

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: The global humanitarian system

HC 675

Tuesday 8 March 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 8 March 2016.

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Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Fiona Bruce; Stephen Doughty; Pauline Latham; Jeremy Lefroy; Wendy Morton; Mr Virendra Sharma

Questions 1-46

Witnesses: **Bruno Lemarquis**, Deputy Director, Crisis Response Unit, United Nations Development Programme, **Christina Bennett**, Research Fellow, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, and **Markus Geisser**, Senior Humanitarian Affairs and Policy Adviser, International Committee of the Red Cross, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Good morning. Can I welcome our first panel of witnesses? We have two parts to this morning's session; we have our panel of expert witnesses for the first hour and then we have the Minister for half an hour afterwards, so we have an hour. We have eight areas that we want to cover during that hour, so hopefully we can ensure both in our questioning and in your answering that we stay at a pace that all eight areas can be covered. For some of our questions it would make sense for all three of you to answer; some of them will be more directed to individual panel members. Let me kick off with a quite general question, which it would be good to hear from all three of you in response to, regarding the World Humanitarian Summit. The 2030 agenda arising from the sustainable development goals has, at its heart, the concept of leaving no one behind. What can the summit contribute to that agenda of leaving no one behind? Christina, would you like to go first? Please introduce yourselves when you give your first answer.

Christina Bennett: I am Christina Bennett. I am a Research Fellow at the Humanitarian Policy Group of the Overseas Development Institute. It is a think-tank here in London. Thank you very much for the invitation and thank you very much for your question.

The Secretary-General has related the World Humanitarian Summit to the sustainable development goals and the whole “leaving no one behind” agenda of the 2030 agenda. This is a pivotal and important link to be made, and a welcome one in terms of where we think the World Humanitarian Summit should go. However, it is not without its risks.

On the positive side, linking the World Humanitarian Summit to the sustainable development goals broadens the debate beyond humanitarian crises and creates the political space and momentum for the World Humanitarian Summit, which is not an

inter-governmental process, to incorporate it into the goals that have been agreed to by 192 countries. It situates humanitarian and development assistance within the same objectives and goals. It will help humanitarians recognise their roles in development assistance and, in turn, help development actors to insert into their own DNA the importance of crisis response and their own responsibility to making sure it is implemented. It will give Governments a stronger sense of their own sense of responsibility in crisis response and it will help avoid many of the contradictions that aid agendas have had in the past.

There are some risks to this, in the sense that the sustainable development goals and linking them to the World Humanitarian Summit may be setting humanitarians up for failure. Humanitarian actors have neither the remit nor the resources to actually achieve those goals on their own, so the important bit of that is the linking and the linking of humanitarian and development objectives together. It also aligns humanitarian objectives with those of Governments. The SDGs and the responsibility for implementing them is attached to Governments. There will be some cases where humanitarian actors will not want to align their work with Governments, for example in civil wars, where Governments themselves may be parties to a conflict. Therefore, while the UK Government and all of us want to get behind the World Humanitarian Summit as an extension or as a contribution to the sustainable development goals, we have to do so with some reservation and safeguard the fact that humanitarian action really does need to be implemented at times on the basis of humanitarian law and humanitarian principles.

Bruno Lemarquis: I am Bruno Lemarquis from the United Nations Development Programme. I am currently the Deputy Director of the Crisis Response Unit of that programme. I have been 25 years with UNDP, mostly in the field in crisis-affected countries. I fully subscribe to what Christine has been saying so I will not repeat it.

In order to reach the furthest behind and the hardest to reach, it will be important collectively to harness capacities across the global system, coming from the humanitarian and development sides, with peacebuilding actors and security actors all working together, first and foremost to reduce the needs and to prevent crises from happening in the first place so that we do not have to spend billions and billions responding to needs. This is a priority under the SDGs as a global framework. It resonates very much with the goal of the World Humanitarian Summit and how to avoid crises in the first place.

Markus Geisser: My name is Markus Geisser. I work for the International Community of the Red Cross here in London, as a senior policy adviser. I subscribe to what my distinguished colleagues have said. If the summit is not transformative, what will be the implications? Today's world is an example. It would remain what I would call a catalogue of inhumanity; the respect and protection of people affected would continue to suffer.

We, from the ICRC, are particularly pleased to see the principle of humanity as a common guide right in the title of the report. It is something important and positive because it mobilises states to work towards a common goal. It motivates states and people alike.

What can the UK do to ensure the success of the UN 2030 agenda? All the 17 SDGs explicitly refer to a need for security and stability in order to reach those goals. Although it is not explicitly mentioned, the risk of conflict and instability would certainly halt that process. What is important now is that the SDGs have been set up. The work is currently

ongoing with regards to the indicators against which the SDGs will be measured. It will be important that the effect of conflict on communities and individuals will be mentioned in those indicators, such as the departure of skilled health workers, for example, or displacement, the destruction of schools and things like that, and there is a particular message for colleagues from DFID because DFID takes a particular lead role in now defining those indicators.

Q2 Chair: Thank you very much. You have each covered points that we are going to explore in some of the follow-up questioning. Can I just ask one supplementary and ask each of you to answer really briefly? What would success look like for the World Humanitarian Summit?

Christina Bennett: For me, success would look like three points: success would be promoting a new consensus on international humanitarian law and putting in place measures to strengthen compliance with law. Success would also look like a plan to reform the humanitarian system itself, and success would also look at reforming the financial models that underpin a lot of how humanitarian assistance is funded and implemented.

Bruno Lemarquis: I would see, first, greater consideration given to prevention and preparedness, including in terms of investment; we should all be obsessed by preventing and preparing. The second system change should be in terms of humanitarian development articulation and coherence, and, third, to bring new actors around the table. The humanitarian responses are very much dominated by a few member states and few implementers.

Markus Geisser: From our side, it is difficult to add, but I would say concretely adherence to international humanitarian law is and remains the single most important way to reduce human suffering in times of armed conflict. We are really pleased that the report puts a particular emphasis on this. Success would also be—although maybe it does not come out of the report as much, and I represent the ICRC and also the movement of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies—that the diverse ecology of the humanitarian response community is highlighted. As much as it is a UN summit, it is also a World Humanitarian Summit.

Chair: You have set a great example of really good, concise answers so we will definitely get through the eight.

Q3 Pauline Latham: As the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing say, “The most effective way to bring down the cost of humanitarian aid is to reduce the necessity to resort to it.” Can you tell us what the concrete outcomes are that you would like to see that would signal a movement away from simply responding to humanitarian crises and perhaps towards preventing them?

Bruno Lemarquis: You are right; a core part of the WHS agenda is about how to ensure that crises are avoided in the first place, so that we do not have to go through this very costly and usually long-winding crisis. The average length of a crisis now is seven years, so you have crises that perpetuate themselves. The best way to reduce need is to invest in and to work on prevention and prepare countries, communities and systems. The numbers are staggering. The international investment in both prevention and preparedness is

staggering. It is very hard to understand why. There is the CNN effect, which to a great extent explains why, although it is much more costly, member states prefer to respond. It is harder to prove; the success of prevention is harder to demonstrate. Soft diplomacy, soft mediation and building national capacity and conflict management are not very costly but it is hard to demonstrate whether it had any impact on a peaceful election, social cohesion and so on. There should be a different balance struck between investment in avoiding crisis and responding to crisis.

Q4 Pauline Latham: Can I come back in there for a moment? You talk about conflict management. That is fine if you know the conflict is coming, but who knew about ISIS? Who knew about Boko Haram? Who knew about all these terrorist groups were going to do what they have done? You could not have had the management of that conflict because we did not know it was going to happen, so how can that work?

