

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Violence against aid workers, HC 2008

Tuesday 25 June 2019

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Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; Mr Ivan Lewis; Mark Menzies; Lloyd Russell-Moyle.

Questions 37 - 63

Witnesses

I: Lisa Reilly, Executive Director, European Interagency Security Forum; Fredrik Palsson, EISF Steering Group Chair, European Interagency Security Forum.

II: Rt Hon Dr Andrew Murrison MP, Minister of State for the Middle East, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Minister of State for International Development; Matthew Wyatt, Deputy Director and Head of Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department (CHASE), Department for International Development.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Lisa Reilly and Fredrik Palsson.

Q37 Chair: Good afternoon. This is our second oral evidence session on violence against aid workers and I welcome Lisa and Fredrik, who are our first panel of expert witnesses. Thank you very much. We have 45 minutes with you and we are seeking to cover six areas during that period. There may be a vote, which will interrupt proceedings for 10 to 15 minutes, but my instinct is that, if there is a vote, it will be with the second panel rather than you. Let me kick off. As you answer my first question, please introduce yourselves. Is humanitarian work becoming more dangerous?

Lisa Reilly: I am Lisa Reilly, the executive director of the European Interagency Security Forum. My background is one of engineering, so my introduction into humanitarian work was through that. My understanding of security comes from being responsible for managing and implementing a variety of programmes in different countries, rather than from a traditional security background. The question you start with is a very difficult one.

Chair: I know, yes.

Lisa Reilly: In some ways yes and in some ways no; I am afraid that is the answer.

Chair: No, it is great. Nuance is a good thing.

Lisa Reilly: If you look at the statistics of incidents against aid workers, the serious incidents are really contained within five or maybe six countries. In those countries, yes, it is quite difficult. We are seeing that, through professionalisation and better understanding of risk in the way we work, in the majority of countries, it is hopefully getting safer.

I remember when I started doing aid work it was basically said, if you were there before MSF or still there when MSF left, you were in trouble, because they were the ones who really worked in active conflict zones. Over time that has changed. The expectation from humanitarian organisations is that we will work in these high-risk environments. You can look at the number of active conflicts that aid work is taking place in, where in the past maybe the majority of organisations would not have worked. As communication technology has improved and the images of such horrible suffering get much more quickly onto our TV screens, there is a greater expectation for rapid response and working in these high-risk conflicts.

I am not sure if that really answers your question. We are working in higher risk areas, but we are getting better at managing the risk. It is not gung-ho—"We need to work in these places"—but there is a certain expectation upon us.



Fredrik Palsson: My name is Fredrik and I am the head of safety and security for Danish Refugee Council. I am also the chair for the steering group of EISF, hence my appearance here. My background is initially Swedish military, coming from a background of bomb disposal, where I moved into the mine action environment in Afghanistan and worked there as a country director for a number of years for various organisations. I came to HQ in this current role of security in 2010, where we had nothing to show in terms of the structure. I built my background on the structure of how we implement safety and security from my experience in the field.

Q38 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. We are going to go into some of this in much more detail and you have both given very balanced, nuanced responses. The primary concern is for the aid workers themselves, but one of the concerns is the potential impact on resources available for humanitarian relief and development, and, in particular, how far organisations, perfectly properly, are having to shift resources away from direct humanitarian assistance to physical safety measures to protect aid workers. Are you able to give a sense of how far that is happening?

Lisa Reilly: We are definitely seeing a shift, in that we are sometimes not targeting the people who are most in need.

Chair: Is that because of security concerns? "We will not go there because there is a risk".

Lisa Reilly: Yes. Sometimes the limitation in resources will mean that we shift the focus of where we are working. That can be driven by political requests and things like that as well. One issue is that physical security is easy to see, but is only a very tiny part of the cost if we are going to do good security risk management. Often, what is missing is the time being allowed to create those relationships and build acceptance with the communities that we need. It can be lack of time, as well as lack of money, that limits our ability to work in some high-risk environments.

It is the age-old balance, trying to not be too risk averse, but not take on too many risks, while trying to meet the populations in need. I hate to use the cost-benefit analysis, but organisations sometimes have to take pragmatic decisions about where you can achieve impact for the resources that are available, which can be one of the questions people have to answer.

Fredrik Palsson: It is always the beneficiaries first. We want to reach as many people as possible for the money that is available, but they are in competition. If we look at safety as the necessary evil for which we have to have certain structures in place, we always ask, "Do we need a police force? Do we need a fire department?" If there are no fires and no crimes, we might be quite well without them. It all has to be based on a risk assessment.



Going back a few years we used to say, "There should be a certain percentage towards security in our programmes and each budget should be allocated a certain percentage. Different organisations use different figures". It is very difficult to say what that goes to, because in Somalia necessarily you will need a higher level, and in Slovakia you will not need as much. They have a more working infrastructure. It has to be based on a real figure. If I have a risk assessment saying that this is what I need, in this particular instance I may even need armoured vehicles, even if we do not necessarily want to go there. Sometimes we have to, because the context stipulates that, and that will then become a more costly affair.

