



Select Committee on International Relations and Defence

Corrected oral evidence: The UK and Sub-Saharan Africa—prosperity, peace and development co-operation

Wednesday 20 May 2020

10 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Anelay of St Johns (The Chair); Lord Alton of Liverpool; Baroness Blackstone; Baroness Fall; Lord Grocott; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Helic; Lord Mendelsohn; Lord Purvis of Tweed; Baroness Rawlings; Lord Reid of Cardowan; Baroness Smith of Newnham.

Evidence Session No. 13

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 118 - 142

Witnesses

I: James Duddridge MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development, (Minister for Africa); Harriet Mathews OBE, Director for Africa, Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Debbie Palmer, Director, West and Southern Africa Division, Department for International Development.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

James Duddridge MP, Harriet Mathews and Debbie Palmer.

Q118 The Chair: Good morning. I welcome to this meeting of the International Relations and Defence Select Committee our witnesses for today: James Duddridge MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development, and Minister for Africa; Harriet Mathews, Director for Africa at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; and Debbie Palmer, Director for West and Southern Africa at the Department for International Development. Thank you for joining us today to give evidence in our final evidence-taking session for our inquiry, 'The UK and Sub-Saharan Africa—prosperity, peace and development co-operation'.

I remind you that, as ever, this meeting will be on the record; it is being broadcast and will be transcribed. At this point, I should also remind everyone that we will break for five minutes as close to 11 am as possible. We will then resume.

As is customary, I will ask the first question. After that, I will revert to my colleagues who will ask more detailed questions of our witnesses. Throughout the session, I will call each person to speak. This is simply to give greater clarity to the broadcasters about the order in which we will proceed.

The first question is for the Minister. What is the Government's assessment of the possible effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa, and how is the UK operating with its international partners to support the region?

James Duddridge MP: Thank you, Baroness Anelay. Quite simply, Africa could easily be overwhelmed by COVID-19 in terms of the health impact. On the co-ordination that we are seeing globally, no nation or continent can cope on its own. We are very much all in this together. Only yesterday, the UK Government pledged £20 million to the Africa CDC,¹ which, along with others, is co-ordinating the pandemic response across the continent. That will help the continent as a whole to build some stability and resilience around future pandemics, as well as deal with this specific pandemic. That makes the UK the biggest donor to the Africa CDC².

Economically, COVID will have a disproportionate impact on the African continent compared with other places around the world. It will be much greater than the impact of the financial crisis. Chillingly, the World Bank projects 40 million to 60 million additional individuals falling into extreme poverty; that number is a particular issue. The majority of those will be in

¹ Centre for Disease Control

² The FCO later clarified that this makes the UK the biggest contributor to the AU's C19 fund, which is being run and managed by the Africa CDC, rather than the biggest contributor to the Africa CDC.

Sub-Saharan Africa. This is on top of the 6 million refugees and 17 million internally displaced people across the continent.

On the UK's response, having just set the background, in addition to that specific £20 million, we have committed £744 million additional COVID money overall globally. That supports a range of activities: helping countries to meet their debt repayments and prepare their health systems; working with organisations such as the WTO, African governments and African businesses; working with supply chains; and looking directly at the humanitarian side, including income protection and livelihoods. In country, one of the things that has really impressed me, working formally in DfID as a Minister for the first time—as opposed to tangentially last time round—is the devolution of decision-making to the front line, which has meant that DfID heads of offices can immediately start shifting some of their existing programmes to give them a more COVID-based focus. We as HMG were then able to change what we were doing on the ground almost in real time, as well as the more strategic additional funds.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I invite Harriet Mathews and Debbie Palmer, the officials from the Foreign Office and DfID, to add to that if they would like to.

Harriet Mathews: Nothing from me.

Debbie Palmer: No, nothing from me other than to say that, as the Minister said, the £20 million contribution that we offered this morning makes us the biggest donor to the African Union's anti-COVID-19 fund, which is a significant step.

The Chair: Thank you—and thank you, Minister. You raised some issues in your response to me, which I know will be probed in more detail by my colleagues. I will make sure that I follow the good advice that I try to give myself and do not pinch other people's questions. I move on to my first colleague to ask a question: Baroness Smith. On each occasion, when I call a colleague, they will not only ask the main question; after you have given your responses, I will go back to that same Member and invite them to put a supplementary question if they have one. I am sorry for this rather clunky way of doing this, but I hope that it means that the broadcasters know which order we are speaking in.

Q119 **Baroness Smith of Newnham:** Good morning. I thank all the evidence-givers for being here this morning. Obviously, the inquiry began several months ago at a time when we as a Committee felt that it was important to look at Sub-Saharan Africa. In the last couple of weeks, we have spent a lot of time taking evidence about COVID-19 but, bearing in the mind that our overall report will be a bit more general than that, can the Minister and the officials tell us a bit about the factors behind the UK's increased attention toward Africa before COVID-19—the current situation obviously adds nuance to that—particularly the change of focus as set out in the five 'shifts'?

James Duddridge MP: Clearly, Africa is becoming more important to the UK and globally. Speaking crassly, Africa is getting bigger—not physically, as it is in fact contracting due to climate change, but in terms of population size. The continent is expected to double to 2.1 billion people by 2050, taking up a quarter of the world’s population. This makes it massively more important than it has been historically.

We are looking at opportunities across the continent. The continent had some of the biggest growing economies pre-COVID, so it is an important trading partner. Africa is the biggest bloc at the United Nations so, taking a step back geopolitically, it is very important. It is attracting a lot of interest from our international partners and competitors, so it is right that we reposition ourselves.

It is also right that we reposition ourselves around the five, or four-plus, strategic ‘shifts’ that were identified by the National Security Council: prosperity, security and stability, climate change and demographic transition, but also the fifth, geographic one—the Sahel—which perhaps we have left for too long as a French sphere of influence over the last five years. That will continue. The UK is focusing more attention on the Sahel for a number of reasons: some of the world’s poorest are in the Sahel; some of the instability and risk that could permeate across the continent is in the Sahel, linking up through the Middle East; and migration, the physical movement of people, is dragging some of the most capable people from Sub-Saharan Africa through the Sahel and up to the Mediterranean, which is a problem all along that chain. So, the five shifts that you talked about are here to stay.

When we look at the Africa strategy, it will be around refreshing emphasis rather than starting with a blank sheet of paper. Quite rightly, on a continent of 54 countries and in a dynamic environment, it needs to evolve over time.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Before I turn to Baroness Smith for her supplementary, I invite Harriet Mathews and Debbie to speak if they have anything to add.

Harriet Mathews: I have nothing significant to add, except that the strategy is very much focused on joint and mutual priorities with a look to the longer term. The idea is to have longer-term relationships that look at some of the things we have in common and that underlie everything else that we plan to do over the coming years and decades.

Debbie Palmer: Nothing from me, thank you.

The Chair: Therefore, I revert to you, Baroness Smith, if you have a supplementary.

Q120 **Baroness Smith of Newnham:** I do. It draws on the phrase ‘Africa strategy’. It is something that the Government have talked about—obviously, all today’s speakers have mentioned strategy—yet some of our previous evidence-givers have been perhaps a bit sceptical about whether

the Government have an Africa strategy. Can you comment on when we are likely to see a comprehensive strategy if one is forthcoming?

James Duddridge MP: I cannot speak for other people who have given evidence. In my mind, we have a very clear strategy. We are acting on that strategy and organising ourselves and our resources around it. One of the tests that I apply to everything I do is: how does it contribute to the Africa strategy? That is alongside other tests, such as value for money, the manifesto commitments and so forth. It is very much a real document. Perhaps I could ask Debbie to come in here. I understand that some of our posts are organising around the strategy, so it is changing the way that HMG operate. Rather than having something siloed or integrated with just DfID and FCO, we are getting much more integrated around those shifts in the strategy.

The Chair: Yes, we will go to Debbie first, then call on Harriet who, of course, was tested on this question very early on in our evidence-taking.

