

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: The humanitarian response in South Sudan, HC 605

Tuesday 19 December 2017

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Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; James Duddridge; Mr Nigel Evans; Mrs Pauline Latham; Chris Law; Lloyd Russell-Moyle; Paul Scully; Mr Virendra Sharma; Henry Smith.

Questions 1 - 58

Witnesses

I: Dame Rosalind Marsden, Associate Fellow, Chatham House; Natalia Chan, Senior Advocacy and Policy Officer, East Africa, Christian Aid; Dr Edward Thomas, Human Rights Investigator and Researcher.

II: Rory Stewart OBE MP, Minister of State, Department for International Development and Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dame Rosalind Marsden, Associate Fellow, Chatham House; Natalia Chan, Senior Advocacy and Policy Officer, East Africa, Christian Aid; Dr Edward Thomas, Human Rights Investigator and Researcher.

Q1 Chair: Good morning, everyone, and welcome. We have two panels today addressing the humanitarian crisis and response in South Sudan. Can I welcome our first panel of experts? We have 45 minutes with you and we are seeking to cover nine areas, so we are going to be pretty rapid-fire. Our general custom and practice is, when you are first answering a question, to please give a brief introduction of yourself. Let me start by asking each of you to give a brief overview of the current situation in South Sudan and its direction of travel. Dame Rosalind, would you like to go first?

Dame Rosalind Marsden: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Chairman. I thought I would give a quick overview of the security, political and economic situation at the moment. The conflict in South Sudan is just about to enter its fifth year; this is the latest phase of the civil war. The humanitarian, human rights, security, political and economic situation is basically dire. There have been devastating consequences for the people of South Sudan, with an estimated tens of thousands killed, although there is no accurate figure; millions displaced; widespread sexual violence; psychosocial trauma; and the economy in a complete state of meltdown. Over half the population face severe food insecurity and a third of the population have had to flee their homes, so South Sudan is now the largest refugee crisis in Africa.

On the security side, since the fighting in Juba in July last year, when Riek Machar, the leader of the SPLM in opposition, was forced to flee the country, the nature of the conflict has evolved in several respects. First of all, the fighting has spread to parts of the country that were not previously affected by the conflict, namely to the Equatorias and to Bahr el Ghazal. The armed opposition has increasingly fragmented. Riek Machar's influence over his commanders has declined somewhat, because he has been in exile in South Africa for a long period, but he is still nevertheless regarded by many as the leader of the Nuer community. New opposition leaders have emerged, such as Thomas Cirillo, an Equatorian officer who defected from the government army.

The conflict has become increasingly localised, with new armed groups emerging around local grievances. Many of these groups associate themselves with the brand of the SPLM-IO or with Thomas Cirillo's movement, but they are not fully part of the command structure. Opposition groups have been using guerrilla tactics in the countryside. The SPLA has been attacking communities that it sees as supporting the opposition. In parts of Equatoria, the villages are largely depopulated, and in the Equatorias there has been extensive land-grabbing by



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pastoralist nomads and cattle barons. In other parts of the country, the conflict has been triggered by land disputes and the Government's redrawing of state boundaries. Overall, over the last year, the government army has gained the upper hand militarily.

On the political side, very briefly, we have seen some significant divisions emerging within the ruling party, the SPLM in Government, particularly when Salva Kiir dismissed the army chief of staff in May, although he also removed thereby an important political rival. While the international community has been focused on the high-level revitalisation forum, which perhaps we will come back to later, Salva Kiir has launched a national dialogue in South Sudan, but one which is viewed with scepticism by many of the international community.

Chair: We will return to more specific questions on those issues, Dame Rosalind. Thank you very much indeed.

Dame Rosalind Marsden: Just briefly, the other thing on the political side is that there has been a parallel initiative, supported by Salva Kiir, to try to reunite the factions of the SPLM, but Riek Machar's faction has stood outside that.

On the economy, essentially the economic crisis has continued to get worse with hyperinflation, the South Sudanese pound rapidly depreciating, severe fuel shortages and the cost of living rising exponentially. The Government's oil revenue is extremely limited, because of declining oil production and relatively low oil prices, and because it is continuing to repay debts to Khartoum and to other creditors. The economic crisis, aggravated by chronic corruption, is now so serious that civil servants and even government soldiers have gone unpaid for months, and lack of resources is also affecting the Government's patronage system. I could say something about the peace process.

Q2 Chair: I am going to have to stop you there, because otherwise we will take the entire time on the first question. Natalia, can you comment in particular on how effective aid organisations are on the ground and the support that they are getting from DFID?

Natalia Chan: Yes. As Rosalind mentioned, the humanitarian situation is extremely grave. It has worsened year on year, and the consequences of this have been devastating, with profound and long-term implications. I will not go into too much detail, in order to answer your question. Aid agencies have been impactful on the ground. For example, earlier this year in February a famine was declared in parts of South Sudan. As a consequence of that, urgent and rapid humanitarian response managed to prevent, or at least help prevent, the spread of famine.

However, as things are now, the situation is still looking very grim in terms of food insecurity, for example. Official figures reveal that there are 1.5 million more people food-insecure now than this time last year.



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We have just entered the harvest season, and the prospects for next year are extremely concerning, with official figures saying that there is a likelihood of recurrence, and even spread, of localised famine. In terms of the operational environment, it continues to be extremely difficult. Over the last four years, at least 92 aid workers have lost their lives. I can talk a bit more about access constraints a bit later.

That said, despite all of that, humanitarians have been able to adapt to the changing situation, and attempted to access people where they can, but it is still the tip of the iceberg. In terms of DFID's support, I think DFID has done well at listening and responding to the changing context. This year, for example, DFID and FCO working together conducted a joint analysis on conflict and security in South Sudan, which is very good. It shows that they are really taking into account the context. The recommendations from that need to be implemented, and it needs to continue to be updated to reflect the changing situation.

With regards to funding, DFID has led the way for humanitarian funding, with multiyear funding, which favours resilience-building, which is something that we have been really emphasising. There is a need to move away from a crisis narrative and to frame things in the longer term, to look at the causes of this protracted humanitarian crisis and look at the long-term drivers of conflict. There is a need to continue the urgent humanitarian response, given the scale of the need, but it has become a common refrain that in order to end human suffering in South Sudan there must be peace, and with that in mind it is important to understand that, in South Sudan, national and local peace are intrinsically connected. Localised violent conflict has the potential to undermine progress towards national peace, and at the same time national political agendas have exacerbated ethnic divisions and intensified fractures along intercommunal fault lines.

Chair: Can you wind up? Otherwise we are just going to run out of time.

Natalia Chan: What does that mean for how we think about humanitarian response in South Sudan? More support is needed for resilience and livelihood programmes. Support for education, health and long-term development must continue. All approaches must be conflict-sensitive and based on analysis of context, and must make the most of the opportunities to create favourable conditions for peace. As a last point, there is a strong case to be made for local and community-based peacebuilding in South Sudan for DFID as part of an integrated approach.