If we can evidence that this is what is required, it will be easier to compete with the programme people and donors who say, "Yes, you had £1 million. This is what was available. You say that you want £1.2 million. It is still £1 million". The risk is that safety will be the one that will be cut away, unless we have evidence to show that this is what we need. I am not for having a percentage of the budget.

Chair: That makes sense.

Q39 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Can you explain to us in the Committee how specialist risk management organisations, such as yours, protect humanitarian workers? You have been talking a bit about that in terms of the armoured vehicles, but talk me through the process in which you would do an assessment and then seek to protect people.

Fredrik Palsson: To understand the question, is it how exactly we do risk assessments?

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I really want to know what you offer.

Fredrik Palsson: As EISF.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Yes.

Fredrik Palsson: Then you should start.

Lisa Reilly: EISF was established as a peer support network for the global security focal points of implementing NGOs. The position can be quite a lonely one in an organisation, so by having a peer support network people can benchmark across organisations and see what others are doing. We very often find that organisations only make change when something bad goes wrong and they realise that something is there. We hope with EISF that organisations can learn from the mistakes of others, so each organisation does not have to make the same mistake.

We work at a global level. Other organisations, such as INSO, work at the country level. Where we look at policy and strategy, they look at the day-to-day security issues that are impacting the programmes on the ground.



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Fredrik Palsson: For me, being able to tap into EISF has been very central in how I develop the systems I have in my organisation. Yes, it is top down. It is for global safety. It is for HQ staff working downwards. Initially, we did not have much. When I came into this role in 2010, I looked around, coming slightly from a security background. "Where do I tap into?" I come from the mine action background, where there are international mine action standards. We know what is at stake.

There need to be standard operating procedures. There need to be contingency plans. I did not see much of that in the broader aid community, so I looked to EISF. It was quite early. There were not so many members at that time. I joined up, and it was very important for me to see how we could share experiences. There must be someone who has worked with this more than I have. All the resource documentation coming out from EISF is best practice. Where there is no common standard, we can always go back to look at best practice and, through peer support, help to make it a sort of standard.

Q40 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** You are offering support, advice and guidance to organisations that are doing this on the ground. Is there any evidence that the humanitarian worker protection interventions that you recommend people deliver reduce risk and have a positive impact on safety and security?

Lisa Reilly: My honest answer is "not really", at this moment in time. We are working with an organisation at the moment to see if we can develop some impact measurement tools to look at this, because it is very difficult to say there were fewer abductions in a country because we had good security management plans in place. We cannot prove a negative.

I do have some figures. This is how we use the belief that we must be useful in a way. Last year, there were over 38,000 visits to the website. More than 24,000 documents were downloaded. Since we put them up, there has been a total of around 20,000 downloads of the papers EISF has produced. While we cannot say that is direct evidence that we have made people safe, the belief is that they would not be accessing these documents if it did not make a difference.

Q41 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** People who are providing security services or those who feel they need it are relying on you for the advice, but we have no evidence that change on the ground makes any difference.

Lisa Reilly: Human beings are most effective if the basic needs are met and those basic needs are safety and security. If we want our staff to be effective and able to deliver aid programmes, they have to feel confident in their organisations that the organisations understand the risks that they are being put at and that, if something goes wrong, they have the capacity to respond, so that they are not worrying: "Is my house safe? Is somebody looking after me?" They can concentrate on the work they are doing so, hopefully, the effectiveness of the staff is improved.



- Q42 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Some studies or work on the perception of aid workers about whether they feel safe and secure, rather than whether it is just the aid organisations feeling that they have ticked a box, would really be very useful here, to be able to see if that has happened.

Lisa Reilly: I absolutely agree. There is qualitative information available and quite a lot of studies have been done on well-being. I do not have the information here, but I am sure we can find it for you. There is very little that is quantitative in terms of that.

- Q43 **Mark Menzies:** We have been told that international aid organisations are relying more on local delivery partners to gain access to hard-to-reach areas. Is there a risk that this simply shifts the burden of risk down the chain of aid implementation to local partners with less resource and capacity to take care of their staff?

Lisa Reilly: Yes. We still see that attitude, unfortunately: "They are from the area; therefore, they understand the risk", and often they do not see that the risks change once they are associated with an international organisation. That whole perception chain has an impact.

Unfortunately, one of the problems is that, when we look at humanitarian response, most funding organisations for humanitarian response do not include any training. It is about immediate response and that is what the funding is for. If an INGO is using local implementing partners, it does not have the resources to spend time and money on capacity building and training the local partner organisations. One of the big problems is around that.

A research project we have just started is looking at what security risk management looks like from the local partner's perspective, because we have had a tendency to go, "We know best. We will tell you what to do", and we know that is not working, so we need to look at it from the other way around.

