

# International Development Committee

## Oral evidence: Follow-up on Yemen, Syria, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, HC 2682

Tuesday 8 October 2019

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Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; Chris Law; Mark Menzies; Lloyd Russell-Moyle; Paul Scully; Mr Virendra Sharma; Henry Smith.

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### Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Dr Andrew Murrison MP, Minister of State for International Development and Minister of State for the Middle East at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ivan Parks, Deputy Director, DFID Yemen, Ian Ball, Deputy Head, DFID OPTs, and Amy Randall, Head of Strategy & Co-ordination, DFID Syria.

## Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Dr Andrew Murrison MP, Ivan Parks, Ian Ball and Amy Randall.

**Chair:** Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome. This is an oral evidence session for the International Development Committee, with the Minister of State who covers, among other things, the Middle East. Our focus today is on the situation in Yemen, Syria, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Minister, we have you for an hour, so we are going straight to the lines of questioning.

Q1 **Paul Scully:** Thank you very much and welcome, Minister; it is good to see you again. There has been new funding in Yemen released by donors, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, for which we have been waiting for a while. That has improved the funding situation, but there are still significant gaps, and long delays in disbursement remain a concern for everybody. What will the UK Government do to ensure more predictable, sustainable funding for the Yemeni response in the next year?

**Dr Murrison:** Chairman, thank you very much indeed for having me before you; it is always a pleasure. The picture for Yemen is not great. It is probably true to say that it is our No. 1 humanitarian concern at the moment, despite the fact that it continues to get relatively little coverage in the media, which is a disappointment. The UK is in pole position in terms of our effort in Yemen, as a state actor. We have disbursed £770 million—or we will have done so within this financial year—since the conflict began in 2015. We are the pen holder. We feel that we are applying quite a lot of leadership.

You are right to mention that cash flow has been an issue. We have been at the forefront of not only disbursing cash, but encouraging others to do so. That was certainly at the heart of my recent tour to the Gulf states. I am very pleased that the UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for example, not only have pledged money, as they had done, but have now committed and spent it, and actually handed it over. That means the situation in Yemen is less of a cliff edge than it once was, which is reassuring, given the level of humanitarian need, as evidenced by the level of cholera and watery diarrhoea, for example, which is staggering.

Going forward, it means ensuring that the sorts of cash flow problems we were getting in the middle of this year do not arise again. Given our leadership role in this matter, we can encourage states not only to commit generously, but to write cheques in a timely manner, as we have been doing, and not just in Yemen, incidentally, but elsewhere.

Q2 **Paul Scully:** It seems that some UN agencies have bigger funding gaps than others. The UN Population Fund is particularly badly affected, which limits its ability to provide support for mental health, sexual and gender-based violence, dignity kits and safe houses. Is the UK targeting its financial support appropriately to cover those gaps?



**Dr Murrison:** We cannot just be a stop-gap donor. We are a very big donor. We provide a great deal of money as core funding for organisations, but we also spend beyond that on projects and programmes. We have to make a call on those projects and programmes, particularly across the UN piece, as to where we put our resource. These are invidious choices to make sometimes, because so many of the programmes, particularly those run by a large organisation such as the UN, are great and they all have their merits. But we have to decide where to focus our spend to get the best buys—in other words, to achieve the most we can for the amount of money we spend, up to 0.7% of GDP. That is what we do. It would be dangerous if all we did was go around stopping up gaps left by others, although—and I suspect we will come on to the OPTs shortly—we have, for example, acted in response to the shortfall that UNRRA had, following the decision by the US and others on that part of the UN effort.

Q3 **Paul Scully:** Clearly you cannot be a stop-gap funder, as you say, but presumably, being a big donor, you leverage some of that influence to encourage others to fill those gaps.

**Dr Murrison:** I believe we can. That is what I was doing in the Gulf recently. I am not going to take credit for what then happened, but it is gratifying to see that other partners then started to disburse their pledges.

Q4 **Paul Scully:** What are we doing to support health, sanitation and education workers to receive a regular salary, regardless of where in Yemen they live? What steps are the Government taking to restore viable UN health programmes on vaccination, cholera prevention and malnutrition?

**Dr Murrison:** It would be wrong to talk about the humanitarian situation in Yemen without talking a bit about the obstacles we face. It is true that the insurgency in the south and the activities of Houthi rebels in the north have made it extremely difficult to disburse cash. I would not want to disguise from this Committee that that means our international development effort for Yemen starts to flash up red, in terms of risk. When you operate in environments such as this, you have to take risks. The risk is around aid diversion and the kinds of activities that the funding British public would not be happy to see their money diverted to. The upside is the sheer scale of benefit that we can achieve with that money. We have to get that balance right.

On vaccination programmes, you will know that there has been significant disruption recently in Yemen, because of the situation both in the south and in the north. I am pleased that that appears to be better than it was. Vaccination for cholera, for example—it is a preoccupation at the moment, given that it is an indicator for wider humanitarian issues—has improved, but we support the agencies in ensuring the safety of their staff. Where it is not safe to operate, we will support them in ensuring that their people's welfare is a paramount consideration. We understand



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and regret the need, sometimes, to pull operations from parts of the world, specifically in Yemen, where the environment is hostile. It will never be benign, but there comes a point when it simply becomes unsafe to operate. We have discussed previously in this Committee the violence that is perpetrated against aid workers.

**Q5 Chair:** The progress on humanitarian funding is very welcome, and we congratulate the Government on the role the UK has played in securing that funding from Gulf states. Can I ask a bit now about the politics and the potential for resolution through a political process? Something I hear quite often is that the previous Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, had a strong personal priority for work on Yemen, and that perhaps that momentum has been lost since the change in July. Are you able to reassure us that this remains high on the Foreign Office's agenda, as well as DFID's?

**Dr Morrison:** I think I can reassure you on that. It is true that Jeremy Hunt was very interested in Yemen. Indeed, he visited Yemen, albeit briefly and under very constrained circumstances. It is my firm intention to visit Sanaa and Hodeida as soon as I can, and at the earliest opportunity when I am not at risk to myself or others in making such a trip. Such a thing is important from a totemic perspective. Hopefully, once I have been there, I will be able to assure you—even if I cannot at the moment—that Yemen remains very high on my list of priorities. It is a humanitarian catastrophe. It is the No. 1 worldwide humanitarian disaster, and I would like to reassure you that it is certainly top of my list, as evidenced by the fact that, although I was touring the Gulf during the summer, the principal focus of my visit was Yemen. I was not actually able to get into Yemen, but I met the Government of Yemen in Riyadh. In the UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia, my primary focus was Yemen.

**Q6 Chair:** I understand that the Prime Minister met the President of Iran during the UN General Assembly. Do you know whether Yemen was discussed in that conversation?