Debbie Palmer: Thank you. As the Minister said, the strategic approach very much drives what we are doing on the ground in Africa these days. Many of our missions have reorganised themselves so that we now have cross-government teams working against each of the five, or four, shifts in the strategy, unless they are in the Sahel and some of the surrounding countries. The missions themselves have reorganised their teams; those teams are now clearly cross-government teams. They are particularly present in FCO, DfID and DIT³ but are also present in a range of other partners, such as the Home Office, BEIS⁴ and PHE.⁵ It is evident in the way we are working. Also, when senior teams—including heads of missions, DIT trade commissioners and DfID—get together in certain regions, such as east Africa before Christmas and southern Africa after Christmas, the conferences were organised around the themes of the Africa strategy. Again, we are now living and breathing this strategic approach.

Obviously, we will come on to questions on the UK-Africa Investment Summit. That was a very clear manifestation of our commitment to this new strategic approach.

We also have a commitment to recruit more than 440 new staff through this strategic approach to ensure that we really staff up our commitments. We had managed to recruit over 70% of them up to the point when COVID hit us, and nearly half of those UK-based recruits had been deployed across the region. Again, that is something clear, and it is driving our approach and everyday actions, with posts also organising their work and their planning processes around these shifts.

Harriet Mathews: The language of strategic approach and strategy has been interwoven. We have a very clear strategic approach and very clear

³ The Department for International Trade

⁴ The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

⁵ Public Health England

priorities, and we work with very clear issues. People have inevitably used the word 'strategy' as a shortcut for the direction of what we are doing. Some of the questioning has been on whether we will publish something. Plenty has been published and we were looking at doing more just before the COVID outbreak but, as the Minister set out, we are following a very clear approach.

The Chair: Thank you. I invite Lord Reid to ask his question. After that, when we have had the responses, I will turn to him for his supplementary. Can Lord Reid be unmuted, please?

Q121 **Lord Reid of Cardowan:** Can you hear me now? If you want something done, do it yourself. Good morning, Minister, ladies. There has been a great deal of talk about a strategic approach and strategy in general. Perhaps we can start to unpick some of that. How important a part of the United Kingdom's strategic approach to Africa is the African Union and its Agenda 2063? Has a plan been agreed with the African Union to implement the commitments set out on the 2019 Memorandum of Understanding?

James Duddridge MP: Thank you for that question. The African Union is more important and effective now than it ever has been. Even over a five-year period, it has been much more effective in the peacekeeping arena and in co-ordination across all 54 countries, above and beyond the five regional blocs. I anticipate spending more time with and in the African Union and working with envoys, special representatives and commissioners—indeed, much more than when I was a Minister before, between 2014 and 2016. Then, I focused particularly on the Peace and Security Council, with Smail Chergui. This time round, I am working much more closely with Amira El Fadil, who deals with the social side of things—including health, crucially—and Albert Muchanga, the Trade Commissioner, who looks at economic issues. Taking a step back, the AU is a lot more important.

The 50-year plan that was set out in 2013 still stands. It is quite a big document. It reflects the overall strategy: "An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens, representing a dynamic force" in international relations. That is a good overarching ambition for the 2063 document.

When I came into the department, I had a four-point way of looking at things and overlaying them. The first is growth—growing the continent on the trade side. Then there is conflict prevention, which is the more traditional side of things: working with the AU and in country, but also sharing that growth and enabling the African continent to help itself. It was about framing what we wanted to do alongside what they wanted to do, whether that is on the African Union's 2063 plan or South Africa's 2050 plan. It is much better when we are joined up.

You quite rightly raised the 2019 Memorandum of Understanding that Harriett Baldwin did. At the time, the then Prime Minister, Theresa May, asked Harriett Baldwin to lead on the African Union relationship in a much

bigger way. The current Prime Minister has now asked me to do that again. Clearly, we have been somewhat distracted. Even before COVID, there was a delay with the general election and the high-level dialogue, but we are now working on it; in fact, we made two calls yesterday to the African Union about the agenda for that dialogue.

I decided early on, on behalf of the UK Government, that we very much wanted to keep the June date in the diary and have a more light-weight high-level dialogue virtually rather than postpone it again, because we simply cannot keep postponing these things when there is a window of opportunity to have a great impact on COVID but also to develop relationships that will go forward.

I am feeling the tentacles of the AU more. Yesterday, I spoke at a Royal African Society event on COVID-related matters, at which an eminent individual said, "You must meet the group of five envoys". Relatively recently, the AU appointed ex-finance Ministers, largely from across Africa, who are talking about the needs of the continent. So, it is not about special pleading for a particular country or region or an immediacy of trying to plug that department or country's budgetary gap. It is about taking a more strategic view across the continent. I am seeing that time and again. It is really reassuring. We will see more of that.

I am not sure of the timings of your report, but perhaps I could undertake to write to you on the output of the high-level dialogue. More generally, I am conscious that although it is brilliant to be in front of you, it is not quite the same as being able to interact and spot a raised eyebrow across the Committee floor and probe. If you want me to come back, or if there is anything that individual Members would have liked to have come in on in detail and would normally have done so, I am more than happy to deal with those things informally, through the clerk or through whatever works for Lord Reid and, more generally, Baroness Anelay.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I am sure that our colleagues would like to take that offer up, Minister. If we have time at the end, which we hope we will, all Members will be invited to put further supplementaries, so I hope that we will be able to test out one or two of the things you said.

Looking at Harriet Mathews and Debbie Palmer, they are shaking their heads, so I do not need to go to either of them. In that case, I come back to Lord Reid. I am advised that the reason there was a problem earlier is that you had muted yourself. When we do something ourselves, it means that the broadcasters are then technically unable to unmute us. That is a lot of "un"s but it makes sense. When you conclude, Lord Reid, would you mind not muting or unmuting and leaving it to the broadcasters? They will sort things out for us.

Q122 Lord Reid of Cardowan: Thank you for that technical information. As it happens, it is wrong, because I did not touch my microphone, but there we are. We live and learn.

Thank you for that useful answer, Minister. Indeed, one of those envoys gave evidence during a very impressive session last week. You mentioned your four-point plan, as it were, for looking at these things. Of course, no plan survives first contact with reality. Over the past couple of years, since you came in, what obstacles to your approach have surprised you? What have you discovered to be Donald Rumsfeld's famous unknown unknowns—that is, something apart from COVID that surprised you by being a major obstacle?

James Duddridge MP: Events, I think—that is to say, it is easy to have a broad strategy and a plan but a good 40% of one's time goes on things that you did not expect to happen. If you are clever, you can use events in line with the strategy, so build back better in relation to climate change, for example, which is one of the issues. Having to push back COP⁶ was a great shame; it is a key priority for the Government and of real importance across the African continent. That was a key shift. Clearly, with COVID, we have not been able to work quite as much on that area.

To take another area, I mentioned to you that one thing I am particularly keen on is growing the continent so that it has a tax base and functions in a more normal way, rather than receiving money from outside organisations, and has a different relationship with outside countries; whether that is a primary relationship rather than a democratic relationship with the people, it is right to grow it. Actually, very soon after we started to look at health and humanitarian matters around COVID, there was a recognition that Africa will be harder hit economically because people live on subsistence, not savings, so there is greater fragility.

Through that, we are bringing back parts of the growth strategy and thinking about how we deal with things. For example, we had a programme with McKinsey in Senegal looking at helping the Senegalese manufacturing industry and, more generally, to get its economy motoring. Under the prosperity umbrella, they are going back in, looking at that programme and saying, "Actually, how about we manufacture PPE in Senegal, not just during this crisis for the Senegalese but potentially regionally and as an export commodity for the longer term, far beyond this crisis?" We have seen with Ebola, and now COVID, that there is a particular need and that supply chains break down.

Trying to pivot back from events and reflect on your strategy is not an option, at the end of the day. Everyone around the table has in various ways been dealing with these events, which go beyond the role and the government strategy. This is nothing abnormal, but perhaps in diplomacy, one has a little less control over events than one might have domestically.

The Chair: Do either Debbie Palmer or Harriet Mathews wish to add anything to that?

⁶ The 2020 United Nations Climate Change Conference, also known as COP26.

Debbie Palmer: Yes, thank you. Thank you also to Lord Reid. To supplement what the Minister said a little, one thing we have benefited from is that the strategic approach to Africa maps neatly across some of the secondary impacts of COVID that we are seeing at the moment. It gives us an organising framework but, as the Minister said, we are looking again at prosperity, trade, keeping borders open, keeping essential goods flowing and issues around human capital and demographics. Health support is in there too, as are security and stability ambitions and climate change, which we will come on to. Those issues remain incredibly salient. Again, it feels as though, as we address this new crisis and unexpected event, we have a framework that can lean into this process in quite a helpful way.