- Q44 **Mark Menzies:** That brings me on to a supplementary. What is the duty of care that international aid organisations owe to personnel working for downstream delivery partners in highly insecure environments?

Fredrik Palsson: The duty of care is a very broad concept. Moving on, again, to the national staff, we all have different profiles, but each profile needs to be assessed. It could be a diversity issue as well. It does not have to be just national staff against international staff. Working with national partners, the duty of care we have towards them is to categorise them.

Sometimes we work with volunteers. How responsible are we to them? That sometimes has been missed. There are thousands and thousands of volunteers working in our camps in Cox's Bazar, for instance. We have a duty of care to them if they work under our umbrella, but at the same time they have a responsibility and a code of conduct. It is a very difficult thing to manage when you have thousands and thousands of people



working on day-to-day, but we have to be as responsible as possible and always assess the risks. I fear that I am not answering the question.

Lisa Reilly: You did, but to add to it, for aid agencies in particular, if we say our mission is around human dignity and supporting that, we must consider our moral obligations, as well as our legal obligations. We are probably covering our legal obligations in terms of duty of care. Are we covering our ethical obligations? I am not so sure about that.

Q45 Chris Law: In earlier evidence sessions on the subject and Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo, we were told that humanitarian organisations needed to invest more in building and maintaining trust among the beneficiaries as a way of securing the security of their staff. In your experience, does a balance need to be struck between acceptance-based approaches and harder, physical security measures?

Lisa Reilly: Yes. Is that a good enough answer?

Chris Law: Yes, perfect.

Lisa Reilly: Acceptance continues to be the fundamental approach of NGOs, and needs to be if we are going to be effective in how we implement programmes. It is time and resource heavy to build that acceptance but it is not 100%. You would all be upset if we were taking donor funds, just leaving them on a desk and not putting them in a safe, so there are protection measures and hard measures. We have to be really careful as to how we balance this.

I know that, in the current response in DRC, there is some debate within the UN, which is looking at using armed protection and armed convoys for the delivery of services. The problem with that is that you may solve the immediate issue but you are creating a barrier between the providers of the aid and the community. The impact that may have on the NGOs outside that protection is that it undermines the acceptance and understanding they have been working to gain. In some contexts, there is no choice. For a long time in Somalia and along the Kenyan border, the norm among NGOs was to use armed convoys.

Fredrik Palsson: It is even an operational condition. The Government dictate that we use special police units, so that is something that everyone uses.

Lisa Reilly: There are times when the hard security is more than acceptance, but even with that we then have to find ways and means to maintain that relationship because, unless we are really focused on the communities and the beneficiaries—and acceptance is not only with the beneficiaries; it is with the broader community—we cannot implement programmes.

Just to give you an example, in the earthquake response in Pakistan, organisations tended to have very good acceptance, among the communities that were affected by the earthquake, of the travel and the



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work they were doing there, but all these trucks with food, non-food items and aid workers were travelling up and down these mountain roads, through all these communities, and destroying the infrastructure and the roads. That was where the security threat then came from: the communities on the roads on the way up to the earthquake area.

When we talk about acceptance, it is not just the assumption we had in the past that, just because we are doing good things, people will like us. It takes a lot of work to build and maintain acceptance with communities.

Fredrik Palsson: It is all about our profile. Acceptance, protection and deterrence is the triangle within which aid workers normally work, in how we implement our security programmes. The perception that we have has maybe changed. Going back to another question on whether it is more dangerous now than it was before, in the example Lisa gave, when they see the roads being destroyed, they try to look at who we really are and what is in these trucks going up and down these roads. We may have excellent co-operation with the people at the end of the road but we do not pay too much attention to the transportation between. The communities there just see things going back and forth and, if there is no intermingling for them to understand who we are and what we do, there will be misunderstandings, and that is how security situations erupt.

Q46 **Mr Lewis:** You have already acknowledged the increased security and risk management costs. The question really is this: what is the evidence that smaller aid organisations with less resource can be at a disadvantage compared to their larger counterparts when they have similar responsibilities but far less resource to carry those responsibilities out?

Lisa Reilly: This is a conversation we have been having about the balance between the big and the small organisations. While the big organisations tend to have more resources, we were talking about how the smaller organisations are often more flexible, have less bureaucracy and may be more innovative in the solutions they come up with. A couple of years ago, EISF produced *Security Risk Management: A Basic Guide for Smaller NGOs* specifically because, a lot of the time, there was this reaction that just said, "It is all right for you. You have a full-time security team but we do not have that luxury".

A lot of the time, we are already taking good security measures. If we have already decided that we do not fly in to Nairobi after 10 o'clock at night because the roads are too dangerous, that is a security measure, but has anybody documented it to make sure that the next person travelling is also aware of that issue? While it requires resources and it requires donors to recognise that resources are needed, it does not have to be a huge burden.