**Dr Morrison:** I am tempted to say that I am sure it was, but I do not want to mislead the Committee.

**Chair:** Perhaps you can write to us.

**Dr Morrison:** I can certainly do that. If it was, and if I can, I will share with you the sorts of things that were discussed.

**Chair:** More broadly, there were a number of events relating to Yemen.

**Dr Morrison:** I can assure you that Iran was discussed with a number of interlocutors. It is difficult right now to discuss Iran without also discussing Yemen, sadly.

**Q7 Chair:** In the past, the Government have been quite sceptical about the idea of a new UN Security Council resolution on Yemen. Is the time coming when there is a case for a new UN Security Council resolution to



help give impetus to the excellent work that Martin Griffiths is trying to undertake?

**Dr Morrison:** It is always worthwhile keeping it under review. We would like to see the Stockholm agreement fully rolled out. There has been some progress in relation to the Hodeda agreement recently, and we fully support Martin Griffiths and the work that he is doing, but we are not there yet. The recent prisoner exchange was positive, for example. We sometimes forget that the Stockholm process is not just about Hodeda; it has a number of other things. High on the list is prisoner exchanges, so that is now underway. Sometimes we need to underscore achievement, as well as being critical where it has fallen short.

Q8 **Richard Burden:** The Government have been unequivocal in condemning attacks by the Houthis, and rightly so—both those that have taken place throughout the period of the conflict and the recent attacks we have seen, particularly on Saudi Arabia. They sometimes give the impression that, while the word “condemn” is used in relation to the Houthis, language becomes a lot more guarded when it comes to coalition attacks, including where, on the face of it, they appear to have breached international humanitarian law. Attacks on civilian areas are a classic example of that. Is it reasonable to expect plainer language from the Government when it comes to the consequences of coalition strikes, including use of the word “condemn”?

**Dr Morrison:** I do not think anybody could accuse the Government of not being critical of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. If you were to speak to the Saudi ambassador right now, he would say that he has the scars of this on his back, particularly in relation to other matters pertaining to Saudi—I am thinking of Khashoggi. We have been highly critical. We have a relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which we clearly try to exploit to extract what we want. They do the same to us; that is the nature of international affairs.

In terms of our condemnation of things when they go wrong, I think we go further, actually. We are actively involved in trying to establish a mechanism by which they at least start to investigate some of this. You will be familiar with the so-called JIAT. Some have been rather cynical about this, but it at least provides a vehicle by which the Saudis start to investigate things when they go wrong and produce reports. The number of those reports has increased, and the seriousness with which the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia takes this has improved, because they are mindful of their reputation.

They genuinely want to do the right thing. I believe they do. It is not in their interests to bomb or attack civilian targets. That is not their intent at all. Where they do, because this is a highly kinetic environment, it is right that, like any other state actor, they investigate things frankly and fully, and provide something approaching a credible report. Our assessment of this is that that process has certainly been established and, in our view, has improved over recent months.



Q9 **Richard Burden:** Has it led to any accountability?

**Dr Murrison:** It leads to accountability in the sense that the thing highlights wrongdoing, where there is wrongdoing. You are inviting me to delve into the Saudi system, which is byzantine and highly complex. I am ill placed to do that. At the moment, particularly with the Khashoggi thing, we are exploring this in broad daylight, since questions have to be asked about who, ultimately, will be called to account for the events surrounding it. The Saudi system is opaque. One of our criticisms is that it is sometimes not entirely transparent in a way that would be helpful to it and its reputation. We discuss these things.

Q10 **Richard Burden:** I take that point, but a number of people would say that the Houthi system of internal monitoring and justice is equally opaque, arguably more even, than the Saudi's. Nevertheless, there appears to be a view in the international community that the Houthis collectively should be held to account in the court of international opinion in a way that does not seem to apply to the coalition. Words such as "restraint" are used a lot more, whereas words such as "condemnation" are thrown about much more easily when it comes to the Houthis.

**Dr Murrison:** First, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is clearly a nation state and we expect a high standard from a state actor, particularly one with which we engage. Then there has to be a judgment call, bluntly. You can agree or disagree, but we have to have a relationship with KSA. We could simply condemn them outright. We could pull back and have nothing to do with the kingdom. It is not clear to me what that would do or how either regional or British interests would be served. The fact is that we have a relationship with Riyadh, which I personally work on, as I know my ministerial colleagues have over a long period and will continue to. In such a way, we seek to exert our influence, generally speaking, for the better. If I did not believe that, I would not be doing what I am. But it is a judgment call as to when to condemn things when they go wrong, in plain and explicit terms, and when to be a little more measured in your language. Welcome to my world: that is what we do.

Q11 **Richard Burden:** One of the areas where there appears to have been some consequence for Saudi Arabia, at least theoretically and partly as a result of legal action, relates to arms sales and the restrictions that have been put on them. That said, *The Guardian* recently reported that motor parts from the Goodrich factory in Wolverhampton, just up the road from my constituency, were found in not only Saudi bombs but cluster bombs, which are illegal. We know that the Government have apologised for arms sales continuing in some cases, despite the recent court ruling, but for something like this then to happen—motor parts existing not only for use in Yemen, but in illegal weapons for use in Yemen—seems to take it to a new level. What discussions have you been having across Government, including with the Secretary of State for International Trade, around arms sales to Saudi Arabia to make sure that this kind of thing does not happen? Where it does happen, what are the consequences?





**Dr Murrison:** First, Saudi Arabia, like every other country, has a legitimate right to self-defence. Saudi Arabia is a partner of this country on a number of issues. It would be perverse if we denied Saudi Arabia that ability; that would not be right. However, we have been over this business of supplying arms to Saudi Arabia a lot in recent weeks and months, particularly in the context of Yemen. As I was describing on the Floor of the House a few minutes ago, it has provoked a great deal of activity within Government Departments—there are several involved in this—on our processes. You would expect me, once again, to reiterate that we apply as closely as we possibly can to the EU consolidated criteria—all of them. That remains the position. After we leave the European Union, I suspect that we will want to continue to co-operate with our European partners on matters of this sort.

Inherent to that is an assessment of end users. Sometimes it can be difficult to be precise on who the end user is since, of course, the end user might end up diverting something somewhere else. We have to do what we can to ensure that the declared end user is, in fact, the actual end user. None of this is 100%. Obviously it is not. We are dealing with human beings and an inherently kinetic and difficult situation.