The Chair: Thank you. The next question is from Lord Mendelsohn.

Q123 **Lord Mendelsohn:** Thank you very much for coming, Minister. The single largest announcement at the UK-Africa Investment Summit was the participation of UK Export Finance, along with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, in the financing of the Orascom Cairo monorail. Recently, just last week or the week before, that work started formally—all the enabling work had been done—which is a very encouraging step. A number of the commercial deals involved money that was already being applied, but there were some interesting and exciting plans and announcements. Which areas of follow-up are you developing into a plan the most and what is the progress on them?

James Duddridge MP: I was at the Africa Investment Summit but not as a DfID/FCO Minister. I was there out of interest and curiosity and because of my passion for the continent over a number of years. Thankfully, I was let in—fortuitously, it turns out. Very early on in my ministerial role, I sought to understand how we ended up having an Africa Investment Summit. It was a hybrid in many ways, although it was not initially designed as a hybrid. It was an African summit, bringing together all the leaders and stating very clearly, building on the work that Theresa May had done as part of her Africa visit, that we were interested in and passionate about the continent. It was also an investment summit.

There were a number of outputs, which I will track through. I am not necessarily responsible for all the deliverables, but I am for some of them. There were more than £6.5 billion of commercial deals. Clearly, some of those are more deliverable than others, so we have prioritised them; alongside other Ministers, I have something of a strategic overview of that process. We have established the Growth Gateway, which we fund to the tune of £37 million, to support businesses to trade. That is within our control and remit a little bit more.

There were a number of UK-funded international development issues under this banner, which again were within our remit to track through. There were some additional potential deals that we can work towards; in particular, there were 36 live deals, which were particularly strong.

The biggest impact has been on the perception of British commitment and interest. I sense when I am speaking to my opposite numbers, either foreign ministers or finance ministers, that there is an awareness of and a greater expectation on what the UK, particularly DIT, is doing across the board, in a much more integrated way. It is part of the prosperity strategy—the four plus one—and part of the growth element of things, which I am looking at.

We have a new Minister in DIT, who I am meeting later today, to talk in a broader sense about doing business in Africa. We also have a very good trade envoy in Emma Wade-Smith, whose presence is felt across the continent. She must have a body double of some description; she seems to pop up in various areas. That is where most of the impact has been made on the Africa Investment Summit. It has been a success; I certainly want to do it again and would want to do it in London again.

To be frank, it is a little odd that when the Chinese want to invest they say, “Come to China and talk to us”. When the Brits want to invest they say, “Come to London”. The French invite everyone to Bordeaux. The list goes on and on. We can do some of these things in country, in places like Ghana, where the Africa investment agencies convene, and the African Union, through the good offices of the Commissioner for Trade and Industry.

There is a lot going on, but this was about shifting into the prosperity area in a much bigger way—and this is only one element. It is obviously exciting and important from a UK plc point of view, but I am equally passionate about non-UK trade in Africa, which is also in the UK’s interest both in international development and in building a market as the population increases. We will invest more in the Africa Continental Free Trade Area alongside the African Union. That is not just about putting cash in, although cash will go to programmes such as TradeMark East Africa, which have been really successful. It is about time and expertise, particularly on the capital market side, where we can work together.

It is big. The Africa Investment Summit was a great success. It took a lot of work to get there—including working across departments in quite a stressed way, in the sense that we put a stake in the ground said, “We’re going to do this”, without necessarily knowing how we were going to get there.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Debbie Palmer had responsibility with regard to the summit itself. I will then see whether Harriet Mathews would like to add anything more, and then go back to Lord Mendelsohn for his supplementary.

Debbie Palmer: The Minister has covered a huge amount of ground there and has given a really clear response. We were really proud of what we in the UK achieved at the Africa Investment Summit. UK-Africa trade was already worth more than £36 billion; we sought to build that further and thicken those partnerships. Yes, we announced 27 deals worth more than £6.5 billion on the day, and there is lots of detail therein, but one of

the other really exciting things about the summit was the focus on partnerships and the way in which we brought actors from the UK and our partner countries together. There were huge numbers of side events, focusing on particular countries, where investors were getting together, Governments were having conversations with them, and local investors and UK investors were able to start getting to know each other and building up that sense of partnership. There is a real ambition on the part of the UK to continue that momentum; it was a very exciting event.

There was another exciting thing about it. As the Minister mentioned, we are focusing on local currency bonds and improving the investment environment. We are also engaged with the private sector. Again, it is very much a cross-government piece, looking at the way in which our diplomatic colleagues are supporting Governments and bringing them together. DfID has tools that it can bring to this—for example, through support on financial sector opening, local currency financing and e-payments—and a whole range of other financial tools, including through PIDG⁷ and CDC.

Then, of course, we have Emma Wade-Smith and her colleagues on the DIT side engaging very closely with UK businesses and partner businesses across Africa. In fact, that level of dialogue has continued even as we go through this challenging period of COVID. We continue to engage closely with UK businesses investing in Africa, understanding the situation that they now find themselves in. Of course, they are working incredibly hard to adapt and adjust to these challenging circumstances to make sure that they can continue to keep their businesses afloat—and, frankly, continue to be a positive and active part of Africa's recovery. This is still very much a growing concern and something that we are excited to continue through our work on the strategic approach to Africa.

Harriet Mathews: The only thing I have to add is to reinforce how current this is. Even yesterday, my heads of mission were still reporting that the Africa Investment Summit is a current topic, that heads of state and Ministers are talking about how to build on it and that its relevance, especially looking at post-COVID economic recovery, is absolute.

Q124 **Lord Mendelsohn:** Thank you very much for that reply. Perhaps the most significant thing is all your obvious interest and enthusiasm; the Minister's clear personal commitment is very encouraging. I want to refer to a few issues around the Africa Investment Summit. How much consideration has been given to the level of trade with Africa? We are at 2% of trade now. Is there a target? Are we looking to improve the terms of trade because Africa wants to look at the UK as a stronger market? Are we looking at how we can use remittances from the UK? As a number of people have stressed to the Committee, that is a huge economic opportunity for us.

⁷ The Private Infrastructure Development Group (PIDG) is an innovative finance organisation funded by the governments of the UK, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Australia, Sweden, Germany and the IFC.

At the same time, do we have a strategy to deal with constant, significant capital outflows from the countries in which we would be well advised to invest if we could find mechanisms for that? How are we looking to reinforce the economic environment and our trade with Africa in general?

James Duddridge MP: Thank you. There are a lot of questions there. Do we have a target? Yes. It was stated by Theresa May back in South Africa. I will ask the officials to remind me of the precise details of that target if they have them to hand. It was a bold target, a stretched target; while the detail does matter, it was about setting something that would be difficult to achieve and would force the UK Government to change the way we behave, rather than carry on as we are.

The question about terms of trade is obviously very topical, with the trade preferences being announced yesterday. That had a very strong focus in terms of how we look for development. We look carefully at what the impact will be for LDCs—less developed countries—and middle-income countries, making sure that there is the right framework to allow for greater terms of trade.

I mentioned briefly TradeMark East Africa, an excellent programme to speed up trade in and out of the continent and within that region. A lot more can be done there; for example, literally speeding up processes and bureaucracy, and getting trucks through with as little bureaucracy as possible. That might include tariffs, paperwork, corruption issues—the whole gamut—but it is about getting products to market faster and making them cheaper for the consumer so that there is more of an incentive to trade.

In terms of outflows of money, there are two types: legal and illegal. On the legal outflow, sometimes there is good reason to take a currency, particularly hard currency, out of the continent. We need to build capital market structures that make it more attractive and safer to leave money in the continent, with it hedged against risk, and use a variety of instruments so that it can be reinvested. The basics of floating companies, dual listing and establishing pensions markets are part of a strong, functioning democracy.

On the illegal side of outflows, clearly we look at this in great detail and make sure that, whatever we do moving forward, there is greater convergence of international rule sets to allow monies not to leave the continent illegally. But there is no point doing that unilaterally; it is a step in the right direction, but if the money still flows out of the continent, we should not pat ourselves on the back. Moving at a slower pace but within global standards is more advantageous than being a vocal leader and making the change earlier. We are better moving with the body politic.