Fredrik Palsson: Within EISF, we now have 103 members. Some organisations are small; some are big. We all learn from each other. It is not just the small organisations that benefit from having the forum and the organisation as such; it is vice versa. Bigger organisations have big



structures for how to implement it, which means that we sometimes miss the smaller problems that we can learn a lot from. It is interesting when we talk about crisis management, which requires quite heavy resources to put forward. A smaller organisation would say, "You can put five or 10 people on this incident but we have only one or two. How do we do that?" There are a lot of different ways to discuss how you can work with peer organisations to ramp up your systems. We benefit from each other.

- Q47 **Chair:** The particular example that you gave, Lisa, of the roads in Nairobi sounds like quite a straightforward one. What is the mechanism whereby that information could be shared at least with the other 102 members or even more widely, not just in that situation but using it as an example?

Lisa Reilly: We tend to work in a way that our organisations identify the issues. We keep an overview of what is going on in the world. We get a lot of questions coming to us. We are writing a policy about road travel in Kenya and we would reach out to our members and ask, "Does anybody already have a policy? Can we take that?" Then we will anonymise the data, so it can be shared. If it becomes obvious that it is broader than just our membership, this is when we start producing the guides and a lot of the documents that are on the website. We always say we are not a research institute. Our papers are very much feet-on-the-ground, and that comes from the membership and everything that the members input into what we do, so it is very practical. This is where organisations such as INSO and the field-level co-ordination bodies then put the policies in practice. They share, on a day-to-day basis, issues that arise.

- Q48 **Richard Burden:** Could I bring you on to international humanitarian law and how far you think IHL provides sufficient protection to ensure that aid workers get access to conflict and fragile states or, indeed, if they are already there, are able to do their job?

Lisa Reilly: I was listening to what Vincent said at the last one: "I am not an expert" on IHL. He then went on and gave a very good answer. I am not an expert but, really reinforcing what he says, the law is there. The problem is that it is not being enforced, and actors are able to break IHL with impunity, it seems, because so few are held to account.

There are some figures here from May. These are incidents that did not cause specific injury to aid workers per se but have had an impact on access and do break IHL. We are seeing attacks by Government troops or opposition militias on camps for displaced people, resettlement sites and convoys where displaced people are moving to safer areas. We heard before about attacks against hospitals and the forced evacuation of 150,000 displaced people in Ethiopia to forcibly relocate them from their homes.

These are all, as far as I am aware, breaches of IHL because these are obviously non-combatants who are being targeted. They do not tend to make it to the news because there are no internationals involved in



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these. These are happening so regularly that they are not reported on any more. It is no longer news because it is just happening so often.

- Q49 Richard Burden:** Is there a change in the pattern of who the perpetrators are? We have evidence that, in the period between 2011 and 2016, about 60% of attacks on aid workers were thought to be committed by non-state actors, principally at the national or subnational level rather than the international level, and only 24% by state actors. However, if you then look at attacks on health workers, and at the most serious ones, where health workers were killed, the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition showed that 71% of cases it had had reported were committed by state actors.

If we look at the map that the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition has produced, the figures there are pretty horrific: 973 attacks on health workers just in one year in 2018. Of those 973, 257 were in one place, which was Syria, and the biggest single concentration was Israel and the Palestine Territories, which accounted for 308, or over 30% of all the attacks on health workers or health facilities. To me, that seems to suggest that the international community is not paying sufficient attention to transgressions of international humanitarian law. First of all, would you agree with that? If you do, what do you think should be done about it?

Lisa Reilly: I absolutely agree. I am not sure what we do about it. There was debate during the World Humanitarian Summit about the need for a special rapporteur within the UN specifically for attacks on medical facilities, which are specifically identified in IHL. Whether or not there is a need for something within the UN in particular, generally the reaction among aid workers is that we do not need more law; we just need the law that is there to be implemented.

Chair: Fredrik, did you want to add to that?

Fredrik Palsson: No, it is beyond me.

- Q50 Richard Burden:** The issue is how those mechanisms can be crafted. Presumably, theoretically, it should be somewhat easier if you are dealing with state actors. Half the time, they will already hold membership of the organisations that are meant to be holding them to account, such as the United Nations and others. I just wonder if the UK Government, as a major humanitarian donor, could do more to strengthen protection of aid workers, whether in dialogue with the UN Security Council or with other donors and Governments, and to ensure that there is accountability in reality, not just in theory.

Lisa Reilly: Absolutely, and I think the aid sector as a whole would really appreciate it if that was done. This is beyond our level of making any change; it is a Government-level change that needs to happen and it would certainly be appreciated.

- Q51 Chair:** That is a perfect note on which to end this panel as the bell goes



for a vote. Thank you so much. Your wonderfully clear but concise answers enabled us to finish 10 minutes earlier than planned, coinciding with the vote, so thank you both for your evidence today. Please feel free to stay for the second evidence session, which will start after this vote at about 3 o'clock.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Dr Andrew Murrison and Matthew Wyatt.