Q3 **Chair:** Dr Thomas, if you can do yours in two minutes you will be very popular with me.

Dr Thomas: I would be happy to. South Sudan has had a Government since the 19th century. All Governments have used ethnicity as a means of controlling populations and intervening in the lives of people that they were economically disconnected from. That is to say the Government do not really rely on everyday livelihoods to raise their money. They have



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always depended on rent from outside and, although they have dwindled and shrunk, 90% of their revenues come from the oil pipeline. In this situation, the Government need to find a way of intervening in people's lives, and ethnicity has been a preferred way for many, many successive Governments over the past two centuries.

However, at the moment one feels that there is an intensification of ethnic politics to a degree unseen since the 19th century, the slavery era, when people were set against each other to capture slaves from each other. That has led to many different interlinked changes at the local level, so the way that national politics affects local politics is by playing games with ethnicity.

Displacement has transformed livelihoods across the country. There is not much statistical information on South Sudan at the moment, apart from the crop and food security surveys produced by the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organisation. They show that people are very dependent on purchased food at the moment in South Sudan. That is a striking finding, because people have no money at all. That is one of the contradictions that people are living every day of their lives.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Q4 Paul Scully: Dame Rosalind, thanks very much for coming. I am just wondering if you can talk a little about the peace process and whether you think it has failed. Do you think there is enough genuine political will on either side for the revitalisation of the peace process and for it to be successful? Do you think there is an appetite among the wider population on either side for peace?

Dame Rosalind Marsden: The high-level revitalisation forum was launched yesterday in Addis Ababa. The UK, Norway and the US—the troika—have been giving very strong support to the preparations for this forum over the last few months. I think they have been trying to indicate their expectations for the forum, but in doing so trying to strike a balance between not being too ambitious, too prescriptive, setting it up for failure or undermining South Sudanese ownership on the one hand, and on the other hand signalling to the South Sudanese leaders that their credibility in future depends on their ability to deliver peace and reform.

Is there enough political will, and will the parties be ready to compromise? We have seen the Government of South Sudan in the months running up to this forum continuing to press ahead with its military strategy, to try to achieve military victory ahead of the forum. Yes, there is a question as to whether the Government will be ready to compromise sufficiently to make real progress at this event. But they have a real interest in doing so if they want to get a sustainable enough peace for their population to start returning to South Sudan, and to address the complete economic chaos that they find themselves in at the moment.



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Q5 Paul Scully: Is this all working just at a national level or are there local actors involved as well?

Dame Rosalind Marsden: I understand that at yesterday's opening session there were a number of South Sudanese civil society representatives from women, youth, the church and so forth. South Sudanese civil society meetings have also been held in third countries in the run-up to this forum, which have published communiqués setting out their ideas. Civil society has been trying to feed into the process in various ways. I am not entirely sure what ability the civil society representatives at the forum will have to influence the outcome, but at least they are there.

Q6 Paul Scully: They are engaged, yes.

Dame Rosalind Marsden: This is important, because the troika has been stressing from July this year that it is very important to have inclusive participation. That is one positive thing, as is the fact that IGAD Foreign Ministers and the IGAD special envoy in the run-up to the meeting have done some quite extensive pre-consultations in the region with government players, opposition actors, and civil society. To that extent, that has been a positive

Paul Scully: Brilliant, thanks very much.

Q7 Chair: You have taken us to the next question, which is great.

James Duddridge: You mentioned the IGAD special envoy. Is that Festus Mogae?

Dame Rosalind Marsden: The head of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, which was supposed to be monitoring the 2015 peace agreement, was Festus Mogae, the previous President of Botswana. The IGAD special envoy is somebody called Ismail Weis who comes from Djibouti.

Q8 James Duddridge: How do all the regional players participate, and how effective are they? There was previously the AU; you mentioned IGAD; bilaterally, there are people like Museveni. How effective are they in coming together regionally? How disjointed are they?

Dame Rosalind Marsden: It is very clear that all the IGAD countries, particularly South Sudan's immediate neighbours, have their own bilateral interests and rivalries, which sometimes made it difficult for them to act in a united way and speak with a single voice. We have noticed over this last weekend, when the IGAD had its Council of Ministers meeting in Addis immediately before the revitalisation forum started, that they seemed to be taking a united position. In particular, they were strongly urging all the parties to commit to a cessation of hostilities, as a first step.

Q9 James Duddridge: Is it all being left at a lower level, rather than an AU level or even a UN level? Has the UN been mediating as well or has it



pushed it down to IGAD?

Dame Rosalind Marsden: The African Union and the UN have agreed to let IGAD continue to take the lead. IGAD took the lead when the crisis first broke out in December 2013. The UN special envoy and the African Union, which has a special envoy too, former President Konaré, have been providing diplomatic support, but letting IGAD get out in front.

All the IGAD countries, especially the neighbours, have huge refugee burdens, which one might have expected to create very strong pressure to address the situation and speak with a united voice. Some of these refugees have been in peripheral areas of the neighbouring countries, but in Uganda, for example, which now has 1 million refugees, it is getting close to a tipping point where it will cause real problems. In Ethiopia, the influx of Nuer into Gambela province is causing some strains between its own Nuer and Anuak populations. Perhaps some of these factors are reflected in the fact that they are taking a more united position ahead of this forum.

Q10 Henry Smith: Dr Thomas, if I could perhaps direct this next question at you, how useful do you think a UN arms embargo would be in helping to resolve the conflict? What sort of support is there internationally with other partners for such?

Dame Rosalind Marsden: If you do not mind, I will take that one. A UN arms embargo would still be very useful, perhaps not as useful as it would have been if it had been introduced nearer the beginning of the conflict, because a lot of heavy weapons have been introduced into the country since then. As we saw during the fighting in Juba in July last year, the Government of South Sudan were using attack helicopters in the middle of Juba. A lot of the fighting, of course, is conducted with small arms, so a UN arms embargo probably cannot do much to address that. It would not be the entire solution, but it would prevent the parties, and particularly the Government, from buying any further heavy weapons. It would also have an impact on maintenance of their existing tanks and helicopters. We understand that some of the pilots that they are using to fly their helicopters are foreigners, so a UN arms embargo would make it more difficult for foreign companies to supply pilots.

As for whether there is enough support in the Security Council to get to a UN arms embargo, frankly it is not clear. An attempt was made last December, a year ago, to push a resolution for an arms embargo. That failed, and there is probably a feeling of caution about doing it again until there is more confidence; they do not want to fail a second time. Ethiopia and, indeed, the IGAD Council of Ministers are sending stronger signals that, if the parties do not abide by their commitments coming out of this revitalisation forum, there could be serious consequences, so the dynamics are perhaps changing and need to be watched closely on the arms embargo.

Q11 Henry Smith: Dr Thomas, how difficult is it for NGOs to be operating in



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the country?

