protection for Sudan that was put together—I think it was in September 2024—and its language is that the least ambitious option was taken. It is my judgment that some of those decisions were less to do with high politics and actually to do with structures of the FCDO, a failure of culture and the absence, still, of a strategy, policy or set of protocols when it comes to genocide and other atrocity crimes. It has been a constant battle for years before violence broke out in 2023 and in the years since to raise the ceiling of ambition when it comes to atrocity prevention in Sudan.

It is my judgment that there has been something of an ideological reticence within the Sudan geographic team towards the concept of atrocity prevention, and I have spent a long time trying to work out why that is. This is about a culture, not individuals. I think that some of it can be explained potentially through the vestiges of a colonial culture that we have seen over a number of years—I am not limiting it to the last three, but I have seen in the last three years that behaviour, not just towards the crisis in Sudan but sometimes towards its civilians and its diaspora. I think that is why the function of the atrocity prevention team—and maybe we can come on to what its function and mandate is and how that needs to be expanded—has been so important. I don't think that that moment that secured the El Fasher resolution would have taken place without that atrocity prevention team. There have been other moments where individuals or that team were able to offer expertise specifically regarding the trajectory and pathology of identity-based violence that enabled further steps to be taken.

If I may add a point on Monica Harding's question about the difference between the two Administrations, a number of us were working very closely with then then Minister Andrew Mitchell. I wrote a brief that came to him very late at night. Being him, he read it immediately. A number of us were then in his office, with both representation from the atrocity prevention team and the Sudan geographic. A couple of things happened as a result of that meeting and in the conversations that followed, which was at his request for us to be thinking about how we could do more on atrocity prevention. Another NGO colleague and I were asked to write a list of the people he should call and what he might say. He did not commit to doing it, but he wanted the options. That is interesting because, while I will always send in options—I have sent in countless lists



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of options of what this Government can do in the face of atrocity crimes in Sudan—that is technically the job of officials within the FCDO.

I remember this particularly because the moment that we hit send on that list, a general election was announced. There is something that we need to learn from that moment, because during that election period Andrew Mitchell as a Minister was suddenly bound and was not able to do a number of actions that he had already set in motion. There was a critical moment in that summer that Nathaniel has just set out. Thankfully, we were already leading up to the resolution, so that was in play. At the moment, the UK's capability under our election rules is limited, even in situations so grave as trying to avert a disaster such as genocide. I think that needs to be noted and the Foreign Office needs to look at it.

The other thing I will say is that I do not think that there was enough preparedness on what the new incoming Government could do in responding to Sudan. I think that there was a dip, actually, in the change of Government both as a result of that election period, which meant that momentum on a number of high-level fronts was paused, and then also during it. It is difficult to come into power, and Sudan, I think, paid a bit of a price for that.

Q31 Chair: The thing I do not understand is that we regularly meet the atrocity prevention teams, the development teams and ambassadors around the world and based here and in East Kilbride, and they are exceptional, passionate people who are at the absolute top of their game. I am finding a mismatch between what you are describing to us and the passion with which those people live their lives, and surely preventing the slaughter of civilians is right at the top of their list. If, to take your example, Minister Mitchell was effectively frozen because of the general election, surely the civil servants would be pushing through with those actions.

Dr Ferguson: I recognise that characterisation in a number of the officials I work with, and I have said on this Committee and others regularly that some of the proudest moments of my life have been working side by side with officials in our FCDO. However, I also think it is true that there is actually a big problem of a culture around accountability. We have talked about accountability a lot today.

Chair: So it is internal accountability, as well as—

Dr Ferguson: What is the internal accountability for taking decisions? Who took the least ambitious decision for UK policy and what were the consequences? I don't know the answer to that, but there must be a way of raising a cultural ceiling of ambition, because at the moment the thing to do is to hesitate. Time and time again on El Fasher, often with Nathaniel and often with others, when we felt that that surge was coming, or even when we felt that we had some time—because you do not wait just until the city falls.



Chair: It is too late.

Dr Ferguson: That is not what preventing genocide is. You are constantly working, constantly pushing and constantly trying to buy time, and sometimes you do it, and tens of thousands of people are able to leave and you save their lives. I think that there needs to be an internal investigation. This Committee's inquiry recommended a number of measures, including the need for there to be a strategic approach. The Government said that they were not yet ready. Sudan and Palestine and other cases have paid the price, but so have our officials, because there has been no guidance, no strategy, nor any protocols for when sufficient evidence is breached that then action must be triggered. There must be a duty to consider at the highest ministerial level the warnings that my organisation and Nathaniel's and others were putting in and when so many lives are at risk.

This is not just an issue for Sudan. We saw it again and again and again on Gaza—the lack of transparency and accountability of when enough evidence has been breached. Then it is a political decision, but then the Government need to be transparent and accountable for taking the political decision either to act or not. I think that is a real lesson of why we have not seen bolder action. The other is that the atrocity prevention team itself is nowhere near as senior as it should be. They need to have significant political heft if the prevention, mitigation and response of atrocity crimes is a strategic imperative, which it of course absolutely must be.

Q32 **Chair:** Are you not convinced it is?

Dr Ferguson: I am not convinced it is, because they are too easily sidelined, over a number of years, on a number of crises. I am not only talking about Sudan here. There has been the suggestion that it is inappropriate to be talking about issues of atrocity prevention when you are also talking about the humanitarian consequences of them. That is a cultural challenge that hopefully the restructure can address.

Chair: We would probably like to come back to that, but first Noah and Monica want to come in.

Q33 **Noah Law:** I think you have probably more than answered my question, although perhaps I could just dig a little bit deeper into some of the difference between your interpretation, Kate, and yours, Nathaniel, which says essentially that there have been failings at the highest level of Government, from Ministers. These are very serious allegations. Kate, you suggested that, perhaps in parallel with that, there have been cultural failings ingrained into a certain level of the FCDO that need addressing. My question is: which is it? Is it both? That deference of responsibility that you described—is that through poor briefing, intentionally or otherwise, or poor engagement with briefing? I would just like to get to the bottom of whether this is Whitehall or the very highest level of Government.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Dr Ferguson: It is an important question. Certainly, I am not pushing back on Nathaniel's assessment. It is a "yes, and". My reflection is what I have more frequently witnessed. I think it is both. One big problem is thinking about whose job it is—whether it is in a ministerial office, so the position of a more political adviser, or within the civil service—to come up with the options that the Minister can then take when atrocity crimes are either imminent or are under way. We need to have an answer to that question.