Q52 Chair: Welcome back. Somehow we are on time, despite losing 15 minutes, so that is impressive. I welcome the Minister in particular, because it is your first appearance before us since your appointment, and congratulate you on behalf of the Committee on your appointment. I know that, since your appointment, you have already visited Israel, Palestine and Iran among, perhaps, other places, but our focus today is on violence against aid workers.

Let me kick off with a general opening question. We know from the statistics and from other evidence that we have received that hundreds of aid workers, medical personnel and others are killed or injured every year while delivering humanitarian assistance. What specific steps are the UK Government, and DfID in particular, taking to help aid agencies to prepare and respond to security threats?

Dr Murrison: First, Chairman, thank you ever so much for having me here today. It is a great pleasure. It is a particular pleasure for the boot to be on the other foot. Well done for keeping it to time; that is something I always failed to do.

You are right to say that we believe that not only are the numbers quite frightening, in terms of attacks on aid workers and, particularly very recently, attacks on medical aid workers, particularly with the news from last week, which is something that is especially dear to my heart, given my background, but the tempo appears to be increasing. I have to say that the informatics are not brilliant. The UK Government have funded a project to look at medical aid workers in particular, in pursuit of UN Security Council Resolution 2286, so you will be aware of that project. It is £2.5 million over five years, led by the University of Manchester, with the assistance of the World Health Organization and others, to better delineate this issue.

In terms of what we do, you will be aware, because I know you have taken evidence from them, of the things that INSO and EISF do. I think you have just seen them, if I am correct.

Chair: We just had them before you. They were the first panel.

Dr Murrison: Excellent. You will be aware, then, of their relationship to DfID and what we expect of them.



Chair: Yes.

Dr Morrison: You will also be aware of things like RedR, which we have used in the past. You will be aware of our policy in respect of our own staff and the duty of care that we have to them. You are probably also aware that we recently introduced something called TRiM, which is more associated with the military, as it happens, but that is a way of assisting people when they are preparing for situations where they are likely to be exposed to extremely distressing things. That is being worked up by the military and has more general applications, and we are very keen that we should benefit from that.

That gives you an indication of the sorts of things we are doing. I know you will be interested in specific projects but I would also have to point out that this particular work strand runs like a vein through what we do. I think Stephen O'Brien was asked whether he was able, when he was a minister in DfID, to disaggregate the cost of doing protection of aid workers from the general budget, to give an indicative figure, and I think he said he had tried but was unable to do so.

Chair: He did, yes.

Dr Morrison: That is a good thing because part of the money that goes to supporting projects is to do with the general management of them. It is a bit like aviation safety, where aviation companies would say, "Safety is just what we do day to day and, therefore, it is difficult to strip it out as a work strand". I would very much hope that this would run through the stuff that we and our agencies do—those that we pay to do work—in a similar kind of fashion, with a total-safety approach.

Chair: Thank you. That is a really good answer. I do not know, Matthew, if you wish to add anything to the Minister's response.

Matthew Wyatt: On the programme side, the Minister has covered everything. That is complemented by what we do in terms of advocacy internationally: our role in the Security Council and in the humanitarian taskforce for Syria; the work we are doing in pressing for accountability, which, as the Minister has said, is complemented by the programme that we are funding and the research to get the data to hold people to account; and the way we are trying to lead by example, such as the voluntary report that we did on the implementation of international humanitarian law in the UK, to set a good example. So the programme work is complemented by an advocacy effort.

Q53 **Chair:** Thank you. This is one of those areas where measuring impact is difficult. Do you have any indications or evidence of where some of the programmes that you have set out today are having any kind of measurable impact on the safety of aid workers that might be measured in, for example, reductions in the number of incidents in a particular country where a programme is operating, or the other effect, which we heard about from previous witnesses, of NGOs deciding not to operate in a particular place because it is too dangerous? Do you have any sense



that that might be impacted by the sorts of programmes you have described?

Dr Murrison: You are right to say that some NGOs will say, “We cannot do this because we have a duty of care”. We do due diligence. There is a difference, you will understand, between the two. I do not have data—and Matthew might want to come back in a minute about that—that I can rely upon to make such an assertion. What I can do is to offer intermediate outcomes: for example, the sorts of check-offs we do to make sure we have discharged our due diligence before we engage agencies to do the work that we want done. That means looking at their risk analysis; at the processes that those organisations are going to put in place to minimise risk, while just being generally comfortable that they are deploying people in a way that reduces, so far as reasonably achievable, the risks they are likely to face; and at what measures there are, if they do run into trouble, to remediate the situation.