Saudi is likely to get what it wants from somewhere or another. My fear is that if we simply say, “We are not going to sell anything to you at all”, and therefore be completely confident that nothing from these islands ends up being used in a way that we would not want in Saudi Arabia, the kingdom will probably default to another supplier, which would have poorer standards than those that this country applies. I feel that very strongly. I see the agonies that officials go through when determining matters of this sort. It is something that genuinely takes a huge amount of time and a great deal of ministerial and officials’ effort. The process is as robust as it realistically can be, notwithstanding the mistakes that have been admitted by the Secretary of State for International Trade.

Q12 **Richard Burden:** We are talking now not simply about end users and where munitions are being used, but the nature of the munitions themselves—in other words, the use of cluster munitions. How was any UK firm able to produce, export and presumably get a licence for components for cluster munitions?

**Dr Murrison:** I do not know the specific case, so I cannot be drawn on it, but I am more than happy to look into it.

**Richard Burden:** Could you write to us?

**Dr Murrison:** I am more than happy to do that. I do not want to say something to you that proves inaccurate, so that is possibly the best way to deal with that. What I would say off the top of my head—which I know is always a dangerous thing to do when talking to a Select Committee—is that, when dealing with componentry, from what I have seen of munitions in my previous life, components can be all sorts of things. They can be taken from all sorts of products. I do not know and I am not going



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to speculate on whether that is the case in the situation that you have just raised, but I wonder whether it is the case here. For clarity, I will write to the Committee about the specifics you have cited that appeared in *The Guardian*.

- Q13 **Richard Burden:** When you do, could you perhaps write to us on another thing as well? You mentioned the investigations that take place into civilian deaths caused by bombing by coalition forces. We are still finding it quite difficult to get hold of exactly how many investigations there have been and what their results were. Could you write to us letting us know how many investigations have taken place and what their results were?

**Dr Murrison:** Do you mean the JIAT investigations?

**Richard Burden:** Yes.

**Dr Murrison:** We can certainly give you what we have, yes.

- Q14 **Chris Law:** I was wondering whether you could assist by telling me if there have been any internal investigations within HMRC involving monitoring arms sales. If so, how many breaches of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 have there been?

**Dr Murrison:** I do not know. I am looking at colleagues.

**Chair:** Will this be in the letter to us?

**Dr Murrison:** It is going to be a very long letter.

- Q15 **Chris Law:** I have been reliably informed that there have been 68 breaches—68 offences. They involve fines exceeding £20,000 and imprisonment for a term not exceeding X number of years. I wonder whether you can look into that for me, please.

**Dr Murrison:** Yes, of course. I am not entirely clear in my mind what you are driving at.

- Q16 **Chris Law:** HMRC has been monitoring arms sales and has found 68 offences in relation to the exportation of prohibited or restricted goods under the Customs and Excise Management Act. I want to know whether you are aware of that.

**Dr Murrison:** I am not aware of that. I am more than happy to look into it and write to you. Are you suggesting that is an infringement of the EU consolidated criteria and our licensing process?

**Chris Law:** Yes.

**Dr Murrison:** I am not aware of it, but I can look into it and write to you.

- Q17 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** I want to ask a quick follow-up question on this and then move on to Syria. This is not about licensing, which is well trodden, but there have been communications with the Saudi regime about its use of illegal cluster bombs? Has there been any condemnation,





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privately or publicly, about the use of those kinds of munitions? They are a friend and ally of ours. Have we expressed our distaste that they are using weapons that are banned internationally?

**Dr Murrison:** Yes, of course. We do that all the time with our interlocutors.

Q18 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** You can do this in writing, as well. Can you tell me when it was expressed to the Saudi regime that you were unhappy that it had used them?

**Dr Murrison:** Yes, I would be more than happy to do that. I suspect it will probably be quite a long list. That is my guess.

Q19 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** I am talking about cluster bombs specifically.

Moving on to Syria, thank you for your time in the Chamber earlier. Starting from a broader perspective, what do you see as the current humanitarian challenges in Syria? As one of the biggest funders in response to Syria, what is the UK doing to ensure humanitarian support for Syrians in need of assistance, wherever they live in Syria?

**Dr Murrison:** I will not repeat what I said downstairs, because that would be a bit tedious, but we are up there when it comes to state actors giving support to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. I know that I came up for some flak for the 20,000 resettled people up to 2020. We can debate that, and compare and contrast it to other European countries. But if you take the package in the round, your constituents and mine can be proud of the contribution we make. I make no apologies for trumpeting that.

The difficulty in Syria, as you will understand, is that we have to operate through other agencies. Those agencies do not have equal access across the country, but we operate where they deem it safe to do so. The organisations we choose, for example the various UN agencies, are those with which we feel most comfortable and that pass our various hurdles, in relation to the proper use of public money and the effectiveness of that spend. Those are the sorts of criteria that we use, but you will understand that, in disbursing humanitarian aid, our first consideration is need. You will probably be aware of the increasing proportion of the DFID ODA budget devoted to aid that is broadly defined as humanitarian. A large amount of that has been going on Syria.

Q20 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** You mentioned al-Hawl camp in your earlier statement. We have heard specific concerns about that, and I was in al-Hawl camp three weeks ago with the hon. Member for Reigate. The vast majority of the population there are women and children. Is the UK involved in supporting and protecting those living in the camp? If so, what assistance is being provided? I am particularly interested in assistance for education, which is something that this Committee has shown an interest in before. There are 42,000 children in the camp, but only 5,000 of them receive education, so what are we doing to increase that?



**Dr Murrison:** I have just been given a list of things we do in the al-Hawl camp, to refresh my memory. The straight answer to your question is yes: we are active through agencies in al-Hawl, providing principally humanitarian assistance—basic medical needs and the sorts of things you would expect in a situation like al-Hawl. Access is a problem in al-Hawl. It remains limited. There are obviously concerns around aid givers' safety. It remains a challenge. I am struggling to find a reference to the precise amount that goes into education, given our wider intention that education should be a prime consideration in supporting people who are displaced. I am sure that I can write to you—again, on this very long list—with something about what we are doing on that specifically in al-Hawl, making sure that kids get something that resembles an education, given that they represent the future. Our concern is that a generation is growing up now in camps of this nature, who potentially are going not only to have pretty bad lives themselves, but to cause problems for their neighbours.

**Q21 Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** We were told when we were there that about 10,000 families are extremely radicalised. The danger is that they radicalise other children and young people in that camp and it becomes a training ground for very dangerous jihadis. That has caused problems for a number of aid agencies, which have shown an unwillingness to provide services in the camp, partly because of press relations. There is a difficulty in an aid organisation providing aid to people who are flying the Islamic State flag above their tents, which some do in al-Hawl camp. We saw that. Has the Minister considered what additional resources will be needed, above and beyond those we would normally give aid agencies, so that not only can their safety be protected, but we will protect their reputation from damage, even though they are working in extremely difficult circumstances?