It is essential that not just our Foreign Secretary and Ministers, but the Prime Minister, have access to the most sophisticated, most expert, most confident independent advice on what their options are to mitigate these kinds of crises. I am not confident that that advisory function currently exists, because it is a different function from the civil service. The civil service has to be neutral, and it is there to take forward the objectives and policy of the Ministers. We come back again and again to the problem that there is no policy on atrocity prevention. We still have no strategy. Both Ministers and officials need to recognise that this is not something that limits you; it is not something that traps you. It buys you more political space. Imagine if we had had an atrocity prevention strategy ahead of 7 October. It would have given a framework to respond to those atrocity crimes that were committed on that day, and it would also have given us a framework to respond not just to an armed conflict, but also to a series of atrocity crimes against the Palestinian people. It is the same for Sudan.

One of the most important findings of the Committee's inquiry on atrocity prevention, which the UK Government adhered to and agreed, was that atrocity prevention is distinct from conflict and therefore requires distinct expertise. We have got some way in the intervening years, in that we have this team that is now genuinely in peril, in my view, in the restructure. I hope that the next session can give some real assurances that we will not see any downgrading in numbers of staff, expertise, funding or budget lines, and certainly nothing that will compromise the UK's ability to uphold its obligations, because it is not able to do so with current capacity.

I think it is a number of problems. On the point about civil service culture, I spend my life working with and towards different parts of the UK Government: not only the Foreign Office, but bits of national security and our domestic Departments. The culture, when crisis hits or when crisis is coming, is to ask for more evidence, which is a problem. It was always a problem, but in a period of information overload, when you can get as much open-source intelligence as you like and there are going to be people selling it to you left, right and centre, the cheapest thing to do if we have no money is to listen to the people who know, who are most proximate to the crisis, and to trust them. They know when they are less safe, and they know what they need, and that is also a very cheap thing to do.



The other thing is to absolutely have some consequence for indecision. At the moment, there is none. It is perfectly permissible in the face of ongoing warning, ongoing escalation and a pattern of violence where there is an inevitable end of catastrophe, as we saw in El Fasher, to hesitate. That is a problem of culture rather than individuals, but I do think that if we are going to talk about accountability, there must be accountability for taking decisions and also for indecision.

Q34 Monica Harding: I want to come back to the gap. I think we can accept, while we do not approve, that the gap between general elections may structurally produce the results that you have talked about. It is still true to say that at the point at which the new Government came in, atrocity prevention was not a priority. Push back at me if you disagree with this, but if it had been, then why the reluctance when it—geographically, let alone thematically—actually raised its head? I would like your reflections on that. If it is or it is not, why is the UK in this situation now, when historically we have been such an advocate against atrocity prevention, and have been the architect of the post-war settlement in Bretton Woods, and so on? Why are we in this position now?

Dr Ferguson: Specifically on Sudan, it is my understanding that Minister Mitchell did try to make atrocity prevention a priority, and from my recollection, at least for a short time, there was a surge of personnel from the central atrocity prevention team into the geographic FCDO. That is one of the things that then enabled the El Fasher resolution. Then, both in New York—not only by the UK, but by NGOs and by other states—there was this summer of looking at civilian protection options, and then, as we have heard, that momentum dissipated.

I do think that it is worth reflecting on whether ministerial objectives and stated rhetorical commitments to protect civilians and to do more is then reflected in the set of options and implementation that takes place within the civil service. There is a mismatch in the ICAI report, where my understanding is that the decision to take the least ambitious option must have been within weeks of then Foreign Secretary David Lammy being at the Security Council, giving that very passionate speech, saying that the UK would never forget Sudan. He said, "To do so would be unforgivable." Then we have this conference in London, where, again, some quite big ambitions from that rhetorical leadership of the Foreign Secretary were not matched, in my view, with a considered strategic approach to how to hold that conference. We were working extremely hard to advocate for the creation of a coalition of conscience, or a coalition to prevent further atrocities, and it took the fall of El Fasher, the leadership of the current Foreign Secretary and the work of the Development Minister to get that up and running.

Even now, I am concerned. While it should not have taken the fall of El Fasher, atrocities in El Obeid and many other towns can still be prevented. The UK has taken extraordinary leadership in creating a new ad hoc coalition to prevent further atrocity crimes, but I feel like I need



assurance to ensure that that ministerial leadership is reflected in the expertise, resources, strategy and political heft that is then being implemented within the civil service. It is my view that it requires a far greater expansion of the atrocity prevention capabilities as a whole, at a high political level. Otherwise, we will fall into a trap of more accountability, more monitoring, and not responding differently to El Obeid, as we should have done for El Fasher.

Chair: Let me pull you back a little bit. We have a lot of questions that we want to get through, so we might end up having to ask you to write to us with some of your answers, because we want to cover the ground. Brian, I think you wanted to push on a point that has already been raised.

Q35 **Brian Mathew:** Before I get into that, I want to say that I am flabbergasted and appalled by what have been described as failures at the highest level of Government. The question in my mind is: do we not, as a Committee, have a role not only to name and shame, and I think we do, but to raise the next crisis that has been mentioned—which could be El-Obeid; that sounds quite likely—to try to ensure that that is not repeated? That may be a rhetorical question, but it is one that I want to mention. Let me go on to say, who should be responsible and, in your assessment, to what extent is lack of resourcing the primary reason for failure in policy?

Chair: Let me give some context to that. You spoke to us about the ICAI report, where the least ambitious option towards Sudan was taken.

Dr Ferguson: On the resourcing point, I do not think that the reason that the least ambitious option was taken was resourcing. That is not my view. Put simply, it is a failure of culture and it is an absence of strategy. As I said before, I have observed repeatedly for a number of years an ideological reticence and resistance towards the concept of atrocity prevention within some within that Sudan team that has been extremely frustrating.