Matthew Wyatt: It is very difficult because there are so many factors that determine these horrific outcomes. It is very difficult to know whether particular measures are able to affect them but, as the Minister said, there are some intermediate outcomes that we could look at. One example would be, I guess, the work that INSO does in terms of making sure that NGOs have the information they need to know what the security situation is in a particular place at a particular time, and have good advice on whether they should go there. Their decisions will be for them, and it is hard to know what the outcome would have been had they decided not to, but the fact that they have that information is bound to help get better outcomes.

The other thing is that we are seeing a bit of a professionalisation of the sector. We are seeing that the NGOs and others that we work with are better able to deal with these things. They are able to be more intelligent consumers of that information, which is perhaps evidenced by the fact that there are cases where they do decide, “No, it is too dangerous. We cannot go there”. It is anecdotal but there is some suggestion that there is an impact.

Dr Murrison: The difficulty we have is that this is not like doing a controlled trial. You are dealing with still, mercifully, relatively small numbers, so demonstrating that your intervention has shifted that is challenging. Also, the environment is changing all the time, so the nature of the situation in which aid workers are deploying is changing all the while, which, of course, is part of the reason that we have seen this increase in the numbers. Trying to conduct an assessment as to the impact in terms of, say, lives saved or trauma avoided is very difficult. It would be difficult to rely on such things.

Q54 **Chair:** When you invite bids for work particularly in some of the most fragile and conflict-affected areas, is there a separate line for the costs associated with protecting aid workers or is it treated more as an overhead?



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Dr Murrison: I am going to let Matthew come into this but my understanding is that it is part of the management block of funding activity.

Matthew Wyatt: That is right. There is not necessarily a separate line. It may depend on the way they choose to construct and put their budgets to us, but we would normally expect that to be part of the running costs, for the reasons the Minister mentioned in the previous conversation. They would not necessarily be shown separately. It is perhaps worth adding that—this is, as far as I know, the evidence that the Committee has had so far—we certainly do not get NGOs coming to us saying, “You are screwing us so far down on costs that we cannot do the security we need to do”, and certainly, were anyone to suggest that they were worried about that, we would be very sympathetic to ensuring that that was not the case and that they could properly finance the security that they needed from our programmes.

Q55 **Chair:** As you will know, an issue that often comes up in evidence sessions is the comparative advantage for larger aid organisations against smaller ones. Is there any evidence that the smaller ones, perhaps with fewer resources, are at a disadvantage when trying to safeguard their staff in insecure environments compared to the larger ones that have the economies of scale and the resources?

Dr Murrison: Yes, I saw this. I think you examined this back in April, in your first session.

Chair: Yes.

Dr Murrison: I would say, as someone who has been involved professionally in health and safety at work in my previous life, that smaller organisations may indeed find it relatively more costly to discharge their obligations but that is no excuse for them not doing so. I would certainly expect them to subscribe to the bare minimum that they should be doing in order to discharge their duty of care. That is an obligation that they have and their underwriters would, I think, be extremely unhappy in the event that they failed to undertake that duty of care that they have, whether they are large or small.

By their nature, the contracts that are let by DfID tend to be with large organisations, which may very well have a sub-contractual obligation to smaller organisations, but that, again, does not relieve them of any obligation they have in terms of due diligence. We would want them to demonstrate that they are applying that due diligence down the chain, if they choose to subcontract.

I understand the question and I understand the temptation that there may be to assume that smaller organisations are doing this less well. I have seen no evidence that that is the case. Have you?

Matthew Wyatt: No, I have not. First of all, in difficult conflict environments, we are very careful about who our partners are, and we



generally partner only with partners that have a good, solid track record of working successfully in such complex environments. Of course, some of their downstream partners may be smaller and less experienced. We would certainly expect our prime partner to reflect all the costs that the downstream partners need in their bids to us. Then we would complement that by the programmes that the Minister has already talked about in terms of the capacity building to help those smaller NGOs be able to discharge their obligations to their staff.

Q56 Mark Menzies: What duty-of-care provision does DfID consider when assessing bids for project funding in high-risk environments?

Dr Morrison: We have to undertake due diligence, which means that, if we are subcontracting work, we have to be assured that those we are subcontracting to, which will tend to be fairly large organisations, have done the appropriate risk assessment, to decide whether they can place their staff in that particular environment and, if they can, what needs to be done to protect those staff members so they have their risk contained in a way that makes it permissible and reduces the risk of harm being done to them. That means being experienced in the aid sector and trying to understand the circumstances where people are going to be deployed and the way in which people can be properly protected.

There is a whole range of things. Some of the basics that occur to me are whether you are making sure that your staff are properly vaccinated, for example, whether they have had proper health checks before they go and when they last had a dental check. If you are deploying somewhere where there is no dentistry and you have a cavity and an infection, your member of staff is going to be placed at a significant degree of discomfort and probably rendered inoperative. Those are the kinds of things that I would expect a responsible organisation to be doing and, as part of our due diligence, we would be seeking evidence that those things have been done. The employing organisation has a legal duty of care and, indeed, DfID has a legal duty of care to its own employees, so we would be undertaking things like pre-deployment training—SAFE, for example—for those members of staff for whom we have direct employment responsibilities on behalf of the state.