Dr Thomas: It is very difficult at the moment. A tally is kept of the number of access incidents, which is over 1,000 this year. Initially, at the start of the conflict, the two main armed actors bore a significant responsibility for the difficulties in access. Now, speaking to people who are involved in delivering humanitarian supplies, it is more that there is a whole lot of criminality on rural roads. There are also extremely cash-strapped, tiny, powerless local governments, which use different versions of taxation and extortion in order to cream off one of the few revenues coming into the country.

In many places in rural South Sudan, most of the liquidity comes from the humanitarian system. That is to say there is not very much cash flowing; everybody needs cash to eat; people are not growing their own cash. Not everybody is getting all their food from the aid system, by any means; a relatively small proportion of food comes from international aid. The only cash coming in is from the humanitarian organisations, and that puts a lot of pressure on them. Everybody is pulling at them to get a bit of their action.

Q12 **Chair:** How effective are the UN peacekeepers in protecting aid workers. Which of you is able to comment briefly on that?

Dame Rosalind Marsden: Perhaps I can.

Dr Thomas: I am not able to.

Chair: That is fine, yes.

Dame Rosalind Marsden: The UN took the bold and important decision, right at the beginning of the conflict, to open its gates and allow people to come into what have now become protection-of-civilians sites. That means that quite a lot of its manpower and resources are now tied up in trying to protect and look after 200,000 internally displaced people who have sought shelter in those POC sites. That is one very important contribution the UN is making.

However, it has had the effect that the UN has been less active in patrolling outside those sites. With the arrival of the new SRSG, David Shearer, there have been signs of some improvement in the mobility of the UNMISS peacekeepers outside the POC sites, and that would in turn have some benefit for its ability to protect humanitarian workers. One has to remember that South Sudan is a huge country. UNMISS numbers are very overstretched and there is a real limit to what they can realistically do.

Q13 **Mr Sharma:** The incidence of sexual and gender-based violence in South Sudan is shockingly high. Is gender-based violence being used as a specific weapon by both sides equally?

Dr Thomas: It is very difficult to come to clear sets of figures about the incidence of sexual violence in South Sudan, and indeed in many other



places. A lot of attention has been given to this topic. An important report was produced by Amnesty International in July 2017, which drew together evidence from over three or four years of conflict about the effect that that has had on gender relations, on women and girls. In some cases, sexual violence is directed against men and boys, although women and girls seem to be the principal target, as in many other situations.

There are a lot of reasons why it is so terrible; it really is heartrending to read the reports of sexual and gender-based violence. First, this is a country that has been in a situation of war for many, many years. In some respects, the war never really stopped. There was still a lot of intense violence in the period of peace that ran between 2005 and 2013. There was a war before that, which began in 1983. Before that, there was a war that ran from the late 1950s up to the early 1970s. Even in the peace periods, there have been periods of localised instability and insecurity. Livelihoods have changed. Gender relations in South Sudan are not terribly backward. There are a lot of beautiful, democratic things about South Sudanese custom. Women have a lot of rights in South Sudanese custom, but they get eroded as young men acquire guns.

In many parts of the country, there is a dowry system that is based around cows. The dowry system is not necessarily an oppressive system. It is a system where, if I am a young man, I have to go round all my extended family and borrow and beg cows, which I give to her aunts, uncles, mum, dad and so forth. It is an alliance between two families, and it can be a very rewarding alliance. But the way that cows are acquired now is not by going and asking your aunty for a cow; it is by maybe stealing a cow, or your commander steals a lot of cows, so you do things for the commander and you get cows off the commander. A lot of things are eroding women's position in society and making things harder for women. Displacement and widowhood are very difficult for women, so women's position is being diminished by conflict.

Another issue is what ethnic politics means in practice. There are national political imperatives between political leaders, and often the only way that they can get action going is by rousing a bunch of young guys in a specific area against another bunch of young guys. How do they do that? They often use ethnicity as their recruiting sergeant. That pits local communities and local livelihoods against each other, so people are attacking other people's cows; they are attacking other people's women. I should not say "other people's women", but they are attacking the female population of their perceived enemies, in order to get political advantage. That really puts women in a very difficult position.

Q14 Mrs Latham: Following on from that, are incidents being reported and are there appropriate ways of gathering that sort of information that can be shared?

Dr Thomas: There are a number of mechanisms for gathering information about sexual and gender-based violence. In the UN mission,



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there is a large human rights section, which conducts interviews with victims. A number of human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have been gathering information as well. There is the mechanism that is sometimes called the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children in armed conflict, which looks at the situation of girls and boys facing sexual violence, among other abuses.

Remember that in 2008, at the last census, South Sudan had 18% of the population in urban areas. Most internationals are not able to go very far beyond those areas, and if they do they have to go in convoy or in a helicopter for a short period. It is difficult to investigate sexual violence on a helicopter mission that lasts two hours or so. Very often, you just get the most heartrending, vicious stories that everybody is talking about; you do not see the underlying layers. There is a lot of commitment among many different organisations to follow this story, but it is not an easy story to follow.

Q15 Mrs Latham: The police would not record this. Hospitals, if somebody had to go for emergency treatment, would not record this, then.

Dame Rosalind Marsden: As a postscript, the International Rescue Committee, together with one or two other organisations—Care International and George Washington University—has just produced a detailed study on this subject. I think that also explains the methodology it was able to use. It was funded by UK Aid, so that might be a good source, if you want to pursue that.

Mrs Latham: We can probably get hold of that.

Q16 Richard Burden: Could I ask you to say something about the healthcare, counselling and support services that are available to victims of gender-based violence, when they do actually come forward?

Natalia Chan: I can answer that. Specifically for victims of gender-based violence, besides the barriers to reporting that have briefly been touched on, the levels of response in relation to need remain very inadequate, in reach, quantity and quality. As the Amnesty report has reminded us, it is an area of very widespread need, but in South Sudan there are very few specialists with the specific specialism to deal with that. There is a gender-based sub-cluster within the humanitarian system, and within that there are a number of organisations that are responding to the specific needs. However, when it comes to specialist care, through case management and so on, it is sorely lacking, especially in the harder-to-access areas.

Psychosocial support is another area that is severely lacking in South Sudan. There were some figures a couple of years ago that said there were only two psychiatrists and about 30 psychologists for the whole country. With the prevalence of violence and so on, psychosocial needs are very, very high; that is something that we have found as well. Even



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our staff and partners have asked for guidance on psychosocial support and how to deal with some of the issues that they often come across, so it is an area of deep need in South Sudan.

Q17 Richard Burden: The barriers are spread—where people are, compared to where the services are—and the actual availability of services themselves.

Natalia Chan: The stigma associated with it is also very profound. Women, and men too, feel at risk of blame and discrimination. There is often perpetrator impunity. There is a lack of knowledge about the health consequences and what services are available, a fear of lack of confidentiality and so on. There are a lot of barriers to people feeling able to come forward, seek help and admit that they have been the victims of this kind of violence.