**Dr Murrison:** The various agencies do their own safeguarding. That is one of the things we consider when we are debating where to put our aid effort. UN agencies, generally speaking, are large organisations and are very good at this. Very often the concern is with smaller outfits that are less well equipped to do some of the safeguarding stuff that we expect. As part of due diligence, it is important that we satisfy ourselves that they have in place what they need to guarantee or at least assure the safety of people working for them.

I am not quite sure that ensuring people's safety is simply a matter of resource. Some of these places are inherently unsafe and people could be put at risk. You did an investigation into this particular issue recently and made a number of important and germane recommendations. It follows from that that we need to take the safety of people working in this environment very seriously indeed. We support the processes of the agencies and various organisations to promote, as far as they can, the well-being of their employees. As we have tragically seen in recent times, it is by no means guaranteed. The number of aid workers, particularly



indigenous aid workers, who have lost their lives or been seriously affected by their occupation is extraordinary. It is right to reflect on that.

**Q22 Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** There will be questions later on aid workers. I want to focus on al-Hawl camp and then go to the wider announcement we had there. In al-Hawl camp, 30,000 are Iraqi. There is a discussion about sending them back to Iraq, but there is a problem with Iraq enforcing the death penalty and the northern Syrians not wanting to send people back to their death. That is an ongoing discussion. Some 31,000 are Syrian, who will have to be dealt with locally, and 12,000 are foreign.

We are told that 16 families—not 16 people, but 16 families, which might represent anywhere between 50 and 100 people—have links to Britain, so are either born in Britain, hold British citizenship or claim links to Britain. I am using that in the broadest sense, because I do not really want to have an argument about citizenship. One of the reasons President Trump gave in his tweets for leaving is that he had tried to put pressure on other European allies to take back their people, to no avail. Therefore, he was fed up with paying for them. That was the kind of phase he used.

There are 16 families there. What duty does Britain have to pay for them? Some of them are young children. What duty do we have in making sure that we repatriate or find a process? Some of them might be radicalised people. Some might be children who have been caught up and are completely vulnerable and innocent. How are we involved in ensuring that we go through these 16 families, work out who is who, repatriate who we need to, have them face justice where we need to, but, more importantly, pay for that process to be done, as the Americans are claiming they have, while accusing us of refusing to do so?

**Dr Murrison:** First, I am not going to take lessons from anybody on the level of our support for the general situation in Syria. I am also not going to comment on things the President has said—that is for him, not me. I am also not going either to confirm or to deny the sorts of figures that you have given me or comment on individuals. That would not be appropriate.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** I am not asking you to. We all know that there are some people there.

**Dr Murrison:** Yes. When we look at the huge numbers—there are 70,000 people in al-Hawl—you are correct in saying that the great majority of them are from the region. We have to deal with this at some point. You have mentioned the death penalty in Iraq, which has caused us some difficulty. In terms of justice—I am talking now about the detention camps overall, rather than al-Hawl—we cannot engage with a system in which people could ultimately face the death penalty. That is a clearly held, long-standing position of the British Government. It is an issue that other partners have not gripped in quite the way we have, which has caused them some difficulty. Let me say that. But we are talking to Iraq about how to deal with this situation in a way that gets over our red lines



in relation to the potential death penalty. That is important, so thank you for giving me the opportunity to put it on the record again.

Repatriation is a hot topic; it is a live conversation. I do not want to disguise the complexity of all this from the Committee. It touches on the standards of safeguarding that British nationals are entitled to expect, the sort of thing you would expect in your constituency. It touches on the possible separation of families. There is a whole raft of things beyond the difficulty of accessing people in a challenging environment such as Syria, which is changing all the time, so I cannot give you straight answers. I cannot give you a plan for how we are going to deal with Detainee X, Y or Z, Internee X, Y or Z, or Displaced Person X, Y or Z.

I cannot do that, but I can assure you that we are trying to work through what to do under a range of scenarios. We accept that, ultimately, we have to do something to resolve this. The whole region is full of examples of peoples who are penned up for generations, in some cases, and we want to avoid that. In particular, we want to avoid the possibility of young people being radicalised, and this simply being allowed to go on and on. We have to break that logjam.

**Q23** **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** When we were there, we met some of the British prisoners. They all said that we were the first Brits to communicate with them, and we were the first Brits to communicate with the authorities on this issue. Clearly there is a breakdown in communications somewhere. They do not feel that there is communication going on about this, and you feel you are communicating a lot about it. I wonder whether you could go back and explore that a bit more, to make sure that the right people are being spoken to.

Following yesterday's reports that Turkey was going to commence military operations in north-east Syria and on the withdrawal of US troops, the UN regional humanitarian co-ordinator for the Syria crisis told reporters in Geneva that he had drawn up a contingency plan to provide aid, saying that the UN was "hoping for the best but preparing for the worst". We have heard the Government's view on this, so I do not need to ask for that, but is the UK also fearing for the worst or are we just hoping that Turkey will behave itself?

**Dr Morrison:** Turkey has an interest in making sure that the number of displaced people is reduced, not increased. My worry about any incursion is that it will increase the number of displaced people. It will certainly destabilise an already pretty horrible situation. What I said downstairs is absolutely true: the focus for SDF needs to be along the Euphrates river. Something more kinetic in the north-west will clearly divert a lot of their attention. That is not a good thing. It is difficult for me to see how anything military in the Idlib governorate or the wider area will do anything other than increase the number of people who are displaced from their homes, thus adding to the situation and to the problem that Turkey and partners have had to shoulder over the past few years.



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**Q24** **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** We will come on to the Idlib governorate in a moment. I am trying to work out, in terms of humanitarian aid and the assistance that we need to provide that region, whether we are preparing for worst-case scenarios now. What actions has your Department taken in the last few days to ensure that we are game-planning those disaster scenarios? If you plan for the worst, it probably prevents it from happening.

**Dr Murrison:** Our effort in north-west Syria is delivered through the agencies that we fund. As I described downstairs, we are among the principal donors to that situation. The amount of money that we put into this system to support humanitarian effort in north-west Syria is a remarkable sum. It consumes a very large part of DFID's budget. I have to say that a lot of what we do is reactive.

**Q25** **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Was there any learning from Afrin? It was an incursion in central northern Syria, which we can probably take some learning from if there is an incursion in north-east Syria.

**Dr Murrison:** When crises have arisen over the past few years, we have been among the first to donate to emergency appeals of one sort or another. I am thinking of recent examples such as Syria and Libya, where we were among the first to donate to the appeal made by the UN. It is important to understand that, despite being an aid superpower, as others have said—it is a phrase I do not particularly enjoy, but one that nevertheless remains true—we are one of several actors in this. We are talking about this situation a lot with our interlocutors, not least at UNGA last month. We are leading the conversation, but the response on the ground is clearly delivered through agencies. *Primus inter pares* is the United Nations and the agencies that fall from it, so it does not surprise me that you say the UN is planning as it is. Clearly we will react to any calls that they make.