Q57 Mark Menzies: You have answered my first supplementary already and you are almost in danger of answering my second but, thinking, for example, of subcontractors, would DfID ensure that those conversations are had with partner agencies and, therefore, that they also include subcontractors, and particularly those that are locally employed? Would that be part of that conversation as well?

Dr Morrison: You raise a good point about locally employed people because you will know that they are the people who are chiefly at risk, for a variety of reasons, not least because they tend to be way upfront in the way that managerial or supervisory staff are less likely to be. They are at greater risk. As part of our due diligence, I would expect us to be asking those sorts of questions: what are you doing about the protection of



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locally engaged staff? I would expect the organisation itself to be exercising its legal duty of care in respect of those people.

Q58 Mr Lewis: What systems-level action is DfID taking to strengthen the protection of humanitarian workers and support staff, whether in dialogue with the UN at the Security Council or with other donors and Governments?

Dr Morrison: I like to think of this in a three-pillared way. We discharge all of this through advocating, providing direct funding and doing all we can to protect our own staff, so this would fall into that first pillar; that is to say, advocating for greater adherence to the rule of international humanitarian law. Clearly, that brings in the United Nations and things like UN Security Council Resolution 2286, which we co-sponsored and are carrying forward in a number of ways. That would be at the general environmental level, so a rather grand and strategic level, where the UK has a good story to tell in terms of pursuing this as an issue, not least because, at the time that UN Security Council Resolution 2286 went through, our own departmental Perm Sec, Matthew Rycroft, was our UN Permanent Rep to the United Nations. We have been front and centre of all this, designing the structures and the understanding of the importance of this as an issue. Does that answer the question at all?

Q59 Mr Lewis: Yes, that is fine. You mentioned UN Resolution 2286. What more do you think the international community could be doing to hold to account those who are in breach of international law in that context? There is a sense that the resolution is very important but it does not appear to have a great deal of teeth, so what more do you think the international community could be doing in that respect?

Dr Morrison: I am afraid that that is often the case with Security Council resolutions. They are great rhetorically but then we find perhaps they do not have teeth. Although it is frustrating—the number of aid workers whose misadventure has not then been followed by the apprehension of the villains responsible for doing this—there have been a few good news stories. Recently, South Sudan dealt with 12 members of its military who were responsible for the murder and rape of aid workers. That is a step in the right direction.

However, the truth is that, in conflict situations particularly, the general chaos that ensues is not conducive to the collection of evidence. An example of where we are trying to rectify this is in Iraq, where we have paid towards a UN project that will result in the gathering of evidence against Daesh, which has committed the most heinous atrocities against minority groups and, indeed, the wider population. Slowly but surely, we are gathering evidence against those who have done these things, and it is absolutely vital, as I said in the House last week, that these villains are brought to book for their crimes. Gathering that information is difficult, painstaking and expensive, but it must be done, so that the message gets across that there is nowhere to hide.



Q60 Chair: That is a very powerful message that all of us would absolutely endorse. The particular examples you have given from South Sudan and Iraq are encouraging and welcome. Richard Burden, who was due to be here with us, has had to go into the Chamber. We lost a couple of Members because of the Adjournment debate being reached a little earlier, but I will put to you what he put to the earlier panel of witnesses.

We have evidence, looking particularly at attacks on healthcare across the world, that is quite striking in terms of the concentration in a relatively small number of countries. The largest number, according to the statistics, is in Israel/Palestine, which I know you have visited recently. The second largest is in Syria, the third in Afghanistan and the fourth in Yemen. In a sense, none of these are surprising examples, but perhaps I could invite you to comment on what sort of action could be taken, working with others, to address these issues in those particular conflict situations, particularly drawing on the very positive examples you have already given from Iraq and South Sudan.

Dr Murrison: There is perhaps a less striking but also positive development in relation to at least one of those you have cited, which is Israel/Palestine. I followed you a couple of weeks back around Israel and the OPTs, so you are familiar with this. The human rights commission, which you may wish to question me on further in relation to the UK's posture, investigated the Great March of Return incidents, and I—as you probably did too—met some of the casualties from that.

Of course, we have pressurised the Israeli Government to investigate these things fully and independently, and, indeed, it has, as I understand it, charged 12 of those who were involved and implicated in the events of last year, which is positive in respect of the commission's findings.¹ The commission's report did, it would appear, have some impact in terms of Israel, which is a positive thing and, I suppose, is a similar piece to the South Sudan one. It is important that state and non-state actors are brought to book when things like this happen. Of the two—state and non-state actors—of course, we hold states to a higher standard, and we would say that to our friends in all candour.