With your permission, I am so excited about remittances that I do not want to miss them out. They are massive. More money is sent by the diaspora into the continent than is given through ODA-ble aid globally, so remittances are more important than discussions on aid. At the moment, it still costs about 6% to move money from country A to country B. That

is far, far too much. Anything we can do to reduce that percentage has to be good for the velocity of money going around and the ability to spend more money on feeding families, providing healthcare or supporting communities.

I will look at that piece of work more over the coming months. Hopefully, before your inquiry starts shaping something, I will be able to write to you and give more detail on what the UK Government are doing more broadly. There is a massive prize to be had on remittances for the African continent, and people play a major role in trying to deliver that prize.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I think you wanted to refer to the officials, particularly on targets. I look to Debbie Palmer and Harriet Mathews to see which of them would like to respond on the matter of targets.

Harriet Mathews: I was going to volunteer Debbie Palmer for that one and then come in.

The Chair: That is generous of you. In that case, may we go to Debbie Palmer on targets?

Debbie Palmer: Thank you. As the Minister said, Theresa May set out a very bold target for the UK's engagement with Africa. In actual fact, at the UK-Africa Investment Summit, the Prime Minister focused hard on positioning the UK as a partner of choice for Africa, focusing particularly on the extraordinary offer of the City of London as the global financier and global exchange for developing countries around the world, for example on local currency financing, which we have talked about, and with a range of other instruments. At the UK-Africa Investment Summit, rather than focusing on targets, it was more about ensuring that we had a really strong offer and that that offer could be enduring in a way that targets cannot be because they bounce up and down as the data changes. That was the Prime Minister's very strong push at the Africa Investment Summit.

On some of the broader questions, as the Minister says, I would emphasise that remittances are very, very important; we are seeing that through the COVID epidemic. We are focusing on a range of work with the Swiss government on this, which will be very helpful for the poorer countries across Africa. The Minister also mentioned TradeMark East Africa, which is an incredibly valuable tool in our toolbox in helping to speed up broader processes and in helping governments, frankly, to come together and ensure that the bureaucracy on either side of the border matches up so that goods can flow.

Obviously, during COVID, we have seen challenges in that area, with borders closed. During the Africa Investment Summit, we also announced our intention to work in southern Africa on a similar trade programme; again, those ambitions are still very much in play. In the light of COVID, we hope very much to take them forward, along with all the other ongoing work on improving the investment climate in Africa and

partnering up with experts and specialists across the UK to ensure that the UK's offer is really helping to drive forward both the continent and our trade to enable mutual prosperity.

The Chair: Thank you. I was not sure whether the Minister wished to come back; it looked as though he was signalling that he did.

James Duddridge MP: Only to apologise to the civil servants.

The Chair: Well said. I turn to Baroness Blackstone.

Q125 **Baroness Blackstone:** As a Minister with a remit across both the FCO and DfID, how important will overseas development assistance be to the UK's strategic approach to Africa over the next 10 years? Which areas of funding do you anticipate will be the most important?

James Duddridge MP: Overseas development assistance is a critical part of the overall package. We spend more than £5 billion on the African continent each year, both bilaterally and as our share of the international money that we feed into; that gives a directional indication of the amount that is spent on the continent. Some of that, such as bilateral DfID aid, is very clearly associated with HMG spend. Other spend in country—for example, our imputed share of the World Food Programme—might not necessarily be associated, but we are paying in our share.

Of course, we are still paying through the EU and will continue during the transition period to have payments related to international development. I always try, when speaking to interlocutors, to remind them of the global number—that is, the addition of ODA money spent on a bilateral basis, the wider country programmes that go across regions, our imputed share from multilaterals, particularly the banks and the EU. That includes non-ODA-ble money, which sometimes carries great effect—not perhaps in the amount, but in the substantive impact on the dynamics of the relationship.

Looking at that £5 billion, I will be very crass and give you a feel for how the bilateral portion is spent at the moment. I will divide it three ways. A quarter of it goes on economic development and long-term transitional work. About 25% of it is a slightly purer, humanitarian amount. The remaining half goes on health, social protection, education, water, sexual health, governance and security, but lots of these programmes are cross-cutting.

In terms of our current situation, there is a greater focus on the immediacies of health and humanitarian, but I see a longer-term shift where our development work will focus on what has a long-term and ongoing impact rather than simply things that plug a gap in the shorter term. Clearly, there is a balance to be had. There is no point having a strong, functioning economy in five years' time if you do not have food on the table or you are likely to be raped or shot as you go to the toilet at night. It is so difficult to take any money away from the immediacy and look at the long-term future, but it is a balancing act. That will be the shift over time.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I turn to the officials. I wonder whether we should start with Debbie Palmer on this occasion, given that this is about ODA.

Debbie Palmer: I have nothing to add; the Minister has covered it beautifully.

Harriet Mathews: And nothing from me.

The Chair: In that case, I go back to Baroness Blackstone.

Q126 **Baroness Blackstone:** What do you see as the main blocks, or obstacles, to achieving these longer-term objectives, and how far will you work with other big donors, whether bilateral or multilateral, in overcoming those obstacles?

James Duddridge MP: Thanks very much for the question. I will go back, if I may, to something that I should have said and which is truly amazing. We are still one of the few nations that delivers on 0.7% GNI. The fact that we do not still bash that around as a debatable is fantastic. We should be very proud of that.

On the question of blockages, I would mention scale. It is enormous. I was looking at a very successful programme, which we could spend more money on, to feed people over only a two-month period. That scheme was worth £37 million to plug a two-month gap, so the scale is enormous. The population numbers are enormous—and growing. While we talk about population as an opportunity, it is also a risk at the same time. An expanding middle class is an opportunity, but an expanding poor underclass that does not have work and is vulnerable will be expensive to keep in terms of social protection, social security and health; it will also be much more predisposed to extremism, low-level violence and banditry, which are destabilising for the continent.

The only way to deal with that is to work through multilaterals, particularly in some of the smaller or more complicated, cross-cutting countries. There is no perfect mix of multilateral and bilateral, because some of the solutions are not straight development solutions; they may be political, for example. So HMG and I want to utilise the bilateral programme to encourage other shifts that are in that country's interests, such as bringing forward democratic elections and better human rights alongside an aid programme and working together. That is easier to do on a bilateral basis, but scaling up and the broader blocker is working through the UN, the World Bank and other institutions.

The Chair: Thank you. In the interests of time and ensuring that all colleagues get an opportunity to ask their questions, I will move on to Baroness Fall.

Q127 **Baroness Fall:** Good morning and thank you for your time today. I want to turn to climate change and both the immediate and long-term effects that it might have on Sub-Saharan Africa. Food security, security in general, disease, poverty and migration—all these important things

massively affect both Sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world. What are your views on the best way to mitigate some of these problems? Also, how do we leverage our international relations and relationships to help to solve some of the problems?

James Duddridge MP: First, I agree with your question: it is one of the most, if not the most, important challenges across the continent and globally. But there is a conundrum: when most people think of Africa, they think of drought and locusts and food poverty, but equally, in west Africa, sea levels are rising in Togo, Benin, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, so they are feeling the full gamut of the impacts of climate change in an already hot continent. The additionality of the 0.5 degrees centigrade is a lot more impactful there than it might be here in the United Kingdom.

In terms of response, my role and that of all the Ministers working between DfID and the FCO are joint. Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park is appointed across three departments, including Defra,⁸ and leads on these climate change issues. That was decided, I believe, in the run-up to COP, where we have a convening power to move forward on and integrate these climate change issues.

Early on, before COP was postponed, we looked at a lot of programmes to see what we could do that was innovative and thought-leading. We looked at working on things like solar and of focusing on energy issues, and at leadership through the CDC—formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation—including what we can do to use the private sector in the climate sector to overcome these issues.

With your permission, Baroness Anelay, I will ask Debbie Palmer to add a bit of meat to those bones, as it is not my specialist subject. While I lead on Africa geographically, this is not a thematic that I lead on.