Q36 **Chair:** You are narrowing it down to that particular team rather than across the board of FCO, DFID and FCDO. You have worked in this area for a while, and you have seen a number of these issues emerging.

Dr Ferguson: It has been one of the most difficult I have ever worked on, and even when there has been ministerial leadership, because there has—whether that was Andrew Mitchell; I think David Lammy took steps forward; I think Jenny Chapman has done; I think Yvette Cooper has done—I am not saying that there is consistency there. That is not to challenge Nathaniel's evidence either, but I have repeatedly observed a reluctance. That is also not consistent; there are brilliant people within that team who have also fought hard for it. It is not the only reason.

There is an absence within our Foreign Office of high-level, experienced political expertise of navigating situations of genocide and crimes against



humanity. It is my view that if you are to be Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, whoever you are and from whatever party, you have to recognise the trajectory of the world and recognise that the primary crises that our Government is most concerned with—Ukraine, Sudan, Iran, Israel, Palestine—all have at their heart this kind of violence. You need to have a special adviser who understands how to navigate that, understands that trajectory of violence and can support you in it. I do not think that we have that sufficiently in No. 10 within the ministerial advisory structure or in a clearly identifiable part of our Foreign Office. There are many very experienced diplomats who are good at that.

- Q37 **Chair:** Let me push back a little bit, because Foreign Secretary Cooper has led on the violence against women and girls agenda. When we did our atrocity prevention inquiry, I was very struck by how domestic violence, hate crime and the escalation of those things are an indicator of the start of atrocity. The skills are within the Department. Is it that they are not joined up, or is it that they do not have the clout?

Dr Ferguson: I think they do not have the clout, and I think if you had asked me this question—how long have we been in this restructure?—18 months ago, my answer might have been different because the atrocity prevention team was building, was growing in strength and seemed to have good backing. Now we are in a period of restructure, where my understanding is that the humanitarian directorate, which is now where the conflict and atrocity prevention expertise sits, is going to have to rationalise seven departments into four. That worries me, because you are entirely right that there is analytical, monitoring, political and the cultivation of new systems regarding these kinds of warnings and understandings of this kind of violence, and they are at risk. I hope that we can get assurance that we are not going to see a reduction—

- Q38 **Chair:** Unfortunately, we are haemorrhaging high-level experienced staff right now because of the staffing cuts, but also the seeming watering down of our development portfolio.

Dr Ferguson: Absolutely. The third problem is an absence of accountability, which I have already spoken about. I think that there is no accountability for taking the least ambitious option. I do think it needs to be scrutinised who and how that decision was taken—not as a witch hunt, but it is my view that issues of such magnitude should be taken up at a ministerial level. If it was, there was inconsistency, and if it was not, that is, to me, undemocratic overstep.

- Q39 **Brian Mathew:** The situation now is likely, as you say, to become worse because of the reduction and changes. As I am picking up, what is needed is courage, and courage at the highest level of Government, to call these things out. That has been missing, and I think our Committee needs to make that point.

Chair: I agree.



Dr Ferguson: I think it is courage and knowledge, actually. I have spoken to a number of Ministers and they want to do more, but there is such ministerial churn that they have not been in post that long. We are unusual: Nathaniel has decades on me, but we have spent our lives looking in the face of this type of violence. You need to have people to advise you, with courage, on what can be done rather than downgrading what those risks are and thinking about what the safest option might be for you. I think it is both.

Nathaniel Raymond: May I make a brief intervention? After Rwanda, the United States, facing a similar situation to what we are discussing today with HMG and El Fasher, instituted four reforms that I think are useful to discuss here. One is the creation of an atrocity alert protocol within the State Department, which also connects to what is called the dissent channel, which is the ability to send a cable outside the chain of command and issue a formal atrocity alert within the Department to the National Intelligence Council and the National Security Council.

The second thing is that the responsibility for atrocity determination rests under US law with the Secretary of State and what is called an atrocity determination, under the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act. It specifically gives the Secretary not only the power, but the responsibility, to be the one who determines the atrocity declaration.

The third thing is the creation of what was called the special ambassador for war crimes, which then became the special ambassador for global criminal justice. That section of the State Department was to be able to create an independent senior-level political duty holder for the Secretary on these issues, which was missing in the case of the political affairs section in Rwanda.

Fourthly and finally, there are procedures based on the atrocity declaration for protocols of response in specific scenarios, known as MAROP—mass atrocity response operations—with a MAROP manual for policymakers and a MAROP manual for Department of Defense operations planning.

I want to say two things here, after recounting those reforms. One is that passion is no substitute for protocol. The second is that heroism and courage are no substitute for statutory requirement. At the end of the day, it is dangerous when we rely on the heroism of junior staff to be the emergency brake when the car is going down the hill with the brakes out. We created, in the American example, for good and for bad, reforms in the aftermath of Rwanda, based on the incredible heroism of Prudence Bushnell when she was at a junior level trying to get National Security Council response. The point is that here we must embed the command responsibility in law so that there is no doubt about who the duty holder is.

Q40 **Chair:** I think you are making very strong points. We are hearing them and we are noting them down, because we have run way over. You talk



HOUSE OF COMMONS

about the heroism and the courage of the people inside the machine trying to get it to be aware of what is going on and trying to prevent these atrocities. I have dealt with Kate and Nathaniel—it has been my pleasure to do so for a number of years—when you have been trying from the outside to make that happen. Matthew, you have been in a similar situation. I wonder if you could speak to how that impacts on you personally. Nathaniel, I have sat in a room while you have been live-streaming people being blown up, and you and your team do that every single day. Kate, I know that you have been WhatsApping, trying desperately to get someone to take seriously what is going on. Matthew, with the intense frustration when you are seeing people being slaughtered and no one takes the relatively administratively minor step, as you say, of triggering article 14, how does that feel? What keeps you going?

Nathaniel Raymond: I will speak personally, and I will speak bluntly. My outrage at institutional failure, in the face of preventable genocidal killing, I see as a duty to stay angry, as the obituary and the memorial for these people. They deserve someone to be angry for them. I used to be angry about my anger, and now I see it as a sacred responsibility to stay angry so that there are not further preventable deaths like theirs. That is my job.