Q18 Mr Evans: Natalia, what is the health system like?

Natalia Chan: The health system has been very badly affected by the conflict: 22% of the health system is non-functional right now. There are 955 functioning health clinics, and they are at 10% of their capacity. This is due to a combination of extensive looting and vandalism, a critical loss of human resources, frequent stock-outs of drugs and pharmaceuticals, and delays in funding. The situation with regards to health right now is extremely concerning. For example, South Sudan is currently in the grips of its longest-running cholera outbreak. The rates of diseases like measles and kala-azar have gone up, and malaria is also a very big concern. MSF raised this very publicly last year, about the scale of the malarial outbreaks.

In the longer term, groups of people who are particularly vulnerable, such as the displaced, children under five, the disabled and victims of sexual and gender-based violence, particularly feel the consequences of that. Women do not have access to skilled personnel during pregnancy and childbirth. You can imagine the long-term implications of that for health services, not just for chronic but also acute.

DFID has played an important role in its support to the Health Pooled Fund, which has made a difference, but it needs to continue thinking about the longer term. The Health Pooled Fund supports six states. It needs co-ordination with other donors, and the wider coverage is clearly important. A couple of years ago, the Emergency Medicines Fund came to an end, so there is a concern about the continued shortage of medicines.

Q19 Mr Evans: There are 850 children dying every week there, through a number of causes; you mentioned cholera, malaria, pneumonia, malnutrition. We have been in a number of countries where we have seen youngsters being inoculated against many of these diseases. Is it just that the system is now so disparate that it is simply not serving the public? If I have a kid who has malaria, what are the chances of it



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surviving?

Natalia Chan: I do not have the specific figures to hand, but children are at grave risk of malaria. Why is it not functioning? Look at the number displaced, a third of the population; look at the insecurity and the impact that has had on existing infrastructure, the looting, vandalism and so on; look at the economy and what that means in terms of the funding implications, inability to access medicines and inability to pay for skilled staff. This adds up together to present a bleak picture when it comes to health. I believe about 80% of health services are delivered by humanitarian organisations.

Q20 **Mr Evans:** My final question is: could DFID be doing more?

Natalia Chan: Yes. The support for the Health Pooled Fund shows DFID is doing something and understands the need for these long-term services to continue. It is quite a difficult question, because all donors could be doing more; we could all be doing more. Ultimately, the responsibility for provision of health services should come down to the Government, so there is a clear need for the Government to be doing more, but with the economic situation as it is, it is a very difficult context.

Chair: Lloyd, you had an earlier supplementary. Feel free to ask it now; we have caught up on time, as sometimes happens.

Q21 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** I will ask the main question and I may come back. I want to know particularly about the preparations for the rainy season. You mentioned that MSF last year had raised some of the malaria problems. Have any lessons been learned in terms of combating malaria from the difficulties last year, previous rainy seasons and, of course, the recent floods in the country? Has there been any thinking about trying to prevent it, going into the new season?

Natalia Chan: The rainy season traditionally falls in our equivalent of the summer, so South Sudan has just come out of the rainy season into the dry season. In a normal situation without conflict, the dry season is the time of year that people are accessing areas, prepositioning stocks and so on, but the conflict has really impacted the ability of humanitarian organisations to do that.

The flooding is an annual occurrence in South Sudan, to varying degrees; some years it is worse than other years. Under normal circumstances without conflict, there is some ability to prepare for that. The conflict has had serious repercussions for the ability to preposition, to prepare in the dry season and to make sure that things are in place for the rainy season.

With the malaria, the fact that it was highlighted last year by MSF was helpful, because it brought attention back to the need for drugs and especially support for children, but there is still a very long way to go and it is still a very serious concern.



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Dr Thomas: I concur very much with what Natalia has just said. Many of the most insurmountable challenges in South Sudan are where logistics, and money or tradable assets, are involved. Drugs are one of the things that are difficult to get around the country at the moment. There is intervention by a lot of actors that want to cream resources off the drug system. It is a terrible shame, because South Sudan made enormous advances before 2013 in getting a drug supply worked out. That has been very deeply undermined by the current conflict.

Q22 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Has DFID supported trying to re-establish drug supply chains?

Natalia Chan: I do not have the specific information with regards to that. In another way, some of the humanitarian funding has gone towards things like the distribution of non-food items. That can go a long way to help prevent malaria. Non-food items would include things like mosquito nets to protect people when they sleep. I do not have the specific information for what has gone towards that from the Health Pool Fund.

Q23 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** The follow-up question was partly to a question that Henry had asked, which was about the arms embargo. The EU, of course, has put an arms embargo in, and we have seen a recent Amnesty International report saying that British companies are still involved in trading arms. Dame Rosalind, do you think that EU arms embargo has made any difference in terms of restricting small arms, because you mentioned small arms were part of the problem on the ground, or has it made no difference at all?

Dame Rosalind Marsden: It is a good question. I was working as the EU special envoy when that EU arms embargo was extended to South Sudan at the time of independence, because it was felt that there was still conflict going on in the country, although it was nowhere near as serious as it is today. Having that arms embargo in place has created a constraint on the ability to monitor any companies that are attempting to breach it. It is an important measure to have in place, but it is undoubtedly true that the main problem is looking at what is happening in the region. That is why it is so important to get a UN arms embargo that would extend to the neighbouring countries, which may act as a conduit for arms coming in.

Q24 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** What monitoring happens with the EU arms embargo? Is it expected for each country in the EU to monitor its respective—

Dame Rosalind Marsden: If the UN panel of experts or another organisation that specialises in monitoring arms sales comes across evidence that a European company is involved in this sort of issue, it would draw it to the attention of the national authorities, and hopefully the relevant Government would take action to investigate.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Hopefully they would, although since 2012 the UK



has not taken any action, so maybe there is an issue there.

- Q25 **Chair:** There is. We have one minute left. Dame Rosalind, we have the Minister next. Is there one thing the UK could do to improve what is clearly an absolutely dire position?

Dame Rosalind Marsden: In addition to diplomatic support, which the British Government are undoubtedly providing to the current peace process, it is also very important to give more focus and support to peacebuilding at a local level and to understand the different dynamics of the conflict in South Sudan at subnational level. Although there are contributing factors that apply across the country, there are also specific factors in different regions, which the Government need to get a handle on. If more resources can be put into supporting local peacebuilding, this will be really important. If there is any chance of achieving a sustainable peace, whatever might be agreed in Addis Ababa—let us hope the forum has some positive outcomes—it is unlikely to be sustainable unless it is accompanied by action at the local level. I would hope that DFID and the Foreign Office, looking forward, can do more in that area.

Natalia Chan: I would echo that: a long-term framework and an integrated strategy that incorporates local peacebuilding. The value of local actors in humanitarian response could be a lot better and further explored, while keeping on funding and raising access concerns. It is really important that DFID has a regional strategy that takes into account the fact that South Sudan is not in a bubble and incorporates the needs of the refugees.