The Chair: By all means, but in the first instance I ask Baroness Fall to ask her supplementary immediately. After the Minister has had a go at responding, I will turn to Debbie so that she can respond to both your first and supplementary question. That is so that, after we conclude Baroness Fall's question, we can take our five-minute break.

Q128 **Baroness Fall:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for your answer. It was reassuring to hear about your ongoing commitment to 0.7%. Linked to what you said earlier to Baroness Blackstone, to what extent will we need to think about reorganising our priorities and resourcing and working more tightly with other Whitehall departments to have a co-ordinated approach to this issue?

James Duddridge MP: COP will provide that opportunity; it would almost force us, if we were not trying to do it otherwise. It is not just about resources, although money is clearly needed. It is about everything you do being climate-proofed and thought through and climate being part of the challenge at every table when you are having a discussion. We talked earlier about our dialogue with the African Union; we need to link

⁸ The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

in how we grow Africa at the rate that we and other nations grew without raping and pillaging fossil fuels.

That is a massive change. Some financial transfer will be needed behind that, but it is much, much more important that we look at the world in a different way and value our resources; they might not include the grass area around the corner from our house—in fact, you might not even be on the continent or the next continent—but we must value these global resources for the global good and integrate them into absolutely everything we do.

We are starting to get there, but even if we do everything that we are doing, we will look back and think, “Could we have done more?” That should focus us on a daily basis.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I come to Debbie Palmer.

Debbie Palmer: Thank you. I would emphasise that our commitment to climate change is very clear in the strategic approach to Africa. It is one of our five ‘shifts’; as I said, we are reorganising our teams and our work around those ‘shifts’. We have already published targets to meet on our commitments to international climate finance; those clear commitments are ongoing.

Through the work of the UKAIS, again, we are thinking hard about the nexus between prosperity and climate—that is, how the two intersect and how we can make Africa a better offer, as well as support it in moving forward quickly in its transition to new fuels, solar energy, et cetera.

All that was very much part of the conversation around the UKAIS, where, of course, there were announcements about a new, large solar investment in Kenya, solar-powered investments in Uganda and other such things. It is evident in everything we are doing. How we blend this into everything is very much part of our daily considerations. Of course, COP will put an increased focus on that; as the Minister said, we are already working towards that and that work is continuing, even through this COVID period.

Finally, there is a really strong cross-government partnership on this. Obviously, BEIS is incredibly involved in the mitigation work, and DfID does a huge amount of the adaptation work, but all this is cross-cutting. Of course, when it comes to things like forest management, there is an awful lot of intersection. It is absolutely at the centre of what the Government are doing now. The Government have been very clear about their commitment in this area.

The Chair: Thank you. It is now 11 o’clock. I will pause the meeting for five minutes. We will reconvene at five minutes past 11 with a question from Baroness Helic.

The Committee suspended until 11.05 am.

Q129 **The Chair:** I now reconvene our meeting. We will proceed with the next

question. It is in the name of Baroness Helic, but I believe she has had to leave the meeting. Therefore, I will ask it in her place. The question is: to what extent has the nature of conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa changed? What do the Government think this means for the future of peacekeeping?

James Duddridge MP: Thank you for that. The nature of conflict and peacekeeping has changed on the continent substantially. As a result, we need to change. The stability of Africa matters massively to the UK. We need to use the full range of diplomacy, defence, development, security and general expertise, along with the African institutions to keep peace and avoid conflict.

The nature of conflict has changed over the last 50 years, with a focus on conflict within country, quite often coups, quite often ethnically led. We are now seeing much more of an asymmetric threat, a regional threat. There is much more threat of contagion across the region, between countries and across the continent.

There is a much greater degree of flexibility of competent forces moving between countries. We have seen a much more appropriate response from African Union-led forces, sometimes interacting with the UN, but more often than not interacting in country with neighbouring troop-contributing countries. An obvious example of this is Somalia and AMISOM, although there are others.

Increasingly, when looking at regional conflict, we see regional solutions. I use the term 'regional' not in a structured way and not referring to the economic regions. The various groupings sometimes depend on the political characters involved who have that leverage locally, but provide African solutions at a sub-African Union level.

That is not to say that the UK has disengaged. Our expertise and assets are used widely across the continent in partnership with countries, but also with organisations and external partners. An example would be our close military co-operation with the Kenyans, both as a warm-weather training base and looking into Somalia, or our close co-operation with the French to provide helicopter lift and more technical assistance there. Things are morphing and becoming a lot more complicated for HMG's response. We are being fleet of foot.

The Chair: I turn immediately to the officials to see whether they have anything further to respond to on that. There is nothing from either of them. I am conscious of the amount of time left, so on this occasion I will not ask a supplementary question since I am not Baroness Helic; I will not try to second-guess her. I know that Lord Alton does not have a video link, but I understand that his audio is working.

Q130 Lord Alton of Liverpool: Thank you, Chair, and thank you Minister. I would like to drill deeper into the reply the Minister just gave about conflict. The mass movement of people to which he referred earlier is frequently driven by vast numbers of people escaping shocking violence

and crimes against humanity, even genocide. People see us as creating just or accountable institutions. What are the Government doing to support and strengthen human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa in building those institutions?

The Chair: Minister, I know that the sound was not optimal, but I hope you got the gist of that.

James Duddridge MP: I got the gist of it. The Government are clearly committed to human rights through the annual report, but also through individual cases. I may look to Harriet Mathews to go into a little bit more detail on that, but we are also providing very direct support through various institutions and programmes, particularly on the DfID side, by supporting the rule of law and democracy not just as a concept but with practical help, whether that is funding and running elections or institutional support.

We talked earlier about cross-cutting around the shift. It is making sure that we bring in something that does not sound like it is about the rule of law, from, say, a trade perspective. The UK-AIS, by bringing in the City of London, provides norms of accountability and a financial system that feeds through into a broader system.

I am conscious that Lord Alton and the House of Lords have raised a number of specific cases. I very much stand ready to help engage where there are persecuted activists, pro-democracy campaigners, parliamentarians, because they are standing up internationally for us all, and political leaders on an ad hoc basis. I encourage parliamentary colleagues to continue the flow of information.

Sometimes I cannot be as open about what HMG are doing. That is in the best interests of the individual involved. Sometimes I can be more open in private with parliamentarians than I can be on the record. If it sometimes looks like HMG are not taking things seriously, have a chat with me, catch me in the metaphorical division lobbies in the Commons and Lords and have a chat. I can see a few arms going up; I am available by email and phone—they still work—and normal business will resume.

Those individual cases are quite an important illustration of working together. I am keen to hear more about that and to join up parliamentarians directly, whether it is with the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief Rehman Chishti or a desk for a particular country, to make sure that parliamentarians are confident that HMG are listening and taking effective action, while understanding the constraints of those actions in a different democratic space from the United Kingdom.

The Chair: I will go straight back to Lord Alton for his supplementary. I am just worried his audio might give out. I will then turn to the officials.

Q131 **Lord Alton of Liverpool:** Thank you, Chair. The north of England might not have as bad a connection as parts of Africa, but nevertheless.

I thank the Minister for the way he has replied on individual issues that I have raised with him. I know that others have, too. I invite him to say something about evidence that we have been given during the inquiry—for instance about children working in the DRC's cobalt mines, and about violence against women and girls by political Islamists. The mother of Leah Sharibu came to Westminster to tell us her daughter's shocking story of abduction. There are accusations of genocide against Sudan's President al-Bashir. There has often been a culture of unaccountability and impunity. What priorities are these issues given in our aid, trade and diplomacy?

James Duddridge MP: On the two specific cases that I think Lord Alton is asking about, on Leah Sharibu I know that Rehman Chishti, the PM's Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief, met with the family. He subsequently briefed me on that and on the wider action being taken as part of the Truro report. I am happy to write to the Committee on that case and that of the DRC with a bit more nuanced detail, which I think would be helpful.

The Foreign Secretary raised the DRC issue with President Tshisekedi at the margins of the UK-Africa Investment Summit. Something I very much follow up on is the interactions with the DRC and the provinces particularly affected.

I will write on both those subjects, giving the best update, as comprehensively as I can, as examples to feed into this report. If there are any other specific cases that you want to raise, rather than through the normal PQ and in writing but through the Committee, as evidence on how we perform in Sub-Saharan Africa, I am more than happy to take those en bloc and provide whatever reassurance you need. If there is additional verbal material on which I can give informal evidence, I am happy to do that through whatever means you see as valid and helpful.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I look to the two officials to see whether they have anything to add. Nothing from Debbie. Harriet Mathews please.