Bruno Lemarquis: There is ample space, as a collective of partners interested in prevention, to work much more closely on early warnings, and not a fragmented early warning system—joint analysis. There is a lot more to be done so that various perspectives, from the political actors, the security actors and humanitarian and development actors, come together so that everybody reads from the same sheet of music. There is room to work on that.

Q5 Pauline Latham: Do you think the crisis in Syria could have been prevented?

Bruno Lemarquis: I am speaking as a development actor working in the humanitarian setting. You have major political actors who are also to intervene, so there is a limit to what humanitarian and development actors can do in terms of prevention. It is more at the local level, preparing communities, preparing systems and preparing institutions to better absorb and respond to shocks. There is then the big politics with the big pin.

Markus Geisser: If I may add to what Bruno has just said, it was famously said that humanitarian problems do not necessarily have only humanitarian solutions. Political solutions are highly important. I absolutely subscribe to what Bruno has just said. What the report highlights, at least from an ICRC perspective, which we welcome very much, is the responsibilities of states or members of the United Nations—some states are also members of the Security Council—to acknowledge their responsibilities with regards to conflict management and with regards to the conflict prevention.

Christina Bennett: I would reiterate what my two colleagues have said on that. In the case of Syria, for example, this started out as a political crisis, not a humanitarian crisis. It is also still a political crisis that needs to be solved by politicians and Governments. Humanitarians can only pick up where politicians and Governments leave off, and they are not responsible for ending conflicts or preventing conflicts in the first place. The first line of defence, in terms of conflict prevention, rests with Governments and the responsibilities of states and Governments. I hope that the World Humanitarian Summit drives that point home; that would be a very concrete outcome to remind Governments of their responsibilities for conflict prevention.

I also think there are things that humanitarian and development actors can do. As my colleague Bruno said, such a small portion of assistance and aid is spent on prevention. It is something like 4%. There is some evidence, and it is disputable evidence, that for every £1 of prevention, you save £7 in response. There is an efficiency and effectiveness argument right there for a preventative agenda.

You also have evidence from places like Mozambique, Indonesia and Bangladesh, where investments have been made in disaster preparedness, in particular. They have been able to either prevent humanitarian crises or do better once those humanitarian crises have ensued. You have a counter example in Ebola where, because of a lack of preparedness within the health system, because of a lack of sounding the alarm early enough by international organisations, you lost lives. There is lots of evidence that could get behind a preventative agenda and lots of evidence that by investing in preparedness and prevention you can actually save lives.

There is also a moral argument here. Why would we not invest in averting the loss of life and averting human suffering in places where we can? The UK can lead that charge in terms of putting money where the risk is—investing in disaster risk reduction, investing in those places that are prone to conflict and prone to disasters, and readying those Governments and populations for when those disasters strike. The UK have already committed to using 10% of their humanitarian funding for disaster risk reduction; I am not sure that they have reached that target but they should be working very carefully to do so.

Q6 Jeremy Lefroy: Following up on what Mrs Latham said and your point there, when we were in Nepal last year, we saw precisely that: the UK Government had worked together with the Nepalese Government to invest in things like school-strengthening and prepositioning of suppliers. We heard subsequently from Nepalese citizens that it was estimated that without this preparation, the death toll from the earthquake could have been far higher. Sometimes that work is going on, but it is almost counterintuitive because people hear of these enormous death tolls of 10,000; what they do not hear is how many it would have been without that prevention. Would you not say that sometimes, because it is counterintuitive and difficult to prove, this is why perhaps not as much is done as necessary? People do not hear about the benefits.

Christina Bennett: Absolutely. I would say the incentives to avert a crisis are much lower than the incentives to respond to a crisis. That comes back to what Bruno was saying about the CNN effect; nobody calls the BBC to cover an effective crisis prevention initiative. They just do not. It is very hard to sell crisis prevention or preparedness to constituencies. You have to spend money now so that we never see these headlines. It is very hard to make that case. It is very intangible and, as Bruno said, it is very hard to draw conclusions that, “Because we invested in these disaster risk reduction measures, we have averted a loss of life this big.” You could never prove that, so it is really hard to make the case for spending money early on those kinds of interventions.

Q7 Chair: We have just come back, as a Committee, from Nigeria. Do you think that Nigeria is another good example of that? There are a lot of concerns that the elections last year could have resulted in a lot of violence and chaos and, in fact, it turned out a lot better than that. Is that another positive example?

Christina Bennett: Perhaps. I am not very familiar with the Nigeria case but I know, in the context of Ebola, early response and preparedness on the part of Nigeria meant that it had very few deaths, if any, from Ebola.

Bruno Lemarquis: If I can give an example of Honduras, Honduras is a disaster-prone country and I visited it a few years back. It is not very sexy to talk to a Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Planning about doing risk informed development, which means managing your risk and incorporating your risk into your public investment programme, national plan and national budget. It is nothing sexy, and this is all about preparing the country to withstand shocks to be prepared for future disasters. These are investments that are not very visible. They are really mainstream into governance systems, but they really assist at least in disaster cases to prevent disasters.

Markus Geisser: May I just add with regards to prevention, apart from disaster but also with regards to conflict, because then it becomes very complex. It is difficult to prevent armed conflict, again, as humanitarians. We have already alluded to the responsibilities of states. However, adherence to the basics of international humanitarian law will at least prevent human suffering in times of armed conflict. Therefore, I would say that respect, as well as to ensure respect, of the law in armed conflict, as long as it has not prevented the conflict—the law only applies in times of armed conflict—it would certainly also prevent human suffering. How to make that case? It is very, very complex. Correlation is not necessarily causality.

Q8 Wendy Morton: I just wanted to follow up a bit further on this idea of investing in preparedness because we are seeing a shift, in terms of the work of DFID, towards supporting fragile states. Could you share with us your views on whether you feel the shift and more emphasis on supporting fragile states would help in a positive way towards investing in preparedness for disasters and crises?

Bruno Lemarquis: I will give an example of a country: Central African Republic. The aid often is very little investment. The cumulative investment over the past 10 years on development aid, up to the beginning of the crisis, is equivalent to the investment made over the past two years in terms of humanitarian and peace and security investment. It is roughly the same. It is about \$2 billion each year. The underinvestment, not tackling issues such as social, political and economic exclusion from large fringes of the population, all led to the explosion of violence two or three years ago. This is a typical case of where investing in fragile states—not once but over a sustained period of time—in communities, in governance systems and in institutions to make them stronger, able to withstand shocks and able to provide benefits to their citizens, is all very important to prevent and avoid crisis. A dedicated focus on more fragile states is definitely very important over the long run.

Markus Geisser: From the ICRC perspective, we would totally welcome that, yes. However, we have to underline that investing in fragile states is a long-term investment. We at the ICRC would consider protracted conflict as part of the fragile states—these conflicts that go through one aftershock after the other. Afghanistan is a good example. Syria probably is the future protracted conflict; all the indicators tell us this is the case. It puts a particular pressure on an organisation like ours and there will also be the pressure from donors like DFID on organisations like ours to also think innovatively and creatively

in those protracted crises, where we realise that simply assisting to the immediate needs of the people is necessary, but not enough. More and more, organisations like ours have to create what we call development holes in order to avoid development reversals, so we go back to the beginning of our conversation where we see, indeed, a more collaborative spirit—not only a spirit, but also a necessity between aid and development actors.

Q9 Wendy Morton: I wanted to move on to building resilience. In much of the evidence received to the inquiry, and in wider summit documentation, there is a lot of talk about building resilience. I would like to ask our panellists what you feel are the keys to resilience in the context of humanitarian crises. Also, how do you feel DFID and its partners could build a better picture of vulnerability to ensure that the needs and resources are better matched in affected countries?

Christina Bennett: I would agree that building resilience of countries, as well as communities, is an important component of what we call preparedness and prevention. The idea is that the more resilient a country, and the more resilient a community, the better prepared they are to prevent disasters from becoming humanitarian emergencies, and the better they are at coping with those emergencies once those disasters occur.