Chair: That is an honourable endeavour. Kate?

Dr Ferguson: You are going to make me cry, Sarah. It is hard. I think that to believe in your country and to believe that your Foreign Office and your Government can do more is what has driven my whole career. I believe in our Foreign Office and what it can be, and I have learned to my great surprise that I am really quite deeply patriotic. I believe in our country so much, and it disappoints me too often.

What keeps you going, though, is the people you walk alongside. It is people who show up and reply to the message that you have sent to them at 11 o'clock at night, because that is when the shelling happens. It is when you are with people who, like Nathaniel and like others in this room, understand that you are walking through this fire on behalf of other people who do not get to sit in rooms like this, and that weight is huge.

You are then trying to hold the equities of recognising that our Foreign Office is made of people, and some of them are amazing, but some of them make mistakes. Those mistakes can sometimes be small—it can be in tone; it can be in how they speak to local community organisations—or they can be massive mistakes in taking the least ambitious option to protect populations. It can be to say, "Don't cry wolf: you can only come in here once and tell us that this city may fall," which totally belies an understanding of how genocide takes place. That gets inside you, and that is really, really hard, when there is a sense that we are not doing this out of good faith, and deep fury and outrage.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I wish that there could be a little bit more trust, because I think that when it is hardest is when you are not working together towards finding a solution but you are seen as somehow adversarial. We hold different bits of the puzzle. Jobs in Government are really, really hard, and we respect them.

Matthew Smith: In short, it has been devastating, frankly. We try to pay a lot of attention to mental health at Fortify Rights, and it is something that we are committed to. For example, I have worked in situations of armed conflict and genocide and atrocities for some time. I have access to medical professionals, I have access to a supportive family, I have access to loved ones and social support networks, and I have personally still been devastated by things like post-traumatic stress. That makes me think how much more difficult it is for people who are on the frontlines who do not have access to these things. We would love to see more funding for mental health in the area of atrocity crimes in particular.

We have hope, though. I have hope personally. We are very careful about the objectives that we set at Fortify Rights, and we sometimes go through that agonising process of acknowledging that a certain objective is unattainable. When we set an objective and when we achieve it, that is one step toward prevention, or one step toward justice or accountability, and we try to celebrate those moments. But I would be remiss if I did not say that it is and can be completely devastating.

Chair: Thank you all so much—not just for being here today, but for what you do day in, day out. I know that you live and breathe this. You are incredibly moral and honourable people, and it is my absolute pleasure to have you here in front of us. What you do, not for yourselves but for this planet, to try to hold those who have the power to account so that they can do what is right for the most vulnerable people on this planet, is phenomenal. I really, really appreciate you.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Baroness Chapman, Will Hines and Kate Viner.

Chair: I apologise that we are running late, but you can understand, having heard the witnesses, why it was important to get their testimony and their evidence on the record. They are people I know you are all aware of and have worked with over the years. I think it was important for them to get what they have seen, what they have witnessed and what they have tried to get on the public record on the public record. We appreciate your allowing us that indulgence. Rather than going through formalities, Minister, could you just briefly introduce your team, and then we will go straight into the questions?

Baroness Chapman: Will Hines is our director—



Will Hines: Humanitarian director.

Baroness Chapman: Humanitarian director. Kate, I do not know your title.

Kate Viner: I am the lead on the ISF within the FCDO.

Q41 **Noah Law:** Thank you for being here, and no pressure, given the gravitas of what we have just heard from the previous panel. What is your vision and ambition for the FCDO's conflict prevention and atrocity work?

Baroness Chapman: The way we work this at the moment, a lot of effort goes into detection and early warning, and then when we think we have to do something, there are decisions to be taken. There was a whole discussion that I heard the end of just now about propositions being put to Ministers and options being discussed. That is how it should work. Then we should decide what we are going to do, given the unique situations that we find. That is how it works at the moment.

I was interested in listening to what your witness from the US had to say, particularly his pushback about how this is not just about courage; you need protocols. I am very sympathetic to that. We certainly have an opportunity to consider alternative approaches. We could regularise our approach that we have at the moment and put that into a more of a standardised way of looking at things. We have well-established tools that we use. We have JACS assessments and other tools that we make, that we share, and they are publicly available.

What would be a realistic aim for the FCDO on this is that we do become—we have global expertise in this. With the new community of expertise that we are building on conflict and violence, this type of work is going to be where I think we could do more. We could integrate it better across our systems. We have recently trained 250 people in atrocity prevention. I would like us to become globally known for being very good at this. That takes consistent leadership; it takes investment; it does not necessarily take a huge amount of money. I would be interested in getting your views and reading your report, as ever, but I think there is an opportunity now, given just how—if we are completely honest—ineffective some of the things that we do are feeling to me on the ground. We do a lot in the multilateral space on statements, bringing people together and shining a light, and it is absolutely vital that we do that. Our ability to actually prevent some of these atrocities in the real world on the ground is where I constantly find myself thinking, "But okay, so what?"

Q42 **Chair:** Matthew gave a specific example: why has the UK not triggered article 14 recommending that consideration be given to the serious atrocities that are happening in Myanmar? He said that that is a letter that we need to put into the ICC, so why have we not done that?

Baroness Chapman: I don't know why we have not done that, Sarah.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q43 **Chair:** Okay. Is that something you can follow up on?

Baroness Chapman: I can definitely follow up on that.

Q44 **Noah Law:** Thank you. Do you see conflict and atrocity prevention as two separate issues?

Baroness Chapman: They are very closely linked, but then I think atrocity prevention is something that our economic work feeds into. There is climate—the things that lead to conflict and atrocity are very wide-ranging. We are engaged in a lot of them, and definitely work on women and girls.

I think what we will gain from the way we are building the community of expertise, the work that Will is doing integrating this into the humanitarian directorate—I think the sensitivity to it needs to be increased across the organisation. Not that we employ people who are not absolutely horrified and affected in exactly the way that Kate described when they are confronted with these situations—because, trust me, they are—but I do think that having this integration and having the leadership through the community and through Will's work should mean that we are more agile and more alert to some of these situations way, way before anything happens.