Harriet Mathews: The Minister has been eloquent on the point about advocacy, both private and public, that our Ministers engage on. In Sudan, for example, the stance in public of our ambassador in the face of human rights abuses was quite a high-risk strategy and highlights that we absolutely prioritise human rights and put them right at the front of our engagement. I have other examples.

I emphasise that as well as that point on advocacy in individual cases and on themes and issues, there is a large amount of work on building democratic institutions—beyond just elections, where there is a vast amount of support as I mentioned in my evidence last time, but through transparency initiatives, working against corruption and all the other wider issues that feed in and are very relevant, for example, in the cobalt mines issue.

Finally, on strengthening and talking to activists themselves and providing linkages across—in Malawi, for example, bringing journalists and people advocating freedom of the media together so that they could compare notes and strategies—we provide the financing and support. There is obviously lobbying and the political effort, but there is also enabling other groups to come together.

The Chair: Thank you. I now move on to Lord Grocott, but I am informed that Baroness Rawlings, who was to ask the next question, has left the meeting. I therefore propose to leave her question until the end to ensure that those present get their questions in. Lord Grocott will come next, but I will then move on to Lord Hannay once his question is concluded.

Q132 **Lord Grocott:** Thank you, Minister. I will ask the inevitable question about how things change now that we have departed from the European Union. Is our withdrawal from the EU seen as an opportunity to diverge from the EU's approach to Sub-Saharan Africa, as we have had at least one or two witnesses suggesting that it might? As we withdraw, how does the Minister see our relationship with the EU continuing in relation to how we deal with Sub-Saharan Africa? I note, for example, that a substantial part of our aid budget is currently delivered via the EU. Does he see changes, in that respect and others, taking place?

James Duddridge MP: Thank you for that question. I do not think that an enormous amount will change. I do not want to overegg the impact of Brexit on Africa or our relationship with it. Equally, I do not want to diminish the fact that the EU is a useful partner in Africa in some circumstances. But it is not the biggest shift. Nor has the European Union ever been our biggest partner on the continent. The obvious partner is not the biggest one with the biggest diplomatic presence—the biggest diplomatic spend is from the Americans.

The obvious partner is the French government, who have a lot of equities in Africa and a deep relationship in a dissimilar but analogous situation to the UK in their historical links across the continent. We will continue to deal with the European Union. We may have stepped outside it, but that does not mean we will not work with it across the continent where appropriate, as we would work with all the other embassies, particularly at post. That is where the really strong bonds form, particularly the personal relationships with individual ambassadors.

Normally, things are country-led—by the UK, by France. In Sudan, as we have just mentioned, the Germans are picking up the baton and helping the Sudanese government post Bashir to refinance and stabilise their economy, which will involve work across the board. The United Nations, probably more from a peace and security viewpoint rather than a comprehensive viewpoint, is critical.

Some of my opposite numbers saw Brexit as a distraction, but now that we have come out of the period of transition—when we were in that “Are we leaving? Aren't we leaving?” type of debate, there was a bit of

confusion over what it would mean for Africa—there is probably more grasping of the opportunities by Africa to say, “Right, let’s look at our trading relationship”. We now have a way forward with the bilateral relationship that is not constrained in any way by the EU. There are not always advantages, but particularly on the trade side there is a feeling of refreshing bilateral relations. I for one will stick close to European partners around Africa. I will work with anyone to the benefit of the continent.

The Chair: Lord Grocott, may I ask you to put your supplementary immediately? Then I will go to the two officials for their responses to both the original question and your supplementary.

James Duddridge MP: With your permission, Chair, I will take this question myself rather than going to officials.

Q133 **Lord Grocott:** If the Minister is taking it himself, could he address that specific point about substantial sections of our aid budget going via the EU? Does he see more of that money being handled bilaterally after our departure from the European Union?

My planned supplementary was simply this: do the Government plan to give better trade access to countries in the region after we leave the EU? Are there positive intentions in that respect?

James Duddridge MP: First, apologies on the EU money question; I omitted to answer it. We currently spend over £1 billion of our aid budget through the EU contributions. That will tail off over the years as part of the transition payments; some of those relate to aid, so no shift of money will happen on 31 December, but there will be an opportunity to realign that money and spend it either bilaterally or multilaterally.

Whether it is bilateral or multilateral is probably less important at the moment, in our view. We are looking more strategically at how it will be spent in relation to the strategic shift and the manifesto commitment. Clearly there will be a post-COVID element to that, but those will be the drivers.

Alongside that, there is quite a big chunk of money; lots of DfID programmes are multiyear, so there is a limited opportunity to shift the ship as it travels. This is an additional opportunity, and one that will be more important given that the 0.7% is of GNI, affected by growth, and reflects what is happening in the global economy. It is quite possible that we will not be in the position we previously have been, perpetually each year spending a little bit more money. Programmes close and often spend a little bit more money additionally. That is where that European money will be chiefly helpful, in refocusing on strategic priorities and manifestos.

On trade access, it is too early to give a definitive answer, but trade preferences by product have come out already. There is a very different, nuanced impact in relation to individual countries; we clearly need to work very closely with our partners in countries such as Kenya, where we certainly do need a trade deal, either as part of the East African

Community or bilaterally, to protect some key flows for them, and for us in terms of goods. Go to somewhere like Waitrose, and Blue Skies is providing the mangoes and strawberries and so forth, but that revolves around thousands of farmers in the supply chain who need to be taken care of when it comes to trade access.

It is a good question, but a little too early to make the call on the detail. That which the Secretary of State for International Trade issued yesterday will give an indication. Some things have gone to zero tariff, but particular attention will be paid to countries with regard to the sugar tariff, the banana tariff and the tinned tuna tariff, which we will need to work through to make sure that everyone benefits and the system works.

I am more than happy, as these things settle, to come back to the Committee on the terms of trade and the impact of tariffs on the African economy. We will have meetings with countries over the coming weeks to work through that now that they have seen what was a commercially sensitive document. They need some time to digest that, and we need some time to have those bilateral meetings.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I now move on to Lord Hannay.

Q134 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** Thank you, Minister, for all the evidence that you are giving, and let me say how welcome it is to find a Minister doing this job who has active working experience in Africa.

Several witnesses have raised the issue of the Government's visa regime and its effect on the UK's relationships with Sub-Saharan African countries. One former UK diplomat referred to aspects of the regime as "humiliating" to visa applicants in the region. Do the Government acknowledge that the current regime harms the UK's relationships in Sub-Saharan Africa? What weight is currently given to the UK's diplomatic, cultural, business and higher education relationships in Whitehall discussions about the future of our visa regime?

James Duddridge MP: Thank you kindly for your comments, Lord Hannay; you yourself are experienced in these issues.

I would not use the words that were used about the Home Office by the Director of the Royal African Society. I would just like to take a step back: I do not want to diminish the fact that sometimes, heaven forbid, HMG get things wrong—there are cases of that, and you may conclude that it may be a thematic thing—but actually we get this right most of the time, and we are getting it more right than we have in the past. In the last full year that we have figures for, 2019, for all visit visas overall there was a 74% approval rate, compared to 71% in 2018, so a 3% improvement. That is not massive, but directionally it gives you an indication.

On study visas specifically, it went up from 81% to 85%. We are fleet of foot. Knowing, for example, that a number of language schools are closing down in country, we have removed the language requirement for the Chevening scholarship for 2020-21, but clearly candidates will still

need to meet the requirements of the university. That is just a small indicator of the things we can do to fine-tune the system.

It is a Home Office lead, but HMG try to work together, in country. I think it is a lot more coherent in Whitehall, in all candidness. That is partly because of proximity—physically, everyone is working together and there is a greater velocity of sharing of information—but also structurally. I remember a time when, if you knew the ambassador, he would sign off the visa; it was all a bit matey and chums, informal and nuanced. Quite rightly, that is not scalable to international travel. Nor is it fair on people that legitimately want to visit but are not necessarily in country networks.