One problem I see with resilience is that it is still very poorly understood. While the UK has been at the forefront of defining what resilience is and what it means, humanitarian organisations have a hard time implementing it in terms of what programmes look like. They stick it in these funding proposals in order to get money from DFID, but then they are not giving the staff and the resources to be able to implement resilience programmes, which are longer-term programmes effectively.

Secondly, DFID, like many other donors and many other organisations, still consider building resilience a humanitarian priority. DFID's current humanitarian strategy includes building resilience in its title. Resilience is now a core competency of all humanitarian advisers both here in London and in the field. We would see resilience as much more of a development priority and would ask the UK Government to be able to bring development actors, to make it a core competency of development assistance, to use development funding, development budget lines and development staff to be building resilience, together with humanitarians in support. In fact, resilience is a longer-term endeavour, which is building up livelihoods and coping capacities. It is something that humanitarians should not do with the resources they have.

Markus Geisser: From an ICRC perspective, I will go back a bit to what I said before; as humanitarian aid operators, we have to more and more create development holes in order to avoid development reversals. I link this clearly to the resilience debate.

I fully agree with Christina with regards to the term as such; it is still poorly understood. Maybe there will never be a common consensus on what resilience is. From an ICRC perspective, an organisation that is so focused on the protection of people on the ground in times of armed conflict, we would simply like to make the point that it is a concept that works very well, if I may so, for development actors in disaster and relief operations. When it comes to armed conflict, we need to caution that victims should not be made resilient to violations of international humanitarian law. That, of course, should not be the

case. That particular element of the term “resilience” does not seem to appear enough, at least in the literature that we read.

Bruno Lemarquis: For us, in a protracted situation, development should never stop but you adjust the way you do development; we call it resilience-based development, which means you adjust your approaches and you focus more on local systems, the protection of livelihood and so on. This should be done side-by-side with humanitarian actors. It is everybody’s job to build resilience. In a crisis situation where it is more linear, like in Nepal after the earthquake, we would call it early recovery. That means, from the very beginning, the development actors need to be involved from the get-go in order to support very fast recovery, building back better, but also the end goal is to have more resilient systems and communities.

Q10 Stephen Doughty: It is not necessarily the absence, as you just put it, Markus, of law and concepts in IHL that is the problem; it is the enforcement of it. Could you give me a practical example of something the summit could do to enhance the enforcement of IHL, rather than just a standard, “We all agree the principles of IHL, we will all enforce them and so on”? What is one practical thing the summit could do to ensure IHL is followed more and adhered to?

Markus Geisser: We have seen that IHL figures widely in the report of the UN Secretary-General so we are very pleased with that, absolutely. The report gives some interesting suggestions. There is talk of a global campaign to respect IHL. We do not know much about it, but who would not welcome such an idea?

The ICRC, together with the Swiss Government, as you may remember, has been tasked by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent conference back in 2011 to organise a series of consultations on finding a way and proposing a mechanism to comply with IHL. We share the Committee’s disappointment that, unfortunately, there was a lack of political will last year in December to come forward with such a mechanism. For all those who want to bring IHL into the global arena, it is a challenge today, yes. Also, with regards to the ICRC and the Swiss Government, we have also been mandated at the last conference to continue this process, which we will do.

With regards to the World Humanitarian Summit, because these two processes are quite different, from an ICRC perspective, I would say that instead of trying to go for a global campaign, as a state—and I talk now, of course, to the UK Government—try to find particular issues that cause immense human suffering, such as the non-protection of health workers or gender-based violence, to find a community of consensus and a convergence amongst states on particular aspects of international humanitarian law and then, from the micro, go further up to the macro. That is a concrete proposal.

The report also mentions a recommendation for states to organise greater tracking, collating and analysing incidents and trends of alleged violations of IHL. That would also be something interesting. Where we really need more clarity is this notion of a watchdog, which is what I heard in the report. I would not be able to make a statement here, whether one should support this or not, so there needs to be more clarity.

Christina Bennett: I would support what Markus has just said. I would also add that you have situations like you have in Syria right now, where access to populations in need is blocked due to insecurity, political considerations, bureaucratic hurdles and deliberate obstruction. What you have is 600 to 700 local organisations, so diaspora groups and local civil society groups, actually doing the good humanitarian work of bringing aid to those in need. Another concrete outcome of the World Humanitarian Summit would be to make it easier for those local institutions to be able to operate in those crisis settings. That would mean giving them more money, sometimes directly or sometimes through international organisations. That would also mean lifting some of the bureaucratic hurdles to working with them, which include everything like they need to have a track record—whether the diaspora group has just been formed for the purposes of responding in Syria and they have not responded in any other crisis.

Then also, very importantly, there is the counter-terrorism legislation which actively blocks these types of organisations from working within our national actors and receiving funds. One thing the WHS could do is to revisit how we fund and enable local organisations but also how to improve national institutions to monitor and enforce IHL compliance. As Markus said, the Secretary-General’s report on this summit is calling for a global watchdog, but why do we not also enforce national mechanisms to be able to monitor and prosecute violations of IHL and work with other judicial systems around the world to be able to compile best practices and be able to bring those perpetrators to justice. It could operate at both local and national levels, in addition to global.

Q11 Stephen Doughty: Given that you have given us the Syrian example, I have been quite struck that in the situation around Madaya and the sieging of various towns and so on, it has not just been the Syrian Government that is involved, but it is groups like Hezbollah that have been obstructing humanitarian access and obviously committing various violations of IHL. What do we do about that problem of non-state actors? It has always been a problem for humanitarian situations, but do you think the problem is getting worse and what do we do? At least states have some incentives to comply with rule-based order, but what do we do once they act?

Markus Geisser: I will take Syria as an example. Certain states do have influence on some of those non-state armed groups or actors. Those states that carry weight in these particular relationships hopefully will remind themselves of Article 1 of the Geneva Convention: “Respect and,”—this is the key here—“to ensure respect” of the Geneva Conventions. There is something concrete that states have to, if they are serious, adhere to.

With regards to the situation on the ground, yes, absolutely, access in Syria is a huge problem. It is not impossible either. We sometimes, from the ICRC say, yes, there is limited access but if you look at today’s humanitarian endeavour and operations in terms of money, never have we seen so many big humanitarian operations. Access is problematic. It has become more complex to gain access. Various organisations adhere to humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence—the ICRC, for sure. We believe these principles are not a panacea to all problems, but they are useful to work towards gaining access. That is our contribution, but the state contribution is if they have

the possibility to have influence on certain actors—including non-state actors—we hope they will do that. We really hope they will do that.

Q12 Fiona Bruce: Stephen asked about non-state actors; I am interested to ask about state actors. How seriously do you think we should take concerns about the shrinking space of civil society across the world, where we see countries, because of the threat of terrorism, perhaps reviewing the constitutions or restricting journalism, or restricting the capacity of NGOs to act if they are funded externally? Is this something that is being adequately addressed or something that needs a lot more attention?

Christina Bennett: What we are seeing is a bit of a shrinking space for civil society organisations, as Governments, and particularly middle-income Governments, become stronger in the way that they respond to crisis. I am particularly speaking about crisis response now. We can, as the international community, use it as an opportunity to build the capacity and build the voice of civil society organisations on behalf of the people that they represent, to make sure they are protected in crisis situations. Things like counter-terrorism legislation, as I said before, really does prevent many civil society actors, who may not have any affiliation with terrorist groups, from receiving funds and capacity support that international organisations can give them. It makes us all losers in the end because they are not able to do their best on behalf of the nations they live and work in. There is a shrinking space. We could all do more to build their capacity and to enable them to be better responders and better representatives of their community. Counter-terrorism legislation is a place to start. Other things, like funding, are a next step.