- Q26 **Chair:** Thank you to all three of you for your evidence over the past 45 minutes; we are immensely grateful. Please feel free to stay in the gallery for the evidence from the Minister, if you wish.

Examination of witness

Witness: Rory Stewart OBE MP, Minister of State, Department for International Development and Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

- Q27 **Chair:** Minister, welcome. Thank you very much indeed for joining us. We have about a dozen questions, which we will try to cover with you over the next hour. Let me start by asking about the peace process in South Sudan and your assessment of its current state.

Rory Stewart: As you know, people are meeting in Addis at the moment and there has been a broader attendance than people had feared. The anxiety six months ago, even three months ago, was that nobody was really going to turn up; even a week ago, there were anxieties that the South Sudanese Government, Salva Kiir and others, would try to boycott, because they did not like the way it had been set up. There have been



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lots of last-minute conversations between us, the South Sudanese Government and the region, to get people there.

There are now a dozen significant groups, and they are not just armed groups; they include civil society, which is a step in the right direction. They include Rebecca Garang and the former detainees, and representatives from the Nuer community as well as the Dinka community. That is a start. The question is what will emerge at the end of this, because a lot of energy was put into the 2015 peace agreement. It was really, really difficult, it required heroic diplomacy and it barely lasted a year.

I am afraid that, if you wanted to be cynical or pessimistic, there would be strong reason to believe that this might fail again. If it does, it will probably be because the major figures, including the President of South Sudan, Mr Kiir, and Riek Machar, and 25 other armed groups and their leaderships, do not feel a huge priority to create peace.

Q28 Chair: In terms of the external players, how crucial in this is the troika? Can you say a bit about the troika and what it does, and then the role of IGAD and the support that we can give it in its role?

Rory Stewart: This is very much an IGAD lead. This is its deal, and we have been very, very clear that we operate in support of it. The African Union has also been very clear that it supports IGAD. The troika work is very important, but it is really there to work behind the scenes, to facilitate and support an IGAD-led process. We do not want huge gaps to emerge between us and an IGAD-led process. That is because, in the end, the key—not quite the entire key, but a lot of the key—to what happens with Salva Kiir lies in Uganda and Sudan, and quite a lot of the key to what the Nuer community does lies in Ethiopia.

Chair: That takes us neatly to our next question.

Q29 Mr Sharma: Good morning. Are you working with any other regional partners? You mentioned the African Union, but are you working with other countries, Governments and supporters in South Sudan?

Rory Stewart: Yes, we are. We work particularly closely with the US and Norway on the troika. We are working very closely with EU partners to try to get a joint position in relation to sanctions. The US and Canada have introduced sanctions and we are now working with the EU to prepare a sanction position there. In terms of regional countries, as I have said, the key players here are Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda, and of those probably the most important is Uganda. I have personally discussed South Sudan with President Museveni; I discussed it with the Sudanese Foreign Minister last week when he was here; I have discussed it with the Ethiopian Foreign Minister and the Kenyan Foreign Minister. I have even discussed it with people such as the Rwandans, Congolese and South Africans.

Q30 James Duddridge: You mentioned the US. Has there been a shift in



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policy in South Sudan from the US, post Obama and with Trump coming in?

Rory Stewart: Yes, and not in financial terms. Mark Green, who is the USAID administrator, was the US ambassador in Tanzania and knows the region quite well, visited South Sudan shortly before I did. I think he was there about a week before I was. He has recommitted US development aid to South Sudan. There were stories about the possibility that the Trump Administration would try to disengage, but in fact the US Government remain immensely generous; they are putting nearly \$500 million into South Sudan. He has recommitted that, and the US response is the cornerstone of the humanitarian response in South Sudan. The big change since the Obama Administration is that the US introduced targeted sanctions against key individuals and did so unilaterally. That was not done in conjunction with the rest of the international community; the US moved first.

Q31 **Chair:** Do the British Government have a view on those sanctions?

Rory Stewart: I think it was a smart move. It was good for somebody in the international community to signal to the Government of South Sudan that there are consequences. We need to get the incentive structure right if we are to have any hope of a peace deal. It has been helpful, not entirely by design, that the EU has not yet got its position together. It now means that the EU position on sanctions can be used to reinforce the peace settlement negotiations in Addis at the moment, whereas the US and Canada showed their teeth a few months ago.

Q32 **Chair:** You would not necessarily argue that we or the EU should adopt similar sanctions to those.

Rory Stewart: We should consider it very, very seriously. The question is the timing, and the way in which we present them. There is no point doing it purely symbolically; the point would be to create the incentive structure to key people at the table or to lead them to broaden their peace settlement. Making it clear to the Government of South Sudan that that is an option for us, that it is something we would seriously consider, is going to be important to get people back to the table.

Q33 **Mr Evans:** How many people does DFID employ in South Sudan, and what are the conditions like for them there?

Rory Stewart: At the moment, we have a headcount limit of 12 at any one time in country, and there are seven FCO UK-based staff on the ground, which includes one defence attaché: it is six FCO, one MOD. Conditions are not great. Because of the violence in 2015, we had to evacuate a number of our buildings. If you were to go to see our ambassador in her residence, that is quite a grand word for a bungalow about the size of this room, with a small front sitting room and her in a crowded pantry kitchen doing the washing up. It is not the high life. The reason for that is that we have to think very seriously about security; we have to keep the staff secure, but strangely, because of the very large



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international presence in Juba, prices of property in Juba are unbelievably high. It has been very difficult for us to find any way of renting suitable accommodation for staff.

Q34 **Mr Evans:** Do you find it difficult to find people to go there?

Rory Stewart: Surprisingly, some of our most energetic staff seem to want to go there. Our ambassador in Juba is a senior staff member; our head of the DFID Office, Becks Buckingham, was the deputy head of our office in Kabul, and is one of our real DFID high fliers. It is a big mission, and it is probably one of the three highest-profile African missions that we have for DFID and the FCO, and therefore attracts very high-quality staff.

Q35 **Mrs Latham:** Have any concerns about the narrowing of the humanitarian space and the ability of NGOs to work in the area been raised with the President of South Sudan?

Rory Stewart: Yes. In every meeting that we have with the President, the Vice-President or the Foreign Minister, we return to the issue of humanitarian access and the narrowing of humanitarian space; it is raised again and again. There has been a small amount of progress legally, in that the President has issued a decree on humanitarian access, but in practice things remain unbelievably dangerous. One of the implementing partners we use to deliver our health programmes was caught up on Saturday in a firefight between the Government and the Opposition, which has resulted in people being killed, aid workers being killed again and others being kidnapped or rescued. That is a live issue at the moment, and this follows on from 92 humanitarian workers having been killed in the last few years.

Q36 **Paul Scully:** Minister, you announced a new £52 million aid package last week, focusing on support to refugees, livelihoods, food assistance and healthcare. It is primarily geared towards refugees who have fled to other countries. I am just wondering how you think this package will help the South Sudanese population.