**Q26** **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** It would be nice to know whether there was learning from Afrin that we could build on here. It would be useful if there was some strategy. That is all I leave you with.

**Dr Murrison:** There is always strategy. Officials in DFID are always thinking about what might then happen. The thing I have learned about DFID, over the past six months, is that it is full of people who have been doing this for the whole of their careers, are deeply committed to it and plan all the time for what may happen and contingencies that may arise. I expect them to be doing that in this case.

**Q27** **Mark Menzies:** We have drifted on to some of this territory, but I would like to ask you, first, what assessment has been made of the situation in Idlib. Given the almost imminent recapture of Idlib, is Turkey likely to be facing another large influx of displaced people? I say this in the context that I visited Turkey over the summer. I went to some of the Turkish border communities and saw the number of refugees, particularly young people, who are in the process of being settled in the border provinces. A



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large influx is likely to have an impact on what is already a burdened and strained system. Could you shed a bit of light on that, please, Minister? Secondly, in the same context, what is the UK doing to ensure that aid agencies can increase their responses and secure their presence in Turkish-controlled areas?

**Dr Murrison:** We have been diverted in the recent past by what is happening on the border between Turkey and Syria, but we have to keep an eye on Idlib and the surrounding area. There are 4 million people there. The concern we have always had, and we have talked about this at length on the Floor of the House, is what happens if the regime decides to mount an assault on that last bastion. Well, it is pretty obvious what happens: it displaces part of those 4 million people. That poses a problem for Turkey. One wonders whether its current posturing and position is, in part, informed by what it fears might happen in the event that the regime decides to embark on further kinetic activity in the Idlib governorate. It would cause a further humanitarian catastrophe. It would cause large numbers of internally displaced people, across national boundaries. It would, I am afraid, be a real problem for all of us who are involved in trying to provide assistance for humanitarian relief.

**Q28 Mark Menzies:** Given that the UK has championed cross-border aid in Syria, will we continue to fund cross-border activities or seek to deliver aid through UN Damascus-registered NGOs?

**Dr Murrison:** Most of the assistance we provide comes across the Turkey-Syria border; it does not all go through Damascus. That is absolutely not the case. In fact, we rely on that border to get aid into Syria.

**Q29 Mark Menzies:** What will the UK do to ensure the safety and protection of humanitarians working for UK-funded partners, including Syrian humanitarian organisations, in the event of the Syrian Government recapturing Idlib?

**Dr Murrison:** As part of our due diligence when we decide who to fund, we expect there to be demonstrable processes for safeguarding aid workers. That is one of our list of things we apply. If we are not satisfied about that point, it will influence our funding decisions. It is not copper-bottomed, as we have seen, because through the agencies we have engaged with there have been stories of people who have sadly died or been very seriously injured. Aid workers expect and understand that they are operating in a hostile environment and, to their great credit, they shoulder a great deal of risk. Sometimes, they pay the ultimate price for that and I salute them for it.

Those operating in and around Idlib are at particular risk, given what is ongoing. In terms of risk rating, this particular part of the world is flashing red, and it will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. People go into this with their eyes wide open, which makes their heroism all the more remarkable. Clearly we cannot make it entirely safe, but we





expect, as part of our safeguarding processes and due diligence, agencies that are funded through UK taxpayers' money to be as robust as possible in demonstrating that they are putting in place processes that will mitigate risk, and to make a determination, ultimately, as to whether they feel that they can operate in a particular area at all.

**Q30 Henry Smith:** Minister, welcome and thank you also for your answers to me and others in the Chamber earlier. What assessment has been made of the challenges regarding the integration and status of Syrian refugees in, I appreciate, very different countries, such as Turkey, Greece, Lebanon and Jordan?

**Dr Murrison:** Turkey in particular has shouldered a huge number of refugees. That probably lies at the heart of the current issues around a possible incursion into Syria. Erdoğan is saying that he wants to create a so-called safe zone, in which he will repatriate refugees. That is what we understand is the case. Now, we can have a discussion about the legality of that, and we touched on some of those issues in the Chamber earlier. Despite FRiT and its successor, with which we are fully engaged, and other programmes, Turkey feels that it is being expected to shoulder an unreasonable burden as far as refugees are concerned.

It is not the only country; you have touched on some of the others. I shall be going to Lebanon soon, which has the biggest burden of refugees per capita, as it happens. Some similar issues arise in respect of that. The Government there have been very positive and accommodating about the situation, and the people have been accommodating, but there is friction right now and a real risk of refugees being done in, as a result of a hardening of the attitude taken by Government and populations. We need to be alive to that. In the region, Jordan is under significant pressure too, in relation to refugees from the current situation. To that extent, the stability of Governments can be threatened, which is difficult for us geopolitically, but it is something we have to manage

**Q31 Henry Smith:** I was fortunate to be in Amman in Jordan a few weeks ago, where we saw some of the work of small NGOs in particular, such as the Sir Bobby Charlton Foundation, in assisting Syrian child refugees, who in some cases have suffered horrendous physical and psychological injury. What support can DFID provide those small NGOs that are providing significant assistance to the wider Government and community in countries such as Jordan, which, as you correctly say, has taken a significant and large burden of refugees, and not only from Syria but from Palestine?

**Dr Murrison:** We support the Small Charities Challenge Fund, which was set up in response to lobbying, from colleagues and others, on the use of smaller organisations alongside the very big multilaterals. That stands and has been helpful in respect of a number of smaller operators. But I will not disguise from the Committee the difficulty that poses DFID, which is reasonably lean and mean. We have to manage programmes, which is not simply a question of writing cheques, as you all understand. We also





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have to follow up on programmes to make sure they are delivering. We retain some responsibility for what those operations actually do. There are reputational risks that we have to check and a whole risk process that we have to manage.

That tends to be a little easier if we are dealing with large multilateral operators, which themselves have large undertakings that give us some certainty about how money is being spent, staff are being looked after, reputations are being protected and money is not getting into the hands of those who should not have it—those sorts of things. Smaller operations necessarily find that more of a challenge, self-evidently, and probably need more assistance, care and oversight from DFID, so this is not without its difficulties for my Department. Nevertheless, we try to be forward-leaning when we see organisations that are delivering on the ground.

**Q32 Henry Smith:** Finally, you mentioned in your initial response to me the so-called safe zone proposal. What discussions have the UK Government had on that?