Q45 **Chair:** On the particular thing in El Obeid, it looks as if things are starting to escalate and we are going to see the pattern again. One thing the witnesses said was that we are aware that UAE drones are being used. Have we put out any public consequences to RSF and SAF about what will happen if the siege continues?

Baroness Chapman: We have, last week at the UN, and we are speaking privately to all of those that you would expect us to speak to, who we believe may be able to influence this. We are not waiting to see. We are using all the levers that we have, with an eye on prevention here.

Q46 **Chair:** When is the point when the private becomes public? Because sometimes you need to name and shame.

Baroness Chapman: Sometimes you need to name and shame; sometimes naming and shaming means you lose any leverage whatsoever. This is always a tightrope. I have no fear whatsoever of naming and shaming publicly if that is the right thing to do, but you have to know it is the right thing to do, and that you are not going to make it worse. That is not straightforward.

Q47 **Monica Harding:** I understand that it is not straightforward, but we have heard evidence in the session before this that the British UK Government's reluctance to name and shame led to a loss of lives in El Fasher. How do we make sure that that is not the case now, when it is looming in El Obeid?

Baroness Chapman: I would have to read that evidence before I respond to it, because I think that if it had been as cut and dried a



conclusion as that, we would be naming and shaming right now. I would like to have the opportunity to look at how that argument was developed and that conclusion was reached because I have my doubts that that would have been impactful, given what we were looking at at the time. However, I have an open mind about this and would read that.

Will, do you have anything further?

Will Hines: On El Obeid, only to say that it is an example of where there has been analysis and early warning, where the team at post have been able to say that we can see this coming. We will consider the range of actions that we can take, actions that are about deterring an attack, about preparing for the humanitarian consequences of that, and about thinking through the full range of things that we can do, should that happen, that would be punitive in nature. There is a long list of those, some of which are currently private, some of which are public at the Human Rights Council and at the Security Council, and we can move through them as we see how the situation pans out. It is an example—very live over the last few days—of exactly where that early warning can trigger a range of actions across the FCDO.

Q48 **Chair:** The evidence that we published at 2 pm today was Nathaniel documenting the stages that he went through with his engagement with both Ministers and Ministers' staff and FCDO staff in the run-up to El Fasher. His assessment is that politically we prioritise the UAE and our trade relationship with them over preventing a genocide. Does that have any resonance with you?

Baroness Chapman: It doesn't. I am very familiar with this discussion; I have had this discussion internally at the highest level within the Government, and it is a discussion I am prepared to return to as often as is necessary. I would not comment on Nathaniel's evidence without reading it properly, because I respect him, but I would be surprised if it were as simple as that. There are many countries playing games in Sudan—many of them.

Chair: Yes, we have heard some of them in this Committee.

Baroness Chapman: Yes, about 12 at the last count. It is an outrage.

Chair: It is.

Baroness Chapman: It gets nowhere near the visibility that it needs until something like El Fasher happens, and then suddenly there is momentarily some interest. One of the things we should be doing—and Anneliese Dodds has been brilliant on this as well—is really trying to get this into the press and shine a spotlight on it. We are using our multilateral levers to try to do that, because I think the invisibility of this conflict is creating a permissive culture for those external actors, shall we say, to feel that they can do this and that there is no consequence.

Q49 **Chair:** That is the frustration, Minister. We only know a tiny snapshot.



We respect your saying that the private conversations are more impactful, but El Obeid will be the third big genocide that we are looking at about to happen, and you are still using the same model of private conversations and people—civilians—are still being tortured, mutilated, starved to death, murdered, put in mass graves and so on. It becomes somewhat frustrating and one wonders what it will take to do something different to try to get a different response.

Baroness Chapman: Getting a different response from me is the easy bit, right? You could do that. Getting a different response in Sudan—it is not just one country that is providing drones to the RSF, so getting that to change and cutting off that supply line to all those warring parties, because there are more than two—is what we aim for. Whatever we need to do to bring that about is what we ought to do.

Sometimes it is tempting to go further, but I need to be absolutely certain that whatever public statements we make are not going to hold us back and create a circumstance. It is really easy for countries that are prepared to sell drones to the RSF to just cut off links to the UK. Why do they care? It is not about money and trade. This is about having any kind of ability to bring people together.

We are engaged in a piece of work at the moment where we are trying to bring civilian parties together to move so that when there is some kind of cessation of hostilities, we will have a civilian track ready to move towards civilian leadership in Sudan. In order to bring that about, we need the agreement of all of those countries that have a stake in what is going on for good or real to think that that is the right proposition. To get them to that place, you have to maintain some influence.

Chair: We are having a vote shortly, and I know that you are pushed for time as well, so we are now going to move to quick questions—first from Noah and then from Monica and David—and quick answers.

Q50 **Noah Law:** This is a question to Will, and then one to you, Minister. Very briefly, has the process for risk assessment and escalation been reviewed and changed since El Fasher?

Will Hines: Yes. As part of putting together a new humanitarian directorate, we have looked at how we integrate the risk analysis, our early warning across a set of issues, including humanitarian crises, conflict and violence, and our methodologies for looking at risk and early warning of atrocities. We are bringing those together into a more integrated function, one that lets us learn across those different kinds of methodologies and have a single place within the humanitarian directorate that can provide that early warning, seek decisions and provide advice on what the right decisions might be when we get early warning in any of those areas. They are not the same, but they are closely linked.

Q51 **Noah Law:** Do you expect that advice to be better to Ministers in future



or different in any way?

Will Hines: Yes, that is the purpose of restructuring the functions.

Q52 **Monica Harding:** Has there been an internal review process since the fall of El Fasher on what the FCDO's response to it was?

Will Hines: We have done a series of things differently. What we have said about the process over the last week on El Obeid, about being able to provide genuine early warning on that bulk of reporting from post and from the Sudan team, and translate it into very specific instructions to posts across the network with our multilateral partners and engagement with Ministers—as you have discussed with counterparts, including Egypt and including UAE—has been a different way of doing things.