I would add another one, which is the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is ongoing. It is, I am afraid, unfortunate that aid workers in general and healthcare workers in particular have been the butt of violence in respect of the vital work they are doing, particularly in relation to vaccination. It is too early to say for sure but I suspect part of the issue is a failure to appreciate some of the cultural sensitivities, which

¹ **Clarification from witness:** The UK welcomes that the Israeli Military Advocate General has recently ordered *five* criminal investigations which relate to *eleven* separate instances of Palestinian fatalities during the Gaza border protests. These investigations are ongoing. Given the importance of accountability, it is vital these investigations are independent and transparent; that their findings are made public; and, if wrongdoing is found, that those responsible be held to account.



very often leads to misunderstanding. There is a piece of work to be done to better explore that and perhaps get it right in the future, but there is also a piece of work about education of the host population, so that they better understand what is being done for them, to try to dispel some of the suspicion that can lead to the hostility of the sort that we have seen. People back home find it very difficult to understand why the efforts that are being made vicariously on their behalf are being attended by such a robust pushback by the population at risk.

- Q61 **Chair:** I very much agree with what you said about the importance of Resolution 2286 and all the limitations of UN resolutions to which you rightly referred. Considering the leadership role that the UK plays in fulfilling 0.7% and, within that, the commitment to spend at least 50% of our aid budget in fragile states, is there scope for us to do more to put pressure on other donors, the UN and other multilateral agencies to place a greater emphasis on protection of aid workers and health workers?

Dr Murrison: Because we are such big donors and because we have put such emphasis on fragile states, which is where a lot of the casualties are going to arise, if that continues and others follow us, it follows that, probably, if we do not do anything, more and more people are going to be put at risk and potentially have more rather than fewer casualties. What you say has merit and, although it is the case that the UK—and DfID in particular—has played a leadership role, some examples of which I have cited, there is always more that we can do. Your investigation, if I may say so, is very timely and will be part of that, because I have no doubt that you will produce a report, which Government will then report upon, and we will have an opportunity to air it in the House, so it will have wider dissemination.

- Q62 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. Last Thursday, we had the Appeal Court judgment on the case relating to arms sales to the Saudi-led coalition. I do not expect you to comment in detail on that but there is a broader concern that many have about arms sales to countries that potentially do not fully respect international humanitarian law. How do you see that fitting with the very proper commitment that you have reaffirmed today to Resolution 2286?

Dr Murrison: You will know that this is all underpinned by the Act passed in 2002—that is important politically—and the consolidated criteria: in particular, 2(a), 2(b), 2(c) and 4. We are quite clear. I have been in the Department only for a matter of weeks but I have been impressed by how seriously these are taken by DIT and the Foreign Office. They are rigorously applied and, I think, rather more so than by many of our European partner nations. I am comfortable with the robustness of what we do.

Clearly, Saudi Arabia has a legitimate right to defend itself, and it did so in 2015 and the years following that in the way that it did. I note the court judgment and, of course, we have asked to appeal. It is true to say we were surprised by the court judgment, given that the Divisional Court



had found rather differently, and were somewhat disappointed. It was on one of the three issues that were up before it; on the other, the appellate court agreed with the Government.

I do not think I need to read out to you the form of words that the Foreign Secretary read out earlier on in relation to the supportive comments of the court and the way that Government had behaved in relation to licensing arms. They were really quite forward-leaning. It would be wrong to characterise the court judgment as condemning Government for the decisions they had taken. It absolutely did not suggest that those decisions were wrong. It did determine that future judgments should be made in relation to past experience. If something had been used, and was documented and proven to be used, in a way that was potentially contrary to numbers 2 and 4 in particular of the consolidated criteria, we should note that in terms of the decision-making process for future arms licensing for export.

Q63 Chair: When this Committee looked at Yemen in the round in the previous Parliament three years ago, we commented on the current operation of the criteria that DfID has a seat at the table if arms sales are to a country in receipt of DfID assistance but does not have a seat at the table in an instance like Yemen, where the arms are sold not to the country in receipt of assistance but to neighbouring countries. Would you consider a case for DfID having a bigger role, simply in commenting on the potential humanitarian implications of arms sales, in this example, to Saudi and others for use in Yemen, but it could equally apply in certain other conflict situations?

Dr Murrison: I am not sure that I would. I would expect those who do have a seat around that table to take advice from other Government Departments where appropriate. I sit in two Government Departments—the Foreign Office and DfID—and they work very closely together, so I would just reinforce the need to take advice that is appropriate across Government.

Chair: Thank you very much. That completes our questions, if I can thank you, Minister, very much indeed for coming to give evidence to us today. I apologise that I was not at Foreign Office questions but, if you are able to say anything to us—and it may simply be repeating what you said at Foreign Office questions—about your visit to Iran, that may be of interest to the Committee, if you are able to share that with us today.

Dr Murrison: Just to clarify, what can I share with you?

Chair: Any reflections you have on the current situation in Iran. In particular, is there anything you can say about Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe?

Dr Murrison: Yes, I am very happy to write to you.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.