**Dr Murrison:** It is not a concept that we recognise; it is rhetoric being used by others. I use it simply because it is being used in the explanations we have heard for why this might be done. We do not regard it as a safe zone and we are concerned about some of the things we hear the Turks are considered doing in regard to this safe zone. We touched on some of those a few minutes ago, in the main Chamber.

**Q33 Chair:** Minister, we are going to move on to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Can I ask you about the situation with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and the impact of the US's decision to cease funding? The Committee welcomes the UK rising to the challenge of meeting some of that funding gap in the short term, but what is your view of UNRWA's longer-term financial sustainability and what we can do, working with other donors, to ensure that its work is not undermined?

**Dr Murrison:** It is worthwhile taking a historical perspective on UNRWA. It is an organisation that was set up in a very different world, but for problems that have endured for much longer than we had ever anticipated. Chairman, you have recently seen, as I have—we were there at more or less the same time—the great work that UNRWA does. We are managing the situation as best we can. It may not be perfect, but UNRWA is an organisation that can rightly claim a great deal of credit for the work that it does. You will have seen, as I have, the health-related and education programmes operating on the ground, particularly in Gaza, which is in a desperate state. I have to ask: in the event that UNRWA does not operate there, what then? I completely deplore the situation in the OPTs, but we have to deal with the situation as it exists on the ground, and that is what UNRWA is doing.

In terms of the recent controversy surrounding UNRWA and what then happened, it is worth pointing out that the donors that have pulled out



represent 5% of UNRWA income, which is small, in relation to the controversy that is being investigated at the moment. We have spoken to UN and we are happy with the action that the Secretary-General has taken. The reputational importance of this and of doing this investigation quickly is, I am sure, well understood at the UN. I am told that the report is expected very soon, and hopefully it will shed some light on the situation and allow the UN to do what it has to do to mitigate and deal with this.

In any large organisation, sadly, things like this happen. But when they do, it is important there is transparency, it is gripped quickly and investigated in a credible way, so it is seen that the organisation has changed as a result. There is something peculiar about aid organisations that makes it particularly unacceptable, in the public mind, when this sort of thing happens.

**Q34 Chair:** More generally on the US approach, do you have any sense that it may re-evaluate or reconsider cuts in aid to the Palestinians or will this decision continue with the Trump Administration?

**Dr Murrison:** I am not optimistic, but I live in hope. I just wish some of those making the decisions saw how things are on the ground and spoke to those kids in that UN-supported school. Listen to them and their stories, and you might take a slightly different view.

**Chair:** I agree.

**Q35 Richard Burden:** Could we move on to movement restrictions, particularly in and out of Gaza? What is the impact of those restrictions, in relation to both people and goods, on the delivery of UK aid to Gaza?

**Dr Murrison:** It is significant. You are aware of the mechanism we fund that assists in checking goods going into the Gaza strip. I regret that we have to spend money on this, because I would prefer Israel to adopt a slightly more considered and pragmatic line in relation to reconstruction in Gaza. I understand that there are security challenges—I fully understand them—but the fact of the matter is that, if you go into the Gaza strip, it is not pretty. As the occupying force in the OPTs, in my view, Israel has a responsibility to do better than it is doing at the moment in relation to the welfare of people living in that strip of land. We always encourage our interlocutors to reappraise what they are doing, notwithstanding their legitimate security considerations.

I want to condemn those in Hamas and other organisations operating in Gaza for the attacks that they perpetrate upon Israel and their own people. That is behaviour that we need to underscore and understand, and we make it clear that it has to stop if the OPTs are to be restored to a state in which people can flourish and live normally. At the moment, they are really not.

We fund, regrettably but nevertheless, the wherewithal to try to smooth the flow of goods into the Gaza strip for reconstruction. The



reason I regret that is because I can use that money elsewhere. If that process was smoother or not necessary in that form, we could spend it doing other stuff elsewhere, up to our 0.7%. I have no shortage of projects I could fund using that money. It seems perverse that sometimes we are feeling our way around the structures put in place by Israel in the OPTs and spending money mitigating them. It would be good to think that, perhaps, we could create systems to make that less necessary than it is at the moment.

We are actively dealing with the movement of people with Israel. I probably said to the Committee earlier—please forgive me if I am repeating myself—that, on my recent visit to Gaza, I sat at a crossing and watched an ambulance being held up, with the person at the back getting out and chucking up, because they were clearly unwell. It was held up for a considerable time at that border post. Vignettes are always a bit dangerous, but that sticks in my mind. We need to move to a situation in which people are allowed to pass more freely across that border, particularly to access healthcare. I have sat there watching a long queue of very elderly people waiting to get across the border for medical attention. That just does not seem right to me. I am sure that more can be done to make that an easier process, notwithstanding the legitimate security concerns that Israel has.

I want to be clear: I accept the security risks and the difficult nature of that environment. I fully understand and accept Israel's desire to protect its citizens, but we must do better in relation to the passage of people and materiel across that border, if we are going to see the situation in Gaza improve. As it stands, Gaza clearly poses a big risk to Israel, and it is not clear to me how that is going to be remedied if the structures there remain in place. They are the problem, in many respects. By trying to resolve those, at least we stand a chance of getting a more benign neighbour on the Gaza strip.

**Q36 Richard Burden:** You are quite right; there really is no substitute for seeing things for yourself. It crystallises an awful lot of the situation over there. Could I ask what more you think we can do? You say you have raised these matters with the Israelis and the fact that the restrictions are not helping them, let alone the Palestinians. What responses have you had from the Government of Israel on that? What more can we do to ensure, after all, that international humanitarian law is observed? You said that Israel has its own responsibilities as an occupying power in Gaza, which it apparently it is not complying with.

**Dr Morrison:** Usually the response is that it is security and Israel will illustrate that by citing cases in which people or consignments of goods have been used to convey ordnance of one sort or another, with tragic consequences. This is why I am fully seized of the importance of security in this piece and entirely accept Israel's desire to protect people from the kinds of things that have been associated with certain groups within the Gaza strip, in particular. I do not diverge from that at all.



There are some things we can possibly do with Israel, particularly in relation to unaccompanied children, which is a harrowing story and something I am seeking to address with the Israelis. I have seen Israelis in action in humanitarian situations. They are always at the forefront of humanitarian responses. Very often we demonise the Government of Israel in particular, but we need to prevail upon Israel and its Government—whatever emerges in the next few days—to do the right thing and be seen to be doing the right thing. Israelis are very charitable people, as indeed are Palestinians, and we need to acknowledge that and ensure that, for their own reputational purposes if nothing else, they engage with some particularly distressing things in relation to the movement of people across borders.