Q13 Jeremy Lefroy: I would like to return to a very important point made by Bruno earlier, which is the fact that we are only going to be talking about humanitarian intervention when the political process has failed or is failing. It seems to me that not nearly enough effort is being put globally into reinforcing the political and remediation efforts. We tend to go, as in the case with Syria, almost straight from a flare up, which was a relatively small flare up, comparatively, to a civil war. I know that there was an attempt at mediation, but it seemed to be too little too late, and the consequences are there for all to see. How do you think we can, as part of this process, bolster up, either through regional organisations like the African Union or the equivalents around the world, that mediation effort with really skilled people who are able to go and defuse a crisis before it results in something like Syria? At the moment, we find that the remediation happens after it is at a stage when hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and tens of billions of dollars have been spent, and a nation has been devastated. How can we put more effort into having that prior? This is perhaps for Bruno, since you raised it.

Bruno Lemarquis: In order for the international system to work, you need good articulation between the high-level negotiation at the political level, and this includes Security Council member states. There is then a role to play—an articulation—between the role of regional actors, which will always come first, like the African Union in the case of countries on the continent and, after that, as a more last resort, the UN. That is the high level. It should then always be backed by the more local level efforts with civil society organisations, local groups, social cohesion, local mediation and so on. The articulation

between the two is extremely important, but that is also the responsibility of states and the Security Council to intervene.

One important initiative that the Security General has launched to ensure that, from an early warning perspective, more is done to avoid massive violations of human rights is what is called the Human Rights up Front initiative. I do not know if you are familiar with this Human Rights up Front initiative. It came from the lessons learned from Sri Lanka and other cases where there have been massive violations because early warning did not work, because the dots did not really connect between the leaders on the ground and up the chain—the regional institution up to the Security Council. This Human Rights up Front initiative is really about having a better collective early warning, looking together—at least within the UN system, having a collective look at situations to make sure that we pick up signals and we are ready to connect, to use the right instruments, to quickly defuse tension, send envoys, and ensure information flow to harness the capacity of the system to prevent the escalation of violence.

Christina Bennett: You are right. What ends up happening is that humanitarian action is always used as a fig leaf to avoid the political solutions. That is what we see time and time again and we have seen it since the beginning of humanitarian history, if you will. Political solutions are hard and sometimes humanitarian assistance absolves leaders from making those hard decisions, because they can do something about the crisis without actually doing something about the crisis. Pressing leaders on political solutions is a first step; that humanitarian action should never be used instead or in lieu of a political solution.

I also think, as you have stated, regional organisations are particularly important in these types of situations. Not only can they provide mediation but they are also much closer to the action when it comes to their own humanitarian activities. We see lots of regional organisations becoming much more involved in humanitarian action and establishing humanitarian departments within them to be able to respond, as regional organisations, closer to the ground. Funding those organisations and supporting their capacity would do a lot towards that conflict prevention and mediation.

I also think that the Security Council—and this is something that was mentioned in the SG's report—could have a stronger crisis prevention role. It is always brought in, when a crisis happens, to say, “We condemn this crisis,” and every 90 days they say that, but perhaps they should take a stronger crisis prevention role, instead of one of crisis response, which does not always work in our favour.

Markus Geisser: From an ICRC perspective, again, we are not in conflict mediation; we operate in armed conflict, yes, but I would reiterate what I said: IHL can indeed serve as a means to find converging interests so that conflict parties, or also those that have particular influence on those conflict parties, converge on particular issues. To go back to the example that I gave, for example, the global protection of health, to make clear statements to try to converge around those particular issues, and then hopefully create an environment conducive for much more complex—and I do not want to undermine it—political mediation.

Q14 Jeremy Lefroy: Do you think that DFID or the UK Government more generally do enough at identifying, together with international partners, the potential causes of conflict and then trying to address them in advance by, for instance, supporting local organisations that are really attempting to bring some kind of settlement or peace? Do you think the UK, including its position as a permanent member on the Security Council, tends to be more reactive and could do a lot more about looking at where the likely flash points are going to be in the countries in which the UK has a significant presence?

Bruno Lemarquis: I would not know enough about the UK. However, globally, there is a lot of room to improve on collective early warning, taking the temperature, having a good collective understanding of where tensions are arising and early investment into prevention. DFID, in particular, has done good work in terms of championing some of the preparedness work, flexibility and bringing some of the different approaches together, but I would not know enough about the overall UK system.

Q15 Jeremy Lefroy: My final question, if I may, Chairman, is regarding development. People involved in development often shy clear of politics, understandably. Yet what you have identified is that it is the politics that is driving a lot of this. I am not talking about natural disasters where clearly there are physical things that can be done, as I have already described with Nepal. Where it is politics that is driving potential or actual humanitarian disasters, do you see a disconnect between the development and humanitarian world, which understandably does not want to become involved in politics, and the actual driving cause, which is politics? How can we perhaps overcome that?

Chair: We will just take one answer on this, so who wants to leap in first?

Bruno Lemarquis: Speaking from a UN perspective, there is room to work better together towards collective outcomes. We look at a situation and we think of collective outcomes from the political, security, peace-building, development and humanitarian aspects, so that we all read from the same sheet of music and we can articulate the UN system to provide the best response to different instances. Each has a role to play, but there is room to improve the coherence. This came clearly from the consultation around the WHS and, more importantly, from last year's peace operation review and peace-building review. These were two fundamental reviews within the UN system that brought the need for coherence between actors.

There is one articulation within the UN system between the political branch and the development branch, where the development branch, as you said, is not involved in politics with a big "p". However, there is this in between where you can, through development approaches, work with national actors and build national capacity for conflict mediation, conflict management and using a development lens to see how to reframe and re-programme your interventions to make sure that they contribute to larger political outcomes. There are ongoing programmes that link the political side with the development side, which are also grossly underfunded, because it is largely about prevention. That is an area that you might want to explore because this has a lot of potential to prevent crises from happening.

Q16 Fiona Bruce: You have talked a lot about joint working and linking; do you think that the High-Level Panel's suggestion of a grand bargain between major donors and the main humanitarian actors could produce effective reform of the global humanitarian system's financing arrangements?

Christina Bennett: I will start and let other colleagues come in. The grand bargain itself is where donors will offer agencies more flexible funding and, in exchange, agencies will commit to the money going further and will be more transparent in demonstrating how it was used. This is a step in the right direction, but I also think the grand bargain should be viewed within the broader process of more systemic-level reform.

To take the grand bargain itself, yes, it should be able to champion a different financial model for the humanitarian system, and this is something that is very important to me. From what I have seen, it can champion a model that is more independent in that it draws from a broader base of donors; it draws from different and more creative solutions to funding humanitarian emergencies, and it could also possibly institute a more independent form of humanitarian assistance through some kind of assessed contribution. It can bring more coherence. The grand bargain could bring more coherence to funding and this is what Bruno has been talking about while we have been here, which is that you have humanitarian and development funding pots, and really they should be merged or working together more closely to find the rational solution: who could be doing what where? When should humanitarians be working? When should development actors be working? Should they be working together at the same time? How do we fund that? It is those kind of collection actions.

The grand bargain also calls for more localisation of money and response—earlier, more support, better funding tools to local organisations. The grand bargain can help us get to a more local form of response, which many would argue is a better or more effective form of humanitarian response.

The grand bargain also calls for more prevention and we have spent the better part of this morning talking about prevention. The grand bargain can help with earlier funds, preparedness funds, funds that are about risk informed financing, risk insurance and financing a disaster before it occurs.