It is about getting the right systems in place. I was very pleased that a number of Ministers for immigration gave evidence to the all-party Africa group, and people shared their views of the immigration system, and while I would not say that the system is humiliating I do appreciate that some people find the system very difficult. That came out in the all-party report, which was very strong, and it is something we should reflect on as we look at the system and changes to the system going forward.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Lord Hannay, if you ask your supplementary now, I will then turn to the officials for any comments.

Q135 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** Thank you, Minister, for what you said about the Chevenings, but you offered a very short stay of execution. Even before COVID-19, the requirement on higher education students with places given to them at British universities and on Chevening—you did not mention Commonwealth scholars—to take English language tests in countries other than where they actually reside is both costly and risky. Now, as a result of COVID-19, it is probably impossible. What are the Government doing about the situation, not just in the very short term but in the longer term, too?

James Duddridge MP: I am not sighted on Commonwealth scholarships, which, Lord Hannay is right, are equally important. I will write to the Committee and address that issue to see whether we have already made an announcement that will reassure him, treating them similarly—and if not, why not? Clearly, with the current situation, we will need to keep this under review, and I would like to give early notice to organisations if that has to be extended. Hopefully, we will be in an entirely different place by the next slug of applications.

It really is a great scheme. In my time on the continent, one of the best meetings I had was in the residence in Pretoria with about 500 people who had been Chevening scholars in the past. I saw the young, the middle-aged and the old and how it had influenced their careers and the impact they had had—senior people in business, senior social entrepreneurs, politicians and civil servants. The more we can do that, and support them, the better.

One thing that came up on the visas is that part of the reason why we feel these problems particularly in Africa is not because there is a

particular African problem but because we have a particular African connection, whether through the church or through development organisations that work across the continent.

There are a lot of people who perhaps do not have higher incomes and who want to travel here, who might fit outside the normal parameters. Strangely, it is almost an indicator of the strength of the relationship between countries that some of these problems crop up on the visas. I am happy to co-ordinate with the Home Office on individual examples if they illustrate a problem and there is a solution to be developed.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Given that it is, as you say, a Home Office lead, I will look to Harriet Mathews and Debbie Palmer, to see there is anything they wish to add.

Harriet Mathews: I would reinforce the Minister's point about us trying to improve the operability of the policy—anticipating big, key events and making sure that decisions are better first time around. That has been one of the things that has been raised.

On English language, we are not at a solution point now, but we are talking to the British Council about more online testing, so that people can do their qualifications remotely. COVID provides an imperative to speed up that process, but we had already started it and we are actively working on that point.

Q136 **Lord Purvis of Tweed:** Good morning, Minister, it is very good to see you. Similarly, I also welcomed your reappointment, given your very deep experience and knowledge of the continent.

Before I ask my question, I would like to touch on something that Harriet Mathews said. I was fortunate to be in Sudan before, during and after the revolution, so I also warmly commend the position taken by Irfan Siddiq, our ambassador there. It was a very brave position, supported by Jamie Hamill and the political team.

My question relates to the Government Integrated Review and whether the Africa strategy or strategic approach will be included in that. Ultimately, how will we know? In response to Baroness Smith's question, you said that the Africa strategy is a very clear strategy and a very real document. Harriet Mathews told us in January that it was "a framework and guidance for our broader work across the continent, rather than having a traditional document that set out the milestones and the point at which it would be achieved". If it is to be included in the review, how will we know if there is progress and whether any element of it is being achieved?

James Duddridge MP: First, thank you for your compliments, which I would reiterate. I was also in Sudan before, but not during. I will pass on your compliments and comments.

The strategy is in several documents; there is no document that I am not sharing with you out of malice or discretion, but clearly they wrote this

paperwork through the NSC. There have been publications and speeches about it and the detail is fleshed out through those.

Harriet Mathews talked about an aspiration to bring it together in a document. That is something that I will take away; I am getting a sense from you that that would be helpful. Even though it is evolving and some of the detail may change, you would have a snapshot of what those five key areas look like and some examples to test us and monitor the change over time.

There will be change; that is the point of having the Integrated Review, which will cut across the four key areas of security, defence, foreign policy, and development. If that is not pulled together in one document, I am happy to commit to writing to the Committee at some juncture in the future, not necessarily in time with this but so that you have something before the Integrated Review to say where the UK Government are, with a letter and document explaining where they were before going into the review, so that you can test that against what has changed coming out. That seems perfectly reasonable.

The Chair: Minister, thank you. I turn back to Lord Purvis for his supplementary, before I turn to the officials.

Q137 Lord Purvis of Tweed: Thank you. Given that part of our work is looking at the link between development, prosperity, trade and investment, which have been referred to by Lord Mendelsohn and by you, how do you envisage that being included in the review? It may well be a major part of our relationship with Africa, if not the key relationship going forward.

Coming back to a response to a question asked by Lord Mendelsohn, Debbie Palmer referred to the Government's position previously being bold. We should be clear that the target announced in August 2018 was that the UK would be the largest investor in Africa in the G7 by 2022. Now, it has become that we will be a partner of choice. I do not know what "partner of choice" means, so why was that target dropped?

James Duddridge MP: First, on the interaction between development, prosperity and trade, an overarching but obvious point is that it is not just about UK trade. The most important bit, from a development viewpoint, is the non-UK trade. In the UK trade element, the most important bit is bringing the structures and ways of working—the pump priming—rather than just revenues for UK plc.

I do not have a crystal ball to see what the outcome will be for the Integrated Review, but—slightly facetiously perhaps, although it is not meant to be—it will be more integrated. No one is saying that we should have more silos to provide a challenge between different departments; we are trying to break down those silos and work more closely together on the strategic shifts.

Directionally, that is what will happen. In many ways, because we see the Integrated Review coming, we are thinking about it all the time. How

would we have responded to COVID if we had been more integrated? How have we operated in a more integrated way? This is in various forms and iterations. In this period, Whitehall is working in a much more cross-government way, both at COBRA-type level but also at official level in a way that has never really been the case. It is about the pace at which one is having to work. You cannot circulate a paper around Whitehall, take views, and it go off to Ministers—you have already lost a week, and you need a decision within hours.

On the target, we still have a bold goal of being the partner of choice, but as Africa expands massively, the cake expands more. There are also more players in the field. Our competitors are investing heavily. Financially, China is eating up a lot more of that investment opportunity than before. It makes hitting a crass target of being the largest harder and harder.

To take Saudi Arabia, in the 2014-16 period at the Foreign Office I am not sure how many times I even talked about Saudi Arabia in relation to the African continent. Certainly, it was not a massive issue. Now, the flows of money coming in from Saudi Arabia are quite large. The money coming in from Turkey has developed, despite the problems with Turkey. The situation has changed. HMG are positioning themselves in Africa as the partner of choice because it is not just about a single figure. The single figure is not the sole thing in the British national interest; our interest in Africa over the last 10 or 15 years is primarily a development one. It is about getting people out of poverty and preventing deaths. It relates to a broader vision.

The Chair: I turn now to the officials to see whether they wish to add further comment to that. Harriet Mathews says no. Debbie Palmer?

Debbie Palmer: I echo and underscore what the Minister has said. We found that the target, as I said, would simply be a snapshot. It sort of reduces our partnership down to one figure—one set of trading figures. There is complexity in whether you measure stock or flow of trade, and the figures also bounce around hugely depending on individual investment deals that happen at any given time.

We found, as the Minister said, that it just was not a particularly helpful way to try to describe the kind of partnership that we wanted with Africa. We therefore wanted to broaden it out and make it something that was much more multifaceted and meaningful, as we talked about the offer that we wanted with Africa and the future partnership that we desired.

The Chair: Thank you. I note that we have nearly a quarter of an hour left, so I now turn to our members generally for supplementaries. I have had advance applications for supplementaries in the last few minutes in this order: Baroness Helic, Baroness Rawlings, Lord Alton and Lord Hannay. I shall take them in that order and see how many we can get in. I see that Lord Grocott and Baroness Blackstone also raising their hands. Baroness Helic, please.

Q138 Baroness Helic: Good morning to the officials and the Minister. I hope that you can hear me. I am sorry that I was not here to ask this question before. I have a supplementary question, which relates to peacekeeping. This year's International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers on 29 May focuses on women in peacekeeping. Currently, only 6% of all uniformed military police and justice personnel in field missions are women peacekeepers. The UN obviously cannot do better without the critical support of member states. What are the United Kingdom Government doing to address this gap?