We talk a lot about prosperity in the West Bank, which is bad and getting worse. The security situation in the West Bank is one of the principal drivers of that dire situation—I am sure that all of us around this table have been to the West Bank and seen this for ourselves. Moving around Palestine is really difficult, particularly into and out of Area C. Ultimately, we may have all sorts of Kushner-derived plans—I encourage good ideas on this from all sources, including the US—and economic plans, but if we do not get over this issue of security, they are going to fail. Resolving this situation lies at the heart of the future economic prosperity of the West Bank.

**Q37 Richard Burden:** How do you think that can be eased or resolved? Actually, my next question was going to be about what impact you think the Kushner plan, Peace to Prosperity, is likely to have on the situation on the ground, either on the West Bank or in Gaza? From what you have said, I guess your response is, as things stand, “Not very much, unless those other factors are dealt with.” How could they be dealt with?

**Dr Morrison:** The Manama thing was not massively successful, not least because the Palestinians did not engage with it at all. We did. We were represented at the economic phase of the Kushner plan at junior ministerial level. We encouraged the Americans to bring forward ideas to resolve the situation, but be absolutely clear: we are completely committed to the two-state solution. That has been and continues to be our long-standing position.

We resist the suggestion that the principal driver for improving the situation in Israel and the OPTs is economic. Money is important, and of course it is wrapped up with security in the way I have described, but before that we need political accommodation. That is part 2 of Kushner. I do not know whether we will get to that stage. It has been said that we would not have the next stage, the geopolitical bit, until November, following the formation of a new Government in Israel. It is clearly a matter for President Trump and his son-in-law. We await suggestions with much interest and will be as helpful as we possibly can in relation to anything sensible that comes out of that but, until we see it, it is very difficult to comment.



**Q38 Richard Burden:** We are going to ask you before we finish about attacks on aid workers. While we are focusing on this, rather than the OPTs, could I put something to you on that? We are conscious of the evidence produced by the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, which has done a survey on where health workers had been subject to attacks worldwide. There were over 900 attacks on health workers worldwide, which itself is a matter of great concern. Being a health worker now counts as the fourth most dangerous occupation to have worldwide. In this context, 308 of them, the biggest single amount, took place in Israel and the Occupied Territories. This is staggering. What can we do about it?

**Dr Murrison:** In previous evidence I have given, either directly to the Select Committee or in my written response—I cannot remember which—I outlined what DFID is doing to safeguard aid workers. We are funding a number of bodies that specifically operate in this piece, so I refer you to that evidence. On the OPTs, all we can do is to emphasise, on both sides of this conflict, the importance of safeguarding aid workers, which is what we do. We hope that will in some way assist in protecting those who operate on the ground. I agree with you that this is a horrible situation and it is a high-risk occupation. You are right that it is the fourth riskiest occupation known to man, right now. Coming back to my earlier point, that largely relates to indigenous workers, those who are at the coalface, who tend to be drawn from the local population. They chiefly feature in the statistics that you have just described—not exclusively, but chiefly.

**Q39 Richard Burden:** Perhaps a theme that runs through all of this is that Israel somehow feels it can do what it wants with impunity. Some 308 health workers have been shot. Most were not killed, but shot. Increasing numbers of people have difficulty getting out of Gaza to access medical treatment. It is difficult to get goods into Gaza and it is virtually impossible for Palestinian businesses to get goods out of Gaza to be sold. All these things appear to violate Israel's legal responsibilities, yet it seems there is a culture of impunity so Israel can do these things. If it does them, while disapproval may be expressed, there will be no consequence for Israel. Is it not time that we start looking at unlawful actions by Israel leading to some kind of consequence?

**Dr Murrison:** We condemn unlawful actions by Israel, not least the settlements, which we do on a regular basis. There is a very real downside for Israel, which is that its reputation takes a severe hammering, notably recently in relation to events on the border in Gaza. Many of those you have cited were killed and injured on the border. I like to celebrate the positive where I can find it, which is difficult in this—I get that—but those are being investigated by the Israeli authorities and we await their outcome. That might sound to be fairly small beer, but it is a start and something that would not previously have been the case but is now. We at least have to acknowledge that they have responded in some way to pressure from Governments such as our own and reacted, but I accept entirely that that is not enough.



Time and again, when we raise this with Israel, it comes up with the line, "Well, it is security." Once again, I in no way disagree that Israel has a legitimate right to self-defence. Of course it has a right to self-defence, and it lives in a very difficult territory. It needs to protect its people. I have visited kibbutz, as you would have, and seen the Iron Dome apparatus and the constant threat faced by Israeli citizens from terrorists in Gaza. The British Government would do exactly the same in protecting our citizens, of course, but there is a question of proportionality and trying to work out mechanisms that address some of the fundamentals in this.

You have quite rightly raised with me reconstruction and the passage of individuals across the border, particularly those seeking medical assistance. My message with my interlocutors in Israel has been, and will continue to be, this: "Accepting your need for security, let us see what we can do to make it easier for things that are legitimate to happen. Do not always put up the excuse, 'It is security and therefore anything goes.'" That is not sustainable, it is not doing Israel any good and it is causing real problems in relation to the OPTs.

**Q40 Richard Burden:** Very briefly, if Benjamin Netanyahu is able to form a Government in the coming weeks, and if he fulfils his pre-election promise to annex part of the West Bank, the Jordan valley, will it lead to any consequence from the international community? If so, what will it be?

**Dr Morrison:** We would strongly urge Israel not to annex the West Bank or any part of it. That would be contrary to international law and, I am sure, subject to widespread condemnation. Bibi Netanyahu made it clear during the election that that was on his agenda. We are all politicians. We know that things politicians say in the run-up to elections, if they are playing to a particular gallery, do not then necessarily happen. I would point out that the Israeli election was not a great success for Mr Netanyahu, and we perhaps have to draw from that that the people of Israel are less forward-leaning on annexation than Mr Netanyahu is. That is a positive thing. I have no idea how Benny Gantz positions himself, but our message to political operators in Israel right now, as they go through the process of forming a Government, is that annexation is a serious matter and we strongly advise against it.

**Q41 Henry Smith:** Can you update us on UK Government aid going to the Palestinian Authority in specific sectors where concerns have been expressed, for example payments to Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons and their families? What is the latest on that controversy?

**Dr Morrison:** We are clear that we do everything in our power to prevent UK aid money getting into the wrong hands. We do not fund terrorism and we have pretty rigorous processes in place to prevent that happening. We fund teachers and healthcare workers in the OPTs. We use the European Union PEGASE system to ensure that the money goes to individuals who have been screened. We do everything in our power to





ensure that money does not go to those we would not want it to go to. It is true that the Palestinian Authority gives pensions to those it refers to as martyrs. People have certainly worried about fungibility—that is to say, the Palestinians’ ability to do that because others are funding healthcare, teachers and what have you. I do not have a black-and-white answer for you on that, because I too struggle with this, but I am clear that UK aid money goes to those for whom it is intended in order to deliver well defined outcomes. We do everything we reasonably can to ensure that is the case.