The grand bargain also calls for more sustainable and long-term funding, which can, when used more flexibly, really help in situations of protracted crises, which are humanitarian crises that go on and on and on for years, and cannot be supported by a six-month funding cycle. The UK, for example, is at the forefront of some of these initiatives in terms of multi-year funding, funding for collective outcomes, cash distributions and cash assistance. These are welcome and the UK should really focus on pushing some of those reforms through the grand bargain process and pushing for their own recommendations of the high-level panel on cash, which it led this fall.

Q17 Fiona Bruce: That was a very comprehensive reply, so perhaps I could ask your colleagues if they agree to say so, but also to comment on whether they think that the reform of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee is important in terms of ensuring a successful summit, particularly with regards to membership. If so, how could the UK press for this?

Bruno Lemarquis: First, on the grand bargain, the piece we will be championing as UNDP is the humanitarian development nexus. We will do that during the next three months. There will be a series of meetings around the key element of the grand bargain. What we are looking for is more joined-up working at every level—we are different but there is ample room for coherence—and joined-up analysis to make sure everybody reads from the same sheet of music, joined-up planning between the slow moving development planning and short-term humanitarian planning; there is work ongoing to ensure it is more coherent. We also want joined-up risk assessment and needs assessment. As Christina said, we need a lot of work on the financing architecture to ensure you use the right type of funding instrument at the right moment for the right type of situation. The issue of leadership is critical for the United Nations. Leadership in countries should be empowered, rounded and coherent, so that you have one leader who can direct the system using the different tools in the toolbox. Some member states and donors should work on incentivising this coherence, joined-up working and collaboration between the different parts. They are all things that could shift the line at the WHS.

Markus Geisser: From an ICRC perspective, we would commit to the grand bargain. We studied it really carefully. A message for the UK Government, especially as 50% of the DFID budget goes straight into fragile countries and protracted crisis situations that go on and on and on, the grand bargain, with all the flexibility attached to it, which Christina has mentioned, would certainly be an extremely useful instrument. It would make it all possible, I would say. However, I would also underline that, as long as we need to sing from the same sheet, as Bruno has mentioned, I come back to the point that I made; I think I used the term “the diverse ecology of the humanitarian response”. What I mean is reduced duplication and management costs, which is one particular element of the grand bargain—the ICRC would certainly, as much as it can, sign up to it—and joint assessments with other organisations where it is also possible in times of armed conflict. Depending on who is going to join this joint assessment, it will probably be more problematic, because certain organisations are much more acutely aware of their neutral, impartial and independent position.

Christina Bennett: To get to the specific part about the IASC, my organisation, ODI, has looked into this in particular. We did find that the IASC, while it is an important body because it brings together all elements of the current formal humanitarian system, has lost its way. Why? Because it suffers from a crisis of legitimacy. It no longer represents the people that are at the forefront of response. It is western. It is the original coterie of organisations that were established after the Second World War or around that time. It does not represent the interests of the diverse array of actors: the civil society groups that you were mentioning, the diaspora organisations, and some of the newer, local NGOs that may have very prominent roles in humanitarian response. It also duplicates other types of co-ordination bodies within the system. It suffers now from this process fatigue because it has become bloated in itself.

We have recommended that it undergo a functional review and a revisiting of both its membership, in terms of enlarging it, but also its working methods by regionalising, perhaps, its decision-making, devolving its decision-making closer to where operations are on the ground and not existing as this top-heavy, global-only, decision-making and co-ordination body.

Q18 Mr Sharma: Can you describe any concrete proposals that DFID should bring to the summit to ensure more support to national first responders and local organisations? I will further add to that: how can the principles of subsidiarity and participation be better integrated into humanitarian responses so that local organisations are used more effectively?

Chair: We will hear from all three of you and this will be your final opportunity to answer, so who would like to go first in this one?

Markus Geisser: I will go first. The first contribution that DFID could make is to recognise, loudly and clearly, what I would call inter-social humanitarian community—again, this diverse ecology of humanitarian risk bonds, where you have local actors, regional actors, national actors and international actors. That is very important.

Secondly, DFID is plainly aware of the importance of this interplay between local, national, regional and international actors, and continues to support the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, which is an interesting example of where this interplay between the various layers of actors works out, according to the principle of subsidiarity.

I would then also suggest that, as much as the ICRC responds very positively to this particular new paradigm shift, to put a particular focus on local humanitarian action, one also has to be realistic. I go back to the way the movement works, where we have this interplay based on subsidiarity. At times, local humanitarian actors, particularly in armed conflict, get into trouble, politically and emotionally. A clear example is today they simply cannot go into Syria, into a federal prison, to check the living conditions of detainees. A prism of realism would also be much welcome and to focus on the interplay between these various layers of this diverse ecology of humanitarian response.

Christina Bennett: I would agree with Markus that there is this general idea that a local response is a better response. In many instances that is true but, as Markus was saying, this is not without a few caveats. Local is most of the time faster. You saw that in the Philippines, where it was church groups who were the first to respond to Typhoon Haiyan. Local organisations can be more appropriate. During the Ebola crisis you saw that it was communities and community health workers who were able to deliver the messages about handwashing and safe burials much more effectively than anybody else. You see in Syria, and we have said before, that local populations can get better access to population when international actors are blocked.

However, because of their position within the community and within society they can be in more danger. They can be viewed as partial. They can also lack some specialised skills and maybe the ability to respond at scale. Local is one component of a response. It is sometimes a more effective response, but not always. Any move towards localisation should be one that is context-specific and based on evidence that local will in fact be better.

How can the UK help to localise a response when it is in fact better? I see three things: first, as we discussed this before, is to reduce the financial barriers to national and local respondents. In 2014, only 0.2% of international aid went directly to local organisations and only 3% went to Governments. The UK Government could work bilaterally and with

key multilateral donors to allow local organisations to receive funding directly and create, among their partners, ambitious targets to be able to promote a higher percentage of their aid to go to local organisations. DFID could also resolve some of the legislative hurdles making it difficult for local actors to operate and receive funds. We have talked about the counter-terrorism legislation. We have talked about other criteria that DFID uses for its partnerships, some of which sets the bar very high for new organisations or organisations that are only working within that particular crisis context. Those could be revisited.

Thirdly, DFID can incentivise more collaboration and more collective outcomes within its international partners, so within its own organisations but also the UN agencies and the international NGOs. As part of their funding agreements it should say to international organisations, “Part of what you need to do is invest in local capacity, invest in local decision-making and partner with these organisations in order to effect a good response. It is not only about you going at it alone. It is about your ability to partner with local organisations.” DFID can monitor and hold those organisations to that.

Chair: Thank you. That 0.2% figure is very striking. The UK figure is actually 0.1%.

Bruno Lemarquis: For us at the UN Development Agency, long-term investment and capacity development in national institutions and partners is natural and very critical. There are good experiences in terms of working with national partners, via the pool fund, when donors pool their funds together, including in response to humanitarian situations. We are directly managing four of those large funds in the DRC, the Central African Republic, Sudan and South Sudan, where the bulk of the funding is going to national partners. This is accompanied by capacity development, so that is something the UK has been very much behind, on the initiative of pooled funding.

Also there is a mind-set shift to open at some point with some of the partners, not using local partners as contractors but as partners. The bulk of the 2% is seen as, “We contract them out. We do not partner with them.” That is the mind-set shift that is required.

Chair: Thank you very much, indeed. We have covered a lot of ground in an hour. I am really, really grateful to you for sparing the time to be with us and for your evidence this morning. Feel free to stay if you want to listen to the evidence from the Minister and thank you very much.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Rt Hon Mr Desmond Swayne MP**, Minister of State, Department for International Development, and **Dylan Winder**, Head, Humanitarian Policy and Partnerships, Department for International Development.

Chair: Minister, welcome back. You are our most frequent visitor from this parliamentary session so far.

Mr Swayne: This is becoming habit-forming, is it not?