James Duddridge MP: The gap is so big. First, I recognise that Baroness Helic is absolutely spot on: women are not around the table in making peace, so that peace is not reflective of the community and does not hold. There is also a broader point to be made about making sure that women are involved with civil society across the piece, making countries more conflict resilient.

The manifesto commitment to girls' education has a very broad-brush benefit but includes having a generation of women who are educated and ready to take up the mantle. But they also need to be given permission to be at the table; that is critical, certainly when we engage. The Secretary of State tells a story of when she went to South Sudan, I think it was, with some British military personnel. A number of female personnel took it upon themselves to do self-defence training in the community with a number of women and girls' groups, to demonstrate how they could protect themselves in relation to the prevention of sexual violence, and more generally, as well as be a role model. We need to present that going forward.

I am more than happy to meet you, Baroness Helic, to go into a bit more detail on the military side and on the prevention of sexual violence against women, which I do not think any of us would have been talking about had it not been for the work that you did back in 2016 and have continued, for which you have a number champions—including me, briefly, back at the UN last time round, and the Member for Totnes, who managed to bend my ear five times on PSVI over the space of one lunch. I welcome my feet being held to the coals; if you can do that, it would be much appreciated.

Q139 Baroness Rawlings: Good morning. I apologise for having to slip out of the meeting earlier. Minister, I note your involvement with the European Union in your previous position. How does our leaving the EU affect my original question?

James Duddridge MP: I am sorry. Could you remind me which question?

Baroness Rawlings: Which other non-African countries do the UK Government believe are the most important to co-operate with in the pursuit of their goals in Sub-Saharan Africa?

James Duddridge MP: There is quite a range; it goes well beyond the tradition of the French and the Portuguese. We touched financially on the

Saudis, but the Gulf states, such as Qatar and the Emirates, are important. In fact, I find the Gulf states more important than some of the north African states and some of the relationships further down, although clearly there is a pull towards a continental offering and a demand to have one HMG view of the African continent through the lens of the African Union. That perhaps was not there in the same way, in that we would not necessarily look at Libya from the south; we might look at it from the east.

The Americans are clearly big players and have the biggest diplomatic footprint in terms of spend. The Chinese are mindboggling in their numbers, with more than US\$200 billion of trade and foreign direct investment of more than US\$30 billion going in each year. Understanding that, working in the broadest sense in the seam—rather than trying to block influence—and making as many of these partners as possible complementary to our offering, rather than competitors, is beneficial.

We have seen increased Russian and Israeli interest. I mentioned the Turkish interest. Turkey is not necessarily a country that you would put on your list of top countries in Africa, but it has 42 embassies there at the moment and seven more planned. Turkish Airlines flies to 58 destinations across 38 African countries and is the fastest-growing in terms of trade. It also has a significant military component; for example, it has a 1,000 capacity military training centres in Somalia and runs the air and sea ports in Mogadishu. It drills down by country—both those coming into countries and their outlook.

The key thing is working in partnership, which sometimes means heading into a Government in country with a joint view. Ambassadors are quite good at convening and passing messages, but we consider UK equities to include human rights and law and order.

On concerns about issues, we focus on the opportunities as well as the upside. Speaking with a broader diplomatic voice tends to work.

On the trade side, we are mixing it up. A trade deal between country A and country B is less likely to work than a trade deal between countries A, B and C and country D, with provision made by other parties as well. It is a kind of self-checking mechanism that does not rely on “Who is winning the most out of this deal, country A or country B?” Working in consortium works to the benefit of Africa and de-risks some of these issues. The same can be said of our diplomatic activity: we work best in consort.

Q140 Lord Alton of Liverpool: [Inaudible] Obviously, there is the question of COVID-19 in relation to the 26th CHOGM conference, to be held in Kigali. How is the FCO using the Commonwealth to galvanise support for Africa?

The Chair: The question was difficult to hear. How is the FCO using the Commonwealth to mobilise Africa on COVID?

James Duddridge MP: Thank you. I think I got the gist of the question. The answer is: to maximal effect. It is a great shame that CHOGM had to

be delayed. I was at the previous CHOGM as chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I hope to take part in the next one as a Minister, although Lord Ahmad of your place leads on the Commonwealth as an overarching body.

It is incredibly powerful. Clearly, Rwanda is in a different position from India, and Mozambique is in a different position from Nigeria, so one size does not fit all, but the Commonwealth is a strong convening group, particularly when it convenes around shared language. It has slightly more of a shared understanding, both of law and order, in terms of types of legal systems, but also on more of the monetary side and cultural side as well.

We continue to work with the Commonwealth and wish to strengthen it, but we should be under no illusion. When I talk to Commonwealth ambassadors, the Commonwealth is a tricky concept to be understood in country. They understand the British relationship and understand a bit about the Commonwealth Games and Her Majesty's role in their countries, but we can do more to sell the Commonwealth. It should be more influential than Premiership football.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. I turn to Lord Hannay. This may have to be the last question, but we may get Lord Grocott in.

Q141 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** Thank you for what you said earlier, Minister, in reply to Lord Mendelsohn's question about remittances.

Do you recognise that substantial sums of the money sent by the diaspora back to Sub-Saharan Africa in remittances are going into the pockets of what is close to monopolistic transference? I am sure you are familiar with this because of your banking experience. What are the Government doing, using their competition powers, to break up that price gouging?

James Duddridge MP: Strangely, the pricing is excessive, but it is less monopolistic now than it was in the past, in that transfers are not going through a banking system where, in some countries, it was monopolistic or there were two or three players. We will be able to say more about this; we are very active on this subject.

I can write to the Committee before it is out of the inquiry, but I want to reveal something that is in progress. In terms of the size of the prize, more money goes on to the African continent through remittances than through international development, so I am very aware. Also, I have seen early indications that this has dropped by about 20% during the COVID-19 crisis, so it is even more important now than it was before, but I do not want to reduce the average transaction charge from 6% to 5%, because that would be a benefit.

We need to look well beyond that and utilise end-to-end electronic systems. The idea that you take cash to Brick Lane and cash comes out at the other end in the African continent or elsewhere is madness in the days when we all do our banking electronically. There is a greater role to

be played by cards, fingerprint IDs at the other ends and mobile telephony. That might sound completely bonkers when you are talking about a dollar a day, but many people living on a dollar a day have a mobile phone, which can be used to send money cheaply and securely. However, there are many competing individuals, not only for banking and moneylending but for the telecoms companies, who have vested interests that we need to break through.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. We have just two minutes left.

Q142 **Lord Grocott:** It is difficult to make generalisations about so many countries, but one that I think is fair is that even though it is 50-odd years since most countries became independent, having previously been colonies, there is still a clear tendency for Britain to have much closer relationships with the former colonies than with other parts of the continent. Yet, as the Minister has described, we have recently made substantial changes in policy in relation to the Sahel. I just wonder whether, looking to the future, you would expect the clear distinction that currently exists, the closer relationship with previous colonies than with other countries, that part of Britain's relationship with Sub-Saharan Africa, to change?

The Chair: Minister, I appreciate that that is a very long question for a short answer.

James Duddridge MP: This is complex. The UK will feel slightly bolder about being honest and saying, "They are our close neighbours". There are some embarrassing bits to that relationship, but there some brilliant bits too. However, across the continent, influences will ebb and flow. There will be new players coming in, and the old dividing lines of the French, the Portuguese and the Brits will be very old hat. Things will be much more nuanced, and rightly so. African countries will be much more transactional, asking, "What can we get out of this relationship?" Most people I meet want more British influence, to counterbalance other influences in their countries, and want to leverage that historical division.

The Chair: Minister, thank you very much indeed, and thank you to the officials, Debbie Palmer and Harriet Mathews, for your contributions this morning in our virtual meeting on the International Relations and Defence Select Committee.

I formally close this meeting, but in doing so remind my colleagues, in leaving it, to be ready to pick up the instructions that have just been sent to you to join a Microsoft Teams meeting, so that we may have an informal discussion. Thank you, Minister; we are grateful for your contributions.

James Duddridge MP: Thank you, and Happy Africa Day on Monday.