Rory Stewart: The first thing, of course, is that a lot of the South Sudanese population are no longer in South Sudan, so nearly 2 million of them have crossed out. It is extraordinary, if you visit northern Uganda, to see essentially an entire South Sudanese state emerging there. Of course, the majority of our money continues to go into South Sudan itself. To put that in context, the £52 million that you have mentioned is within the context of us spending £110 million inside South Sudan this year alone, as part of what will be a nearly £440 million multiyear package, through our humanitarian programme called HARISS in South Sudan. That is money going to the World Food Programme, going to Oxfam, working with the German development agency on delivering livelihood support. We have 10 implementing partners supported through HARISS, with more than £400 million of multiyear funding.

Q37 **Henry Smith:** Minister, welcome. The HARISS programme that you



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were touching on is about halfway through its implementation phase. How successful, in your assessment, has the programme been and what efforts have been made to assess its impact thus far?

Rory Stewart: In terms of its fundamental purpose, which is saving lives, preventing people from contracting cholera and malaria, providing basic shelter, basic food and some targeted cash assistance, it has been a successful programme. We are working with extremely experienced, reliable partners, like UNICEF, that we work with all over the world. Of course, like all humanitarian programmes, this is not addressing the root cause of the problem. This is simply dealing with 3 million or 4 million people who have been displaced.

Q38 **Henry Smith:** With a deteriorating situation in the country, what contingencies are being made to support the HARISS programme going forward?

Rory Stewart: We can access additional funding through our crisis reserves. We have put in about £110 million this year, which meant we brought forward some things that were intended for next year because of the severity of the crisis. If the crisis continues again into next year, we may need to move money around within DFID budgets.

Q39 **Henry Smith:** How has the partnership and interaction been with local actors with regard to the HARISS programme?

Rory Stewart: What type of local actor?

Henry Smith: With local partners additional to DFID. How is that relationship?

Rory Stewart: The major partners that we have in the HARISS programme are the major UN agencies. We work through the UN resident co-ordinator, who is Beninese and extremely competent, and the deputy SRSG. We feel that there have been good staff on the ground, but there is also a capacity problem. The number of concurrent crises, with DRC now added to the list of the four previous famines, means that even for very large agencies, like Oxfam, finding enough staff on the ground is challenging. This is more anecdotal than scientific, but it seems as a consequence, from my observation on the ground in South Sudan, that these agencies are focused more on humanitarian relief than they are on traditional development work. I suspect part of that is because of the capacity problem.

Q40 **Henry Smith:** Is there no real support from those in authority in South Sudan, with what authority they have, in terms of supporting the programme?

Rory Stewart: No. The South Sudanese Government are not a constructive, helpful partner. They are one of the worst government partners that we work with anywhere in the world. Humanitarian access is not guaranteed. We have situations, as we did over this weekend, of government forces firing in firefights around aid workers. The



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bureaucracy is unbelievable. If you try to operate out of a South Sudanese health system, through the government systems, the slowness and the amount of paperwork is astonishing.

The corruption in some parts of the South Sudanese Government is quite extreme. There is a general sense that humanitarian relief and development is not a priority for the Government of South Sudan. For example, they prevented me, as a Minister, from visiting an opposition-held area. Their security forces would not allow my plane to fly into those areas. This is not a Government that we feel at the moment are really demonstrating a strong commitment towards development or humanitarian assistance.

Henry Smith: Minister, thanks. That is a pretty stark answer.

Q41 **James Duddridge:** What is our support level to UNMISS, in terms of numbers? What are troops doing in South Sudan?

Rory Stewart: At the moment, we have about 440 British troops, almost all from the Royal Engineers, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Katie Hislop. We have two bases. The major base is in Malakal. Their engineering work is directed by the UN force commander, who, in the case of Malakal when I was there, was a Rwandan. That has largely been focused on engineering infrastructure work around the camp and in support of the peacekeeping and humanitarian activities. It will extend from drainage work to the construction of a jetty, to allow boats to be unloaded off the Nile to provide humanitarian assistance and UN supplies.

Q42 **James Duddridge:** Is UNMISS taking direction solely from the UN, or is it also taking direction from IGAD?

Rory Stewart: Solely from the UN.

Q43 **Chris Law:** The UN peacekeeping mission has largely failed, by lots of external and internal reports, including DFID describing it as struggling to fulfil its mandate. I want to know why the peacekeeping mission is failing so badly. What are the causes? Is it capacity? What is the UK doing to help improve the situation? Am I right in saying the mandate is to be refreshed at the moment? What involvement do the UK Government have within that refreshing of the mandate?

Rory Stewart: Let me take those in reverse order. We have a strong involvement in the renewal of the mandate, both as a troop-contributing country and as a permanent member of the Security Council. It is a good time, because we ought to be able to adjust the mandate to reflect the results of this peace negotiation. The hope would be that, in terms of both the core existing UNMISS mission and the additional troops of the African rapid reaction force, which is due to be deployed, we should be able to put more soldiers into the areas of maximum vulnerability, for example the Equatoria region of southern South Sudan, which has not received as many troops.



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It has also been clear that David Shearer and others have been pushing to try to create more flexible forces, so they are less tied into these protection-of-civilians camps. This has to be balanced against the fact that hundreds of thousands of civilians are currently depending on those troops for security and are located around those camps. From a strategic point of view, in an ideal world the concept is to facilitate those civilians returning to their homes and to provide services for them in their own homes, so that the peacekeeping troops can be out in the field more, trying to stop armed conflict.

However, unfortunately the security situation is so bad that, understandably, many of these civilians are very reluctant to return to their homes. I visited Malakal, for example. That was a town of 120,000 people. When I saw it, it probably had only 10,000 people left. It had been taken and retaken, between the IO and the Government, 14 times in a single year. The buildings were pockmarked with bullets. Most of the smaller houses had had all their roofs stripped off; they had lost all their roofs and the mud walls had melted. Essentially, the bush was returning very quickly, all the way along the roads.

The Government in Malakal are trying to say things are peaceful now. The police are back on the streets and trying to persuade the community from the nearby protection-of-civilians camp to come back to that town. The community was saying to me, "You have to be kidding. There is no way we are going back to this town." When I was there they said, "We were encouraged to go back two weeks ago, and were beaten up when we turned up in the town, so we have no intention of going there."

Extreme violence around the POC camp has reduced in the last 12 months. There were horrifying accounts focused on Malakal. There were some very good reports by NGOs looking at incidences of rape from South Sudanese soldiers against women going out to collect firewood. Those soldiers have now been cleared away. All the huts they used to be located in, which were between the airport and the camp, have gone, so we are getting far fewer reports of violence against the displaced people around that area. But they themselves still feel that things are not safe enough to return to their homes.

Q44 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** What is the current UK stance on an arms embargo?