Chair: Absolutely, and it is very impressive that you were here to listen to the other evidence. Thank you for doing that. We have quite a lot of questions for you and about half an hour to cover them. We have seven areas that we are aiming to cover in that time, but we have structured it so that the most important questions are the first ones. I am going to go straight to Stephen for the first question.

Q19 Stephen Doughty: Minister, in the written evidence from DFID, you say that the summit should revitalise commitment to the universal values that underpin humanitarian action. Can you give some practical examples of what you are pushing forward to meet that aim? For example, would you push for a global compliance mechanism on IHL?

Mr Swayne: There will be a meeting in April covering this, and also in September Obama will be organising another meeting on driving forward this agenda. I want to see a real engagement at the summit, an anger that will engage the world and drive forward an agenda to do something about the consistent and persistent abrogation of international law with respect to the treatment of non-combatants. Clearly there has to be political action and political action driven by the Security Council. The summit cannot do that, but the summit has to begin that campaign, the engagement of that campaign, to be driven by anger at what is happening.

Q20 Stephen Doughty: There is a danger here because something must be done. Anger is great. It is great that you are going to do that, Minister. It is fantastic and DFID has the ability to lead in that. DFID has the ability to be a leader here. DFID and the UK have the ability to be a leader, but what practical things are you going forward to push for at the summit?

Mr Swayne: We have a number of practical demands at the summit with respect to protracted displacement, with respect to financing and with respect to reform of the international systems. However, specifically in terms of abiding by international law, I do believe that that has to be a political decision made by the nations of the world in a forum that the summit does not address.

Dylan Winder: Perhaps also to add to that, Minister, we are working very closely with the Red Cross movement on looking at the compliance mechanism. We are working with other donors, with the US and the EU to also look at what we can collectively work together on on this really critical issue. It is, as the Minister says, a very political issue. We are hoping that there will be some kind of leaders' segment at the summit where member states will be able to make some of these more political comments.

Q21 Fiona Bruce: Good morning, Minister. We welcome the Government's leadership on dealing with the issue of protracted displacement. I want to ask you about, in particular, internally displaced persons, who often are in much more need than refugees in the sense that they are not protected by a universal or binding instrument. My question is: what can be done to improve the legal rights of IDPs? Should there be a binding legal instrument? Perhaps just to set this in context, the Committee has just returned from Nigeria where there are 2.2 million internally displaced people, and we went to a camp where there were almost 1,000. They had no support from the Nigerian Government. In fact, they had no support from any authority at all. They were entirely dependent upon the charitable support from

people living near them in Abuja or the little bit of work that could be eked out by some of the young men who went out into the locality to try to find it. Even the school there where the children were taught was being run by volunteers from within the camp or local residents. This is a very serious question, because there are almost twice as many IDPs as there are refugees in the world.

Mr Swayne: You are absolutely right and I am glad that this is now the particular focus of the Secretary-General in what he wants. Absolutely, the internally displaced are a lot harder to reach often enough to deliver aid to, and they have fewer rights. It is something we have to address given that they are the greater part of the problem. I cannot see any solution other than a recognition—some form of formal recognition—of their rights.

Dylan Winder: We also believe we should be looking at all these different groups. Particularly with IHL, it is really critical to maintain humanitarian access into some of these areas. That is absolutely essential. IHL is the global agreement that we all have to be able to work there, so we do believe, as the Minister says, that this is a really important part of the summit. IDPs should be one focus, but not the only focus. We need to make sure we are working on all the different bits and they should come together in our approach to the summit.

Q22 Jeremy Lefroy: There was a meeting last June organised by a forum focused on improving humanitarian action, which was recommended to the Secretary-General to reform UN agency mandates and roles, and I am quoting here, “better to meet the basic humanitarian needs of affected people”. We understand that the UN Under-Secretary-General—our former colleague—Stephen O’Brien is insisting that the UN does not need to change. I do not know whether he was responding specifically to that or whether there is room for change without the UN as a whole changing. What is the Department’s position and what is the Government’s position on that at the moment?

Mr Swayne: I have had discussions about this and we were all agreed that we would not start from here. You would not design the system that we now have. However, should we be reopening those questions of the mandates and redesigning from scratch? I think pretty well the consensus is that it is not worth the candle. You would not get agreement. You would run into indeterminate difficulties and obfuscation. It would be very difficult to get agreement.

What does the reform therefore look like? It comes down to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and revitalising that with what, in my brief, was called empowered leadership. Leadership is getting the right personalities in position. Clearly empowered leadership implies an element of institutional reform and getting leadership at the country, regional and global level. However, that reform, I am informed, would be very, very difficult because it raises the issue of sovereignty in all sorts of parts of the world where people do not want to be told what to do by a humanitarian co-ordinator who is in charge.

My own preference is for someone to be in charge. The consensus in the Department is that we need to provide incentives in the form of the financing—the way that we finance the system—to get it to behave more in the way they want, rather than to secure institutional reform. Am I right?

Dylan Winder: You are, Minister.

Chair: You are always right.

Dylan Winder: We do think reform is a really critical element of the summit. The grand bargain, as mentioned in the last session, is going to be very important for that. Part of the problem is the donors. As people mentioned, the UK does not have a specific humanitarian budget at country level. We are able to operate more flexibly within multi-year arrangements. However, a lot of donors have a separate humanitarian budget in a separate Ministry. They are very time-bound. We think the grand bargain is a great opportunity for us to have discussions with donors, as well as the UN.

We are slightly disappointed that one of the roundtables that was planned on reform has now been dropped from the summit agenda. However, we are hoping very much that the grand bargain discussions will pick this up. We will certainly be pushing absolutely for reform of the system, in the way that the Minister has said in terms of empowered leadership at both global and country level, looking at multi-year funding, looking at how we can have better joined up needs assessments and, particularly in protracted crises, looking at where we can get humanitarian and development actors working together much more effectively under one plan and under one assessment.

Mr Swayne: If we do not get a clear—I was going to say 10-point plan—plan with points and action coming out of that discussion on the grand bargain, we will be disappointed.

Q23 Jeremy Lefroy: It seems to me the UN Under-Secretary-General's attitude is a completely logical one, because at this point the last thing you would want is a massive row over process, when we have such matters confronting us at the moment. Can I just ask about the way in which DFID's humanitarian work looks forward and, to some extent, looks back? Looking forward, I think you have said before that it is vital that humanitarian and development goes hand-in-hand and that development has to be programmed into the humanitarian work. I just want to raise this issue of the predecessor to humanitarian intervention, which is political action or political failure. We saw in Nigeria last week that the UK's work on the elections last year has, in some way, helped to have a peaceful election with an outcome that has been accepted. Clearly it took the bold decision of the outgoing president to say, "I accept these results", and there was huge involvement by civil society, but the UK very much supported that process, which was an extremely important part of what has happened to Nigeria in the last year or two. Is DFID engaging more with political processes, not just around elections, but around trying to see conflict stresses coming and helping actors on the ground to work with each other, so that they do not end up in civil conflict or civil strife with the kinds of consequences we all too often see?

Mr Swayne: In terms of looking forward and looking back, we last published a humanitarian policy in 2011. We are going to publish a new, revitalised policy just before the summit. There is an expectation that we will, as the second largest donor, have something clear to say on that. We issued our first consultation document, which you may have seen, last week, asking a number of questions. You are absolutely right; part of our demands that we have placed upon ourselves and targets that we have to meet, which we are meeting, is spending at least half of our resources in the most conflicted and unstable states. That is part of the answer of the early warning and of addressing these issues.

My main effort, as I regard it, is Goal 16 and the issues of governance, which if addressed properly are the most likely to de-conflict or deal with conflict at the outset. Ultimately, if people believe they can win on the battlefield, it makes life very difficult and it requires a very hard-hitting political message, at government and world leadership levels, to defuse that.