Q53 **Monica Harding:** Does that give you confidence that you can take more preventative action for El Obeid than happened for El Fasher?

Will Hines: It is clearly a better model.

Chair: Can I go to David?

Monica Harding: Yes.

Q54 **David Mundell:** Just one thing. Self-evidently—as I have said to you before, Minister—there are things that you could do more proactively, and one is to have more statements in Parliament. The new Foreign Secretary got off to a good start with a statement, but I do not think we have had another one on Sudan in the Commons to keep the spotlight on the issue, so I would encourage that proactivity.

Can you just tell us a little bit about the decision-making process when a range of options are presented from least to most ambitious?

Baroness Chapman: I can tell you from my perspective. Will and Kate will tell you about all the work that goes on to get to the submission that I receive. When it works well, the submission with the recommendations is expected, I have already talked it through with the team, and we do a lot of work to help me understand and to learn about the legal frameworks around some of this, how the multilateral system can play into it, resourcing, expertise, all of that stuff. We talk at length about these things.

When you get your submission, there will be a number of options. One will usually, but not always, be recommended. I do not see outlandish things that are undeliverable and would be ineffective from civil servants; things that then get ruled out in order to make their preference be the one that you choose. My experience is that the propositions that are put to Ministers are deliverable, but they require choices and trade-offs and they are usually laid out really clearly. Often, we end up amending some of these recommendations, making new ideas, because things are rarely cut and dried. That is how it works, and it is as good a way of doing it as any. What I really value is the ability to sit down with officials and really



HOUSE OF COMMONS

go through this stuff in detail. I do not remember a Sudan submission where we have not gone for the highest-ambition option. I do not know what that was in reference to, but I will—

Q55 **David Mundell:** In the previous evidence, the witness's position was that the least ambitious option was chosen to protect human life.

Baroness Chapman: Was that put to Ministers?

Chair: It was the ICAI review. ICAI did a full review.

Baroness Chapman: Yes, but I do not think that there was a set of propositions put to Ministers where Ministers did not choose the most ambitious option. I do not think that has ever happened.

Q56 **David Mundell:** Obviously you would expect that. Given that that has been put to the Committee, it would be good to respond to that point, when you have had an opportunity to review it and Mr Raymond's evidence,.

Baroness Chapman: That is my position today. I have given you my response; if I am wrong, I will write to you and correct the record, but I think—

Q57 **David Mundell:** You may have a different view. One of the scenarios is that you have a different view as to what the least or most ambitious element of it was.

Baroness Chapman: Yes.

David Mundell: Therefore, in terms of responding to us, your clarifying in that context would be helpful.

Baroness Chapman: Yes. I am really happy to do that. That is fair.

Chair: Thank you. Were you trying to come in, Noah?

Q58 **Noah Law:** Briefly, Minister, do you think the public is sufficiently aware of the concept of diplomatic leverage that you have outlined? Looking back, do you think there are any instances where the UK Government have got that balance wrong?

Baroness Chapman: There are bound to be, but I can tell you of instances where we have, I think, been getting it right. There is concern about Ethiopia and conflict on the border with Eritrea and in Tigray. None of us wants to see this. I raise it every time I meet a Minister from Ethiopia, not because it is that Minister's decision or that Minister's responsibility, but because I want them to know in their system from the UK, which is one of their longest-standing partners diplomatically and in development—and they are hosting COP, so they want to be seen as responsible leaders on the world stage—that any kind of action that would lead to an escalation in conflict or hostility would reflect very badly.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

These are the sorts of conversations that we should be having at the earliest indication that something may happen, and we were in a situation where conflict that we were deeply, deeply concerned about—and still are—at the beginning of the year looked to be imminent, and now looks less imminent. However, I can never sit here and say it has been prevented, but these are the kinds of conversations where diplomacy can come in. These are things that we do through official channels, things that I can do, the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister does as well.

Q59 **Chair:** Minister, I am going to have to ask you for brevity, please.

I have some quick-fire questions for you. How many staff are in FCDO?

Baroness Chapman: I don't know. Lots.

Will Hines: Altogether, globally, UK-based and country-based staff, it is 16,000 to 17,000.

Q60 **Chair:** Minister, you said that 250 staff have been trained on atrocity prevention. Do you think that is the right number?

Baroness Chapman: In the last year.

Q61 **Chair:** Okay, so how many altogether have been trained on atrocity prevention? Because this Committee's report into—

Baroness Chapman: Over the years?

Chair: No, serving now. This Committee's report into atrocity prevention said that every ambassador, or the most senior person, ought to be trained because if you just look where conflict is, you are going to miss where atrocity is brewing.

Baroness Chapman: I think that is a fair suggestion. I do not know whether we train all of our heads of mission in conflict or atrocity prevention, but I think it is a good suggestion. We have trained 250 in the last year. We will do more. It is an important part of what we do.

Q62 **Chair:** Thank you. One of the things that was put to us was that there does not seem to be any accountability when the evidence or the recommendations made were proved to be quite dramatically wrong. How do you go through that process internally? Say you found out that information either was not put forward or it was nuanced in such a way that led a Minister to make a decision that proved to have poor consequences, if I can put it politely.

Baroness Chapman: If a Minister makes a decision, the Minister is responsible for that decision—end of discussion. If there is a problem with how the evidence is put forward or it is incomplete—once you have done a lot of this, you can tell when you are being led, and I don't like that very much.

Chair: I can imagine, Minister.



Baroness Chapman: So conversations ensue. I am going to go back and look in detail about what is alleged to have happened here. It does not sit with the experience that I have had, but I have only been Africa Minister since last September.

Q63 **Chair:** We have pushed back because the staff that we engage with are very dedicated professionals. Another example that came out was about a duty to consider, so that if anybody at any level says, "This is really concerning", it can be escalated up to the Minister who has a duty to consider, or maybe to one of the directors. What do you think about that as a concept?

Baroness Chapman: I think that used judiciously that could be good. In these sorts of high-stakes situation, I would not want to do that more broadly, because you would never get anything done, because we employ brilliant, creative people who have ideas all the time. But I think—

Chair: Everybody's idea is the most important.