**Q42 Henry Smith:** That is very clear. In addition to PEGASE, are any other mechanisms used to vet UK development contributions to the Palestinian Authority? Is it simply through PEGASE?

**Dr Murrison:** PEGASE is a large part of it and that is the area where people have been most concerned that money, because it involves cash transfers, might be used to fund terrorists. Our various programmes delivered through agencies in the OPTs go through the same rigorous quality-assurance mechanism that I referred to earlier. That is all auditable and we ensure, as far as we possibly can, that money does not reach those to whom we wish to deny it.

**Q43 Henry Smith:** What other sectors in the Palestinian Authority is UK aid going to? You mentioned education, but are there others receiving British development assistance?

**Dr Murrison:** We have discussed some of them this afternoon. We have talked about UNRWA and the various UN agencies that operate in the OPTs. We have talked about the reconstruction mechanism. There is a raft of platforms that we use, but each one goes through the mechanisms that we have to ensure that money is not being diverted.

**Q44 Henry Smith:** You mentioned international organisations. Has the UK resumed its contributions to the World Bank trust fund, which I understand was contributing towards Palestinian civil servants?

**Dr Murrison:** I am looking at colleagues.

**Ian Ball:** I am sorry; I do not know.

**Dr Murrison:** We do not know. We will write to you.

**Q45 Chris Law:** You have touched on violence against aid workers throughout this session. Given that DFID has committed to spend at least 50% of its aid budget in fragile states and regions, what is DFID doing to protect aid workers from violence? These are very often violent settings.

**Dr Murrison:** I refer to the evidence I submitted previously about the bodies that we fund. I am struggling with the figures, off the top of my head, but a substantial amount of DFID money has gone into those. More directly and more importantly, the multilaterals we fund have all gone through the sieve in relation to the protection they offer their employees, for whom they are responsible, and the mitigations they have put in place



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to minimise any risk. I do not disguise from you the fact that we have to, nevertheless, assume some level of risk in relation to these people. Some of them have sadly lost their lives or been seriously injured in the course of what they do. We cannot remove that risk altogether, but our funding processes are rigorous in relation to safeguarding. If we are not happy that sufficient safeguarding has been put in place, it will colour our judgment as to whether we can support those particular programmes.

**Q46 Chris Law:** When we were doing a report earlier this year on tackling violence against aid workers, we saw that numbers have increased in recent years to an all-time high.

**Dr Murrison:** There is a reason for that, incidentally. The amount of operations in conflicted situations has increased. One can offset certain risks. For example, crudely, if you are operating in sub-Saharan Africa, where there is a risk of tropical diseases, you can mitigate some of that risk. If you are operating in a highly kinetic conflict environment, it is much more difficult to do that. Because so much of what we do is now in that difficult-to-control situation, it is probably one reason why we have seen more people being badly affected, sadly.

**Q47 Chris Law:** Thank you for that answer. Specifically, the report called for better safeguarding for aid and healthcare workers to protect them from harm and, in particular, to hold aggressors to account. Through the testimonies we heard, there is a lot of evidence about what is happening, how the casualties come about and the violence, particularly against national aid workers, as you have highlighted. But extremely little is being done to hold the aggressors to account. I really want to know, since the publication of the report, what concrete steps the UK Government and DFID have taken to provide that leadership.

**Dr Murrison:** I will take two countries as an example, Iraq and Syria. In both countries we are supporting programmes that discover evidence of crimes against humanity. This is a big piece of work. The frustration, in the case of Syria, is that the individual who, ultimately, is responsible for a lot of this is difficult to get at, but it is important that all this is recorded and that those responsible know that, sooner or later, the international community will be coming for them. The worry I have is that, if we do not record the evidence now, it will make that task much more difficult. That work is ongoing and I am pleased with it. Those who will ultimately be collared for this need to know we are coming for them.

**Q48 Chris Law:** I am really glad to hear that. It is good to hear. In the report, we put forward the idea of the UK hosting an international humanitarian workers' safety and security summit to raise the profile of this important subject for a global audience and to establish a consensus on best practice. Is this something the UK Government are actively considering or already making plans for?

**Dr Murrison:** Yes. I am not sure whether colleagues want to chip in, but it is certainly on my radar as something that might be worth while. The



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UK has recently hosted a number of summits and conferences related to international development. I am thinking of the Jordan summit in London earlier this year. There is a whole slew of them. London is a great place to have this sort of thing. The London imprimatur is impressive and powerful, not least because we sit in the middle of various time zones and people can get here easily enough. It is a great place to hold symposia of this sort. Next year, for example, we will be doing the Gavi replenishment, as you well know, Chairman, because we have discussed it at length. The sort of thing you just described is worthy of serious consideration.

Q49 **Chris Law:** Is that a commitment to it, then?

**Dr Morrison:** No, it is not a commitment. I am going to commit to reflect upon it.

Q50 **Paul Scully:** Excuse me for nipping out to a Delegated Legislation committee. I want to come very briefly back to UNRWA. You were talking about the American contributions to UNRWA being removed, but Switzerland and New Zealand have taken away their funding for different reasons, because of their concerns. There is an Office of Internal Oversight Services investigation into ethical misconduct. I wonder whether you might reflect for a minute on that and what steps you are taking towards the UN agency.

**Chair:** The Minister reflected on that earlier.

**Paul Scully:** You have done that, have you? Forgive me. In that case, my other question was just about the transparency of UNRWA, because there is some concern about transparency of what it is funding. Again, if you have reflected on that already, excuse me. If you have not, any comments would be gratefully received.

**Dr Morrison:** I noted that. I certainly agree with you about transparency, where it is possible. To talk generally, sometimes what appears to be transparency is nothing to do with the nature of the material that we are seeking not to be completely clear about, but perhaps wider considerations or commitments we have made to other partners. That can sometimes cause difficulty. More than once, I have seen issues around transparency, and been looking at the material and thinking, "Goodness me, why on earth did we not just put this in the public domain, because it is as boring as a boring thing?"

The fact of the matter is that, if we have made commitments to the other parties, which I have to say, going forward, I will resist, and we are then invited to put it in the public domain, that can sometimes cause bilateral difficulties. In general, I want to be as transparent as I possibly can, while protecting any relationships that we have. Going forward, I am very resistant to the idea that we should give undertakings to third parties that material might be protected, when we will come under challenge in fora such as this.



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**Chair:** Thank you very much indeed, Minister. We have gone a little over time, so I am grateful to you for your responses today on some very big, challenging crises around the Middle East. Thank you.