Dylan Winder: Absolutely, and what we are increasingly doing, as the Minister says, is working politically both at a global and at a local level. This is not just DFID; this is the UK Government. The new humanitarian policy will be a new government policy. We will look at the role of the Foreign Office and the network, which is really critical to this agenda. Also we have seen things like, recently, the Secretary of State chaired a Security Council meeting on development so we are really trying to look at how we recognise this political issue, as it is one of the most important things we do, particularly in those conflict areas.

Q24 Chair: Minister, can I take you back to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. You have made a case both today and in written evidence for reform. We heard earlier from Christina Bennett from ODI, who described the committee as having a crisis of legitimacy. When you spoke just now, you talked about what you ideally would like to achieve and some of the obstacles to achieving that. Realistically what would success look like in terms of reform of that committee?

Mr Swayne: I had this discussion yesterday and I am not sure that I necessarily agreed with the conclusion. I do hanker after somebody in charge, but I do not think we are going to get that, so we have to get a commitment out of the grand bargain: a commitment to an invigorated leadership at country, regional and global level. That, I suspect, will come at a price of much greater pooled funding, so that they have the flexibility with which to operate. That raises questions for donors. That is the best we could hope for. I do not think we are going to get an institutional agreement to reform the system, but I am happy to be corrected.

Dylan Winder: No, I agree, Minister. We want to see much more collective action from IASC Principals, which will hopefully be based on a more common assessment of need. The other thing we are after is perhaps a bit more space where donors can have a discussion with the IASC. At the moment we do not have an entry point with them either. Our discussion tends to be at individual agency boards. We wrote a joint donor letter to the IASC, calling for a space where we can have that system-wide dialogue with them.

Q25 Chair: Is there resistance to that and, if so, where it is coming from?

Dylan Winder: We have not had a full response to our letter yet, but I imagine that there may well be some resistance.

Mr Swayne: When I attended the finance paper discussion in the UAE a couple of weeks before the Syria conference, I had the impression there was rather greater consensus and determination on the part of all the agencies to address the issue. I am reasonably confident that it is very much on the agenda.

Q26 Chair: Is there a case for an expanded membership of the IASC?

Mr Swayne: I picked that up during the last session. It is important that the IASC has legitimacy. That involves inclusiveness. There is something in the back of my mind that says, “It is our money and I am responsible to you and have to answer to you on how it is spent”. So long as we are confident that the new mechanism is capable of spending pooled funds effectively, I will be reassured.

Q27 Fiona Bruce: I would like to turn to an issue that has been a recurrent theme of this Committee, which is about DFID’s support to smaller organisations. One of the key areas for improvement coming out of the summit consultations is the importance of empowering communities and local organisations through the localisation of aid. It is very interesting that local and national NGOs receive only about 0.1% of UK funding, much lower than the average worldwide, yet they are often the first and last responders in terms of crisis situations. Could DFID look at again at the importance of funding local actors?

Mr Swayne: I am surprised at the statistic because it seemed to be so much more in terms of the time that it evolved. Certainly, if you look at our response in Nepal, it was based on civil society organisations that we had empowered, provided for, trained and rehearsed and rehearsed and rehearsed. We want to see much more buying from local and national government in building resilience. I went to the launch of the Start Network, which we have supported, and the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, and the Disaster and Emergencies Preparedness Programme. These are all issues where we are trying to drive forward a local agenda, but colleagues are coming to me all the time and asking us to invest in particular local organisations that they draw their attention to. I have to be aware of the problem of managing lots of little ones and having the due diligence to ensure that they are capable. There is a balance to be had, but I do accept the argument that you make that local organisations get there faster and can deliver quicker. We have to be alive to that.

Q28 Fiona Bruce: Do you think sometimes DFID is just too risk-averse?

Mr Swayne: One of the things I have certainly found since being in the Department is that it is not risk-averse. We do all sorts of things that involve a great deal of risk but we seem to manage that risk. That is the problem here. How can you be sure that you are delivering effectively if you are trying to manage all these aid programmes? We have had this discussion in the last Committee on what we were doing in Nepal. The question put to me by the Committee was, “Are you sure that you can manage all of these things?” and then you asked me to do a whole lot more things as well.

Q29 Fiona Bruce: Charter4Change has called on a commitment of 20% of global funding to national NGOs.

Mr Swayne: Where has 20% come from? Is this just arbitrary? I do not know what the proper amount is. The proper amount is the right amount. The right amount is the one we have decided that these organisations can do this, ought to do this and will be effective at

doing this. When you add them all up it will come to a percentage, but I certainly would not want to commit to any percentage in advance on the basis of a target.

Dylan Winder: Minister, perhaps it is also worth pointing out that DFID is the largest funder globally of pooled funds at country level, the majority of which goes to local NGOs. For us, it is less about the money transferred directly to national NGOs and more about the fact that those national NGOs, I think the last session said, are supported in terms of their capacity, they are able to engage working with the policy environment locally to make sure that can happen, and also looking at how the private sector locally can come into that piece as well.

Q30 Fiona Bruce: Have you seen any impact on what has been called the shrinking space of civil society in terms of local NGOs being able to work in different countries?

Dylan Winder: Lots, particularly in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Q31 Chair: Can I just press on this 0.1% figure that we have, would the pooled funds, which Dylan referred to, be outside of that 0.1%?

Dylan Winder: The 0.1% just refers to money that we directly pass to national NGOs, which I suspect are organisations like BRAC in Bangladesh, which are the bigger southern-based NGOs, which are more international.

Q32 Chair: Would you have a figure for what the total UK funding of national and local NGOs would be that would include via pooled funds?

Dylan Winder: I am afraid it would be quite difficult for us to track.

Mr Swayne: We could have a go.

Q33 Chair: If you could have a go and, if it is possible, it would be great to have that figure. I take your point, Minister, about the 20%, but would you accept that 0.1% is too low?

Mr Swayne: 0.1% certainly sounds very small and I am surprised at that number—shocked.

Fiona Bruce: Our figures, as I understand it, are coming from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Chair: They are, yes. They are OCHA figures, as I understand it.

Fiona Bruce: That monitoring organisation, yes.

Mr Swayne: I was not questioning their veracity.

Q34 Jeremy Lefroy: I would certainly agree, Minister, with the comment that you make about DFID being prepared to work in risky areas. We saw that last week in Nigeria and I very much pay tribute to the work of DFID staff and partners. The UK is pretty much the only country, as opposed to multilateral organisations, working extensively in a state like

Kano and we were very pleased to see that. Please keep that ability to take high levels of risk and please continue to take that risk.

I want to refer to a letter written to us by Andrew Mitchell and Clare Short, who are concerned about the effects of counter-terrorism measures on certain local NGOs. They give some examples: that the efficiency and timeliness of aid has been reduced due to increased administrative burdens; there has been an undermining of relations with local communities and local partner organisations, and there is less transparency and accountability due to associated uncertainty. This came as a result of a visit they paid to the area around Syria. What are your comments on that, first of all?

Mr Swayne: The law is that if you pay a bribe to get through a checkpoint, to deliver aid to starving people, you have broken the law. If it comes to a choice between letting those people starve or paying the bribe, the choice that the law—that we have made, as a Parliament—is that you let them starve. Breaking the law and paying the bribe, you might get mitigation for the smallness of the bribe and the greatness of the need but, nevertheless, it is the law. I am not sure there is any way around that. There is no humanitarian opt-out or amnesty in this. Perhaps that is something we need to do a great deal of thinking about. I got a very helpful note in my box overnight, which said, “What we can do is work closely with our partners to better understand the difficulties that they face, provide guidance and support their needs to navigate this complex landscape.” I am not sure that that is an answer. I am not sure that that gives us anything. The law is the law. We have to do due diligence on these organisations. They have to be alive to our concerns and the dangers. We cannot fund organisations where there is a danger of that funding going to terrorists.