Baroness Chapman: Exactly, yes. Will will tell you if this is not true, but I think I am seen as a Minister to whom you can put something that is a bit kind of, "Oh, we have never really done this" or "We would have liked to have done this, but Ministers have never agreed to it before", and I am that Minister to bring it to. I would be very, very concerned if our system were somehow second-guessing a ministerial preference on something as important as this and were self—

Chair: Editing? Self-censoring?

Baroness Chapman: Yes, self-censoring. There are ideas that people have that are so clearly undeliverable that there is no point in putting them forward, but I don't think that is what we are talking about, though.

Q64 **Chair:** No. It was not about the ideas of what to do. It was about very real concerns on the ground, whether it be corruption or atrocity, that they needed to escalate when they have tried to go through the usual channels. It resonated with me as an MP, where my frontline staff are trying to protect children and middle management are trying to ignore it.

Baroness Chapman: Yes.

Chair: Do you have a system that people can go around? If I could build on to that, the communities of expertise. My concern around them is, Minister, if I am right, your intention was that you have basically a think tank that has specialists in their field that people can draw into. My concern is that it becomes a barrier. Therefore, how are you trying to use this new structure?

Baroness Chapman: I am concerned about that as well. This is one of those examples of things where we have to co-create. My vision of the community's expertise, I think, is slightly different from that of some



HOUSE OF COMMONS

people who have been in the civil service for a long time, where there is this closed, hard edge to it.

This is not a direct example, but I think of it more as a local strategic partnership, where we identify a set of problems or a policy error—in this case it is violence and conflict—and we draw in. Yes, we have our own expertise for sure, and we do have outstanding expertise within the FCDO, but we also draw in people like Kate.

Chair: Like the panellists that we had.

Baroness Chapman: Yes, exactly, people who can be in whatever form. For example, they can act as a sort of challenge function to us, which she does, alongside others, or we can even have part of that discussion and be part of that community. The reason they are called communities is to make them more permeable and to allow for that. That is quite a culture shift in our system, and I think some of our communities of expertise are really leaning into this and grabbing it. They are used to working that way, research and development-type people. For others it is a bit more challenging, but my job is to drive that through and to make sure that we get something that is different and fresh and isn't excluding the expertise that the UK has.

Q65 **Chair:** All three of our witnesses described the pain, frustration and anger about trying to get into the system to notify of brewing catastrophes and the door being firmly shut. Your view is that, if done right, these communities will effectively embed them within the system so that they have that fast track.

Could I ask you about resourcing? What resources will these communities have, specifically looking at the one that would deal with atrocity, and how many physical atrocity specialists would you have within your team?

Baroness Chapman: We published the allocations for the community of expertise, I think, in March. I do not remember off the top of my head. Will, I don't know if you do.

Will Hines: The financial allocation?

Baroness Chapman: Yes.

Will Hines: I am not sure about the published version, but it will be between £10 million and £15 million a year of programme money to spend with the Conflict and Violence Community of Expertise.

Baroness Chapman: The money that our teams can spend in country when they do their portfolios as well.

Q66 **Chair:** The atrocity prevention team at the last count was about 25 people, but it has been a while since I have met up with them. Are all of those specialists being retained, thinking about how unstable the world is right now?



Will Hines: Restructuring the parts of what we have in the Humanitarian Directorate, we will have an atrocity prevention policy team within a wider group thinking about policy issues around the protection of civilians in conflict and the prevention of harm to civilians in conflict.

There is also the function that we were describing earlier around early warning analysis and risk, and there is a community of expertise on conflict. There are three parts of the directorate that I am putting together in the Humanitarian Directorate.

Q67 **Chair:** With respect, that has not answered the question. Are you increasing the number of staff who are focused on atrocity prevention or decreasing them, or do you not know yet?

Will Hines: Across those three areas, it is not comparing like with like. Certainly at the end of last year and beginning of this year, there were staff and a team looking at conflict prevention and atrocity prevention. Those functions have been done in separate areas, which means we have a focused team working on atrocity prevention.

Q68 **Chair:** Why did you make that decision? Because the Minister has just said how you are starting to embed it across all of the work, so violence against women and girls, for example, with domestic violence being a clear indicator of increasing tensions. Why are you now separating them back out rather than surging around atrocity prevention?

Will Hines: Those are two teams are single departments. They can work very closely together. I think it is important to have a team that has a very clear identity around atrocity prevention and the protection of civilians.

Q69 **Chair:** I remember that it was quite painful speaking to the former ambassador to Myanmar who was trying to get some support when he thought an atrocity was brewing. If a situation happens in whatever country in the future, how would an ambassador draw into the resources now?

Will Hines: That is the thinking of having these communities of expertise. Where I think we have struggled in the past is relying on ambassadors to know which policy team they need to go to, which UK partners might be helpful, or which centrally managed programmes can help with those issues.

Effectively, we have a single shop window, a single front end that says if posts need support on issues around conflict, violence and atrocities, come to the part of the organisation that is a community of expertise on those things. They will find guidance, support, analytical tools, internal expertise, the ability to draw on external expertise and a way into those partner organisations, like those that you have just heard from, who can provide insights on those issues.

Chair: That sounds really smart and exciting but, Minister, if I could just



HOUSE OF COMMONS

say so, that makes it even more imperative that ambassadors have the training so that they know when something is starting to go wrong. From the work that we did, it is actually quite simple. An hour online course will give them the tools that they need, because you only know what you know. Brian, over to you.

Q70 Brian Mathew: Thank you. How are you ensuring that changes under FCDO 2030 will not have a negative impact on the delivery of your priorities for the UK's atrocity prevention work?

Baroness Chapman: I think Will has answered that. It is very difficult, when you are working in an organisation where you know there are so many people who are having to apply for jobs, and the process we are going through at the moment isn't pleasant. My only hope is that it can be resolved relatively quickly. We have taken care through the process. It is not for me to answer in detail on HR issues at all. That would be inappropriate. However, the conversations that I have had with DGs on this have been about making sure that we do keep our expertise in the right places and we shift. There will be things we are doing less of—

Brian Mathew: Can I interrupt you, Minister, because I know there is limited time?