Rory Stewart: We have to look very seriously at that as one of our options. There are probably two separate questions, which are related. One of them is how effective we feel an arms embargo would be. South Sudan is a country about the size of France or Texas and very, very sparsely populated. There are 9 million people in it. Smuggling is a huge problem. For example, there are reports of a lot of smuggling of arms from the Ugandan border.

It is absolutely forbidden for British companies to sell any weapons to South Sudan. We take very seriously any allegations that British



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companies have attempted to get round that rule. We would not issue arms export licences for people trying to sell weapons into South Sudan.

- Q45 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Have you been following up the Amnesty report that claims a British company was involved in the brokerage of arms between Ukraine and South Sudan?

Rory Stewart: Very, very closely. We are aware of the report. We are following it up very closely. To repeat my statement, we would never issue an arms export licence of that sort. If British companies that are involved in that activity break the law, they will be treated very harshly.

- Q46 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** It is not necessarily just the issuing of licences. I have been told by people in HMRC that they have not prioritised the enforcement of the UK arms export controls, and they are the people that enforce it. I just want to get reassurances that you are putting pressure to make sure HMRC is treating that as a high priority and enforcing them.

Rory Stewart: If you have that kind of information, please pass it to me.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I am more than happy to do that, yes.

Rory Stewart: They should be prioritising this. If you are hearing from them that they are not, I will try to find out who on earth is doing this and why they are not prioritising it.

- Q47 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** We have not prosecuted anyone at all for any arms export since 2012. It starts to look like a picture that we are not enforcing, and then gives carte blanche to companies that would want to go rogue. It is just making sure that we have a clear statement that it is totally out of order.

Rory Stewart: It is completely out of order. We will follow up any information that you have on people engaged in illegal activity.

- Q48 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Are we putting any pressure on other Governments to put in arms embargoes, particularly the US, along with the sanctions that it has put in?

Rory Stewart: Yes. We continue to discuss it very closely with all partners. I was coming on to the second point. In addition to the arms embargo itself, the practical effects of that and the problems around smuggling, you can use that as a political instrument in order to drive the peace process, co-ordinating the way that arms embargoes are used, particularly from the regional states. Ultimately, this is going to be less about countries like the US. It is ultimately going to be about the way that countries like Uganda behave. That is going to be key to driving peace.

- Q49 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Is any support being given to programmes like the Human Security Baseline Assessment, which researches and investigates small arms in South Sudan, particularly arms that are being smuggled over the border?



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Rory Stewart: In my understanding, at the moment we are not supporting that programme. Our programme support on security and conflict tends to focus on conflict resolution and peacebuilding programmes, and making sure that conflict sensitivity runs through our development programming, as opposed to focusing on the issue of arms.

Q50 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** That programme got finance from the other two of the three partners. Is the feeling that that programme had enough resources and did not need any support from us, or is it just something that we do not invest in?

Rory Stewart: I do not have the information on that specific programme. My instinct is that the team, which has a very close relationship between Alison, our ambassador, and Becks, the head of the DFID country office, will assess these programmes largely on the basis of their efficacy and contribution to our overall strategy. The question that they would be asking is: "Of all the things that we can do with the relatively limited budget, spending, for the sake of argument, £160 million this year in South Sudan, how does this prioritise against education, health, peacebuilding, conflict resolution or our support to the IGAD process?" I think they would have concluded that that was less of a priority. Whether that was because they felt the programme was being less effective, or whether they felt other partners were doing it, I am not in a position to say.

Q51 **Chair:** Minister, can I move us on to the issues around sexual and gender-based violence in South Sudan? A year ago, we took evidence from a panel including your predecessor, and we heard about a programme called Access to Justice, which was about enhancing justice services for victims of gender-based violence. At that point it had been suspended because of the security situation. Are you able to update us on the current status of that work?

Rory Stewart: Yes. In my understanding, that programme currently remains suspended. To explain why, we do a lot of gender-based violence programming through our humanitarian support. We support partners in camps working specifically on this issue, and through some of our CSSF work on conflict resolution. To set the overall framework, there has been a huge shift in what we do in South Sudan. It is a shift that has had to recognise that the situation in South Sudan is far more extreme and far worse than we had anticipated.

As you will be aware, Mr Chairman, broadly speaking, in 2012, when independence came, there was a huge optimism. An enormous amount of money went into sectors like governance, justice, civil society, rule of law-building, capacity-building, support to financial administrations, support to the Government of South Sudan. That was predicated on there being functioning institutions, a Government that wanted to work with us and a security environment that would allow people to do that kind of work. Hundreds of millions of pounds went into that, and almost



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all of that went up in smoke when the fighting began in 2014, and again in 2016, after the brief peace in 2015.

What we are doing now is much closer to humanitarian programming. That is even true of things that seem to be developmental. If you look at our education and health programming, to some extent we are trying to keep schools and clinics going. We would be misleading if we suggested that, in the current situation in South Sudan, we are really in a position to transform the education and health system. The things we would normally be talking to you about in Ethiopia or Rwanda would be capacity-building of the local government, handing over functions to the local government. These things are hardly possible without a functioning state.

The Access to Justice programme is part of that general thing. It was a well-designed, well-intentioned programme when we felt that it was a peaceful, secure situation with a Government that wanted to work with us. As things are collapsing into something that feels more and more like a failed state, we are getting closer and closer into the business of saving lives.

Q52 Chair: That makes sense. The announcement that you made of the £52 million is obviously very focused on the humanitarian situation. Will any of that money be specifically around support for women and girls, including issues related to gender-based violence?

Rory Stewart: Yes. As I say, we have programmes specifically with implementing partners through HARISS that focus on gender-based violence. Our education programme is absolutely focused on girls, so much so that one of the questions raised by some of the girls that I met in a school in Malakal was: "Why are you supporting us but not supporting our brothers?" That has been a difficult decision for us, but the decision we have made is that we want to prioritise girls.

Q53 Henry Smith: What successes do you think DFID has had in education in South Sudan, particularly focusing on the support for girls? It follows on directly from what you have been saying.

Rory Stewart: In South Sudan, the word "success" is a slightly dangerous word. DFID programming has been absolutely vital to keeping schools running at all. In particular, the fact that we are providing cash transfers to girls has massively increased the female enrolment rates. We have good, robust evidence around that. It is not a lot of money. It is about £20 a year, but most of these girls turning up to school pointed to that as making a critical difference in terms of their ability to leave their families and come to school.

Unfortunately, there are many schools in South Sudan and they are chronically underfunded. The school that I saw in Malakal had an earth floor, a few benches, a blackboard, a corrugated iron roof and no windows. It was unbelievably hot. The teacher was teaching in English,



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the students learning in English, but the English language skills of teachers and students are not very good. Most people speak Arabic or their local tribal language, but the textbooks are not in those languages.

The sums of money that DFID is able to put into these schools are quite small. It will be a few hundred dollars per school, which will allow you to do some basic repairs to the roof, provide a piece of furniture or a blackboard and try to get some more girls into that classroom. We have to be realistic about what this feels like.