Some organisations can be very naïve. I had a number of religious organisations in a few weeks ago, and one of them complained that they were being condemned for not having condemned the events that took place in Paris. They said, “We are a development organisation. We do not make political statements.” I said, “Wise up to reality. If you do not condemn what happens in Paris, people will say, ‘They did not condemn what happened in Paris.’” It is obvious, is it not?

Q35 Jeremy Lefroy: I would agree with you; it is obvious. I will just give an example. My wife and I have a charity that we have had for 25 years. The account was blocked. That was because, I presume, we are considered, as Members of Parliament, politically sensitive. We were unable to operate that charity for nearly a year because we did not have a bank account. That was of little significance, except for the few people that we support. However, for major NGOs, which are coming under the same sorts of rules, these can be really difficult things. In most cases, they will not have any contact with terrorism at all but there will be a risk-averse response from the bureaucrat, the official involved—in this case a bank official.

Mr Swayne: I will cover myself by saying that banking regulations come under the Treasury and counter-terrorism comes under the Home Office. However, I do not believe these have come directly out of counter-terrorism legislation. They are largely an imposition from US banking regulations spreading. I would point out that local Conservative associations are experiencing those difficulties, as indeed are individuals and Members of Parliament.

Dylan Winder: It may be worth adding, Minister, that we have also established a working group with NGOs and the banking sector to better understand exactly what those issues are.

Q36 Jeremy Lefroy: That is very positive to hear. When is that expected to report?

Dylan Winder: I am not sure when it is expected to report, but it has certainly started.

Q37 Jeremy Lefroy: Would you be able to feed back at the earliest possible opportunity? Clearly this is an issue of concern to UK NGOs.

Dylan Winder: Yes, we can certainly come back to you on that.

Q38 Chair: We are taking evidence next week from Andrew Mitchell and Clare Short. I understand that Australia's counter-terrorism laws have been amended to address this issue. Is that something that you are aware of and are able to comment on?

Mr Swayne: I am certainly not aware of that, but I would be very interested to see what they have done. I have a view, perhaps a controversial one, that there is something else we need to do at the other side of the equation. I started with this very stark example of you have a convoy, you are trying to negotiate through all sorts of numbers of checkpoints and, if you come across a terrorist group or a state party that says no, you cannot do it. This impunity and this knowledge that nothing will ever happen to them because, even after the war is over, with Western standards of evidence to secure an indictment, there is not a will on the part of the world to—this comes back to where we started with the anger that is happening; if that anger does not drive a will to do something about impunity then, ultimately, there is no way of enforcing it. What is the silver bullet? Is it a bullet? Do we arm or weaponise our relief efforts? Do we declare people to be outlaws and go out and get them so that they know that there is no impunity?

Q39 Jeremy Lefroy: What is your view, Minister?

Mr Swayne: I tend to that view.

Q40 Stephen Doughty: Leading on from that, but taking you in a slightly different direction, Minister, as a distinguished and gallant gentleman yourself you will have had your training in international law of armed conflict and so on. The Secretary of State for Defence yesterday was talking about the operations in the Mediterranean with refugees; increasingly our Armed Forces are being put in complex situations often working alongside humanitarian situations and crises. What role does DFID play specifically in advising the MoD and our Armed Forces on IHL and compliance dealing with those situations?

Mr Swayne: We do have a very good relationship with the Ministry of Defence and there is a liaison between the two. It is an established, regular liaison and I have met with them.

Dylan Winder: It is worth saying that the Foreign Office is the Government lead on IHL and we do talk collectively with the MoD. We have a set of memoranda of understanding with the MoD in terms of how we work. We have the Oslo guidance internationally, which the UK complies with. We have a very good discussion with both the FCO and the MoD on this issue.

Mr Swayne: I am alive to concerns that what is called the humanitarian community has about the militarisation of aid. Given my background, I do not particularly share those concerns. I am alive to them; we have to address them but I am not overly concerned. Our Armed Forces have shown themselves particularly flexible in a number of situations where they are quite capable of delivering aid. When it comes down to it, as I have said this before, when it comes to a situation like Sierra Leone, there is only one Department in Whitehall where a Minister can say “Go” and a man goeth; “Come” and he cometh.

Q41 Stephen Doughty: I have a cheeky last question. It is International Women’s Day today; what are you going to get out of this summit for women and girls in humanitarian situations?

Mr Swayne: It is very important that the summit is informed in all of its decisions by the principle that underpins the global goals: nobody left behind. We want to raise women up the agenda, certainly in places of conflict. They suffer much, much more and their voice is not nearly heard enough. That has to be an outcome of the summit if we are to declare it a success.

Q42 Fiona Bruce: You say the Foreign Office is a Government lead on IHL. Which Government Department is the lead on conflict prevention?

Mr Swayne: We have the CSSF. This is one of the ways in which we are addressing a number of concerns properly. We have a Conflict, Stability and Security Fund specifically to address areas that we have raised. We have a good governance fund. I would claim that we are; am I right?

Dylan Winder: It is a collective effort, Minister.

Mr Swayne: All HMG.

Q43 Chair: There is no lead Department.

Mr Swayne: I suspect that we are doing more than anybody else—put it that way. We do jointly administer the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund together with the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office, so I suppose it is a collective effort. We will be spending significant bits of our budget on those issues outside the CSSF.

Q44 Jeremy Lefroy: In the last Parliament—I cannot remember in which inquiry it was—we recommended that the United Nations, or indeed DFID supporting the United Nations, could help to train more women in international peace negotiations. We found that almost all the negotiators involved in the various conflicts that we looked at were men. On this

International Women's Day, I wondered whether any progress had been made towards that. Certainly the Minister at the time thought that this was an interesting idea. I wondered whether we could take that up again, because there is a distinct lack both of trained peace negotiators in total and certainly of women who are peace negotiators.

Mr Swayne: I was not that Minister.

Jeremy Lefroy: You were not.

Mr Swayne: Now I have heard it and I think it is more than just an interesting idea; it is an idea we should do something about it if we are not already addressing it. Are we?

Dylan Winder: We are certainly doing a lot on women and girls internationally. We are certainly working a lot with the UN in terms of getting more women in positions where they can advise on needs assessment at global level, including in conflict areas.

Mr Swayne: Let me come back to you.

Jeremy Lefroy: It needs a more specific addressing of this subject.

Mr Swayne: I will take away an action point to tell you exactly what we are doing and what we ought to be doing.

Q45 Stephen Doughty: An important point was raised by the previous panel about humanitarian data. We are pleased to see the role that DFID is saying it is going to play in leading best practice in that. Can you say a little bit about the work the Department is doing on that and what you expect in terms of the summit?

Mr Swayne: There has been a great deal of work done on data. Indeed, it was driven forward by the Liberal Democrat Minister Lynne Featherstone, who hosted a conference at Westminster on driving forward data. It is vitally important that we are able to compare the different agencies and we have them all on the same basis so we are able to compare like with like, in terms of costs, overheads and all the rest. We will certainly be pushing forward with that agenda.

Dylan Winder: We are doing quite a lot on age and sex disaggregated data, to make sure that we and other partners can track that. We are also, as the Minister, says looking at value for money and transparency type data. There are lots of exciting initiatives around big data and working with the big tech companies to look at how we might get more feedback from affected people during crises. It is a big issue and a big issue for the summit.

Q46 Chair: Minister, one final question from me: on a scale of 0 to 10, how optimistic are you about this summit in May?

Mr Swayne: I would say 8. I have adjusted my expectations in terms of the ability to deliver a solution on the adherence to international law in respect of non-combatants, refugees and displaced persons. I doubt we will get institutional action but what I want to see is a real determination expressed to drive forward the agenda to get that action.

Chair: Thank you very much. Thank you for your evidence here today. We are really grateful.