Baroness Chapman: Go on.

Q71 Brian Mathew: What is the future of the international humanitarian law cell? That is a direct question.

Baroness Chapman: It is integrated, isn't it?

Will Hines: Yes. That was a cell that was looking at IHL with respect to Gaza, which is now part of the work on the Middle East Directorate.

Q72 Brian Mathew: Okay, so that has been passed on to the Middle East Directorate.

How many of these staff will be retained in the new arrangement, of those people who were in the international humanitarian law cell?

Baroness Chapman: I do not know how many people work on which.

Chair: Could you write to us with that information? That would be great. Thank you.

Q73 Brian Mathew: How will you ensure that the Department will be able to deliver on your priorities in this area?

Baroness Chapman: The point of the restructure—apart from the fact that obviously we needed to make cost savings—the way it has been done is to make sure that it does. The reason we wanted such things as women and girls being integrated is because we think that is a better way of delivering progress for women and girls. Thus, 90% of our delivery will focus in some way on women and girls. We are making sure, I hope, that we do manage to achieve that. It is clearly a risk when you undertake



these sorts of structural changes that you fail to do that sufficiently. I will be watching really carefully. If we get to the end of it and Ministers feel that there are areas of work where we are underpowered and we can make change, we should be prepared to do that.

Will Hines: Can I add something? Is that okay? We are going through a restructure of the UK headquarters. The FCDO 2030 reform agenda is broader than that. In large part it is about saying, "What are the issues that the UK really needs to focus on over the next five, 10 years internationally? Do we have structures that enable us to do that? Do we have the capabilities in the right places to be able to do that, and do we have clear accountability for getting those things done?"

We can provide absolute assurance that—and we heard it so powerfully in the previous session, about a world where humanitarian need is driven by conflict, where there are rising levels of atrocities, where norms around the protection of civilians are so under threat; and we hosted the ICRC donor dialogue here a couple of weeks ago and really heard that powerfully from them—that is top of the list of things on my mind around what sort of humanitarian function we need and what sort of capabilities, structures and systems we need.

FCDO 2030 is a chance to think, from an organisational design process, about how to do those things really effectively and what capabilities we need to do that.

Q74 **Brian Mathew:** This really leads from the same question, but as you point out we have already heard today about external expertise. We have heard examples of where external expertise has not been listened to. How do you ensure adequate capacity and motivation of officials to analyse and present external advice?

Baroness Chapman: It is their job to do that, if I am honest. If they are not doing it, that is a problem. The fact you are going through a restructure does not let you off that being your job. The quicker we can get the restructure done the better—but not being irresponsibly quick about it because it does not do people any good to live with any more uncertainty any longer than they absolutely need to. I would be deeply concerned if the situation you described was one that was taking place across the organisation. I do not believe it is.

Q75 **Brian Mathew:** The best way, though, is to learn from where things have gone wrong, and clearly things have gone wrong in the past.

Baroness Chapman: Yes, and we are dealing with the most difficult context on the planet. They are getting more and more difficult, and things will go wrong and mistakes will be made. Yes, people need to be held to account. Do I think that it should be career-ending for people who are making very, very difficult judgments in real time in those places every time they get something wrong? Absolutely not. We need to



provide our teams with the training, support and the skills to be able to do the amazing work that they do.

Q76 Brian Mathew: You heard from Nathaniel in the last session. You were in the room at the time. He came up with a number of ideas based on what they have done in the States. One was specifically an atrocity prevention Act. Would something like that be worth pushing through Government?

Baroness Chapman: There are lots of things that I would like to legislate for the Government to do. There is no in-principle objection to that one. We have certain duties that we subscribe to multilaterally, such as with the criminal courts and so on, that the US is not part of. It may be that our duties are enshrined in different ways, but I would be very happy to take legal advice on what would be the right mechanisms for the UK.

Brian Mathew: It might empower staff, for example.

Chair: Monica has the last question. Kate, I am really sorry that you have been sat there throughout all of this. We really care about ISF and the work that you do is fantastic. If it is all right, Minister, if we could write to you about the specific ISF questions, because I know it is a topic that you are interested in as well, and there are a lot of moving parts right now. Monica, you get the last question.

Q77 Monica Harding: I am very keen to hear about the ISF too.

Minister, I was in Adré, as I know you have been. I was told there that they expected after the fall of El Fasher, 90,000 people to cross the border and only 45,000 arrived. There are many missing and the estimates put the number who were killed in the fall of El Fasher at 60,000. Now there have been numerous reports in the *New York Times*, in the *Washington Post*, indeed in *The Guardian*, that the UAE is arming RSF that committed those genocidal acts.

Do you not think the British public needs a statement from the Government on the role of the UAE in arming the RSF? If that is the case—there have been reports—should the Government not be saying something about it? There are significant cultural assets of the UAE in this country that the public supports. Does the public need to know?

Baroness Chapman: I am all for being candid with the public, but—and I have said this in many sessions, and I am going to say it again now, and I said it earlier this session and it is up to you to tell me that I am wrong—I am not going to say something that I think could jeopardise our ability to bring parties together. They are the ones making this conflict last longer and introducing technology. By “they”, I mean the various different countries that are making it their business to be involved here. They are prolonging this conflict. They are enabling these atrocities to be committed. They are enabling what has happened in El Fasher and may well continue to happen in other places. I need those actors to be



HOUSE OF COMMONS

prepared to sit down, to use their influence with the RSF, with the SAF and others. To get them to do that, I need to have influence with them. I am not going to do anything that is a one-way decision if you do something like that.

The reporting is widespread. People can reach their own judgments. There is evidence that is available for people to see: open source, journalists. They can do what they need to do to share that with the public in the way that they see fit. It is really important, when you are responsible for a diplomatic relationship, which you know that you have to leverage in order to make progress, that you do not just throw that away.

Chair: Minister, we appreciate all that you do in this space. I think it is probably the one area that the UK can really lead the world on, so all grist to your mill and thank you to the team. This Committee is a particular fan of the atrocity prevention team. We have seen at first hand the work that they can do if they are given the resources and the head to be able to try to challenge wherever they see these escalations. Thank you all very much.