Q54 Henry Smith: Is there any resentment? It is very interesting that you were talking about being questioned: "Why are you helping us but not my brothers?" Are there any difficulties around that in terms of implementation on the ground?

Rory Stewart: There presumably must be, or the girls would not have raised it. There must be a sense that there is something a bit odd about the fact that they are getting money. It is a difficult thing to answer. This is essentially a question of two things: resources and priority. For what it is worth, in brutal terms, provision of cash assistance to girls is beginning to bring girls up to parity with boys. It is not leading to a situation where there are more girls in school than there are boys.

Q55 Mr Evans: You just described the dreadful conditions in one of those schools, which are probably replicated in many areas, maybe even worse. Then you said we give small amounts of money. We have a budget of £12 billion; why do we not give more?

Rory Stewart: There are 700 million poor people in the world. We are trying to deal with about 540,000 children in South Sudan, stretched across about 2,200 schools. We try to support probably 500 times that number of children around the world. We spend about 10% of our global budget on education. If we wanted to do more there, we would have to think about whether we wanted to reduce the number of children we support in Tanzania or Uganda.

There is another, bigger question, which is an interesting question for the Committee, as you do education work. That is how we strike the balance between quantity and quality. In other words, are we correct to try to give a small amount of money to 2,200 schools and 540,000 children, or would we be better focusing on 200 schools and making sure that those were good buildings with a high standard of education and high results, while accepting that means that you are neglecting others? These are really difficult things to answer.

For what it is worth, my gut instinct is that we probably need to begin focusing more on quality, even at the expense of not being able to reach everybody. The danger of many education programmes in Africa now is that the majority of children are leaving school after seven years unable to recognise a letter.

Q56 Mr Evans: You have just given us that option of spending more on fewer



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schools. Looking overall at the budget, which you will get to see on a regular basis, no doubt, do you see programmes in there that you think, "My goodness me, if only we chopped that programme we could be putting a lot more money into something that is going to be worthwhile"?

Rory Stewart: Yes and no. I definitely have feelings like that. The problem is usually this: there are certain types of programme that emotionally and intuitively feel very obvious and easy to support. South Sudan is a really good example of a place where most of the programmes feel very straightforward and appealing. We basically only do three things in South Sudan. We do humanitarian assistance to internally displaced people, which is tents and food, very, very basic education support and very basic health support. That is quite difficult to disagree with.

The problems lie in programmes that are much more ambitious and trying to do big, transformative development change. Those are usually high risk, high return. I am more suspicious of them usually, because I tend to be a bit gloomy. Quite understandably, the development professionals would say, "If we do not do some of these programmes, you will never be able to fundamentally transform this economy and allow it to look after itself. If you keep doling out small amounts of money to a lot of schools, or building a lot of shelter and providing a lot of food to starving babies, you are never achieving those big transformational changes."

The most difficult stuff is always in the space of governance. The fundamental problems in almost all these countries are corruption, conflict and Governments that are not committed towards development. Programmes to address that are absolutely vital, but generally do not work, because generally you are working with people who are not really serious about giving up on corruption or their commitment to development. The choice that would face you, me or anybody is: do you—this is the way of encapsulating it—try to address the root causes of the problem, corruption and things, because that makes logical sense? Do you feel, like me, that, in most of these cases, it is almost impossible to address the root causes? When addressing the symptoms, generally you can see what you are doing and it is more straightforward.

Q57 **Mr Sharma:** DFID was key in securing a new Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan at the UN Human Rights Council in March 2016, and in strengthening the commission's mandate in December 2016 to include sexual and gender-based violence, with a view to ending impunity and increasing accountability. Can you provide any further updates on the role of the commission in reducing impunity and increasing accountability for acts of gender-based violence? How does DFID support this? It is a long question.

Rory Stewart: The human rights situation in South Sudan is horrifying. There are abuses on a more-than-daily basis. A truly horrifying number of South Sudanese women, in particular, report having suffered violence



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or sexual violence. The numbers in some surveys are up at 85%. It is just unbelievable. This is millions of people. When I talked to South Sudanese refugees in north Uganda, most of them had suffered violence either in their homes or on the transition through.

As you say, we have been working closely with the UN system. We have also been supporting the establishment of a hybrid court with the African Union to try these cases. But, in a situation in which there are dozens of armed groups, in which it is frequently too dangerous for any international to travel into these areas, in which nearly half the population have been displaced from their homes, it would not be honest to pretend that the British Government will be able to resolve these issues.

What do I mean by that? In very blunt terms, Mr Sharma, if you are a woman in a Nuer village who has been raped by the SPLA, you are 75 miles from the nearest UN peacekeeping force, and there is no landing strip anywhere nearby, no functioning court system, no police, no functioning jail system, how do you, or indeed millions of other South Sudanese women, realistically access justice? In the end, these courts and accountability systems tend to focus on a few dozen perpetrators, as we have seen even in the much more orderly controlled environment of the Balkans, through these cases that you will have seen in The Hague recently. In fact, there will be tens of thousands of men, and they are almost all men, who will be committing these crimes.

Q58 Chair: Minister, this is obviously a very gloomy subject, from the evidence that you have given so reflectively and thoroughly, and the evidence we had from the previous panel. You mentioned the optimism that there was at the time of South Sudanese independence. Is there a case to say that it was a mistake to split Sudan?

Rory Stewart: I do not feel that. I feel that there was almost no option. People go back and forth on this, but my basic sense is that the situation was so tough and so horrifying that there were no good options. Remember that this fighting in South Sudan is the grandchild of fighting that began in the 1960s, and then began again in the 1980s. It then went through the splits between Garang and Riek Machar in 1991. By the time everybody staggered into the comprehensive peace agreement in 2005 and then the referendum in 2011, this was the end of 40 years of continual north-south conflict.

At the time it seemed plausible, if I had been sitting in front of this Committee, and I can completely understand why people supported this idea, to put huge blame on the Government of Sudan for running a proxy war, stirring up the trouble between different groups, funding the Nuer against the Dinka and vice versa. It seemed perfectly plausible, given that there was absolutely no good will by that stage between South Sudan and the rest of Sudan, and the divisions, whatever they had been historically, had become so deep, the sense of nationalism in South



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Sudan so strong and the desire for independence absolutely overwhelming. You saw the celebrations that happened.

Chair: I remember, yes.

Rory Stewart: I do not see that there really was any option. The tragedy is that these men, who are effectively warlords, traumatised by decades of fighting, who have known almost nothing except a life of cattle raiding and looting, find themselves in government with no real commitment to government. That was not inevitable. Other people with military backgrounds, Museveni, Kagame, for all their many challenges, were able to create functioning states. This has not been the case with Salva Kiir or Riek Machar.

Chair: Can I thank you for your evidence today, thank the Committee for their work since we reformed earlier this year and wish everyone a merry Christmas?

Rory Stewart: Happy Christmas.

Chair: Thank you, Minister.