

International Development Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

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From Sarah Champion MP, Chair

To all Members of the House of Commons

By email

14 September 2020

Future of UK aid scrutiny

Dear colleagues

We wanted to update you on the future of the International Development Select Committee (IDC) following the merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth and International Development departments on 1 September.

We are proposing that the IDC changes its remit to cover all Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending across Government. The annual aid budget is substantial at 0.7% of GNI, which this year looks likely to be £13 billion. Parliament has an important role in demonstrating that UK aid projects deliver value for money for the UK taxpayer and challenging weaknesses in UK development policy and safeguarding. A cross-party select committee is the most effective way of doing that. Having a dedicated committee to take on this role remains imperative. The House has always placed significance on the scrutiny of UK aid spending; there has been such a committee since 1969, long before the creation of the current department.

The Government states that its preferred position is for select committees to mirror government departments and, as such, it wants to abolish DfID and create a new, slightly enlarged, FCDO committee to take on the role. It is the Prime Minister's gift how he organises his Government, but the formation, or abolition, of select committees is a matter for the House.

Over the last ten years, ODA spend has increasingly been spent across Government departments. DfID was still the main recipient but FCO, Home Office, Health, DEFRA, BEIS and Education now have significant ODA budgets too. The IDC's proposal would see us following the cross-government model used by the Public Accounts and Environmental Audit select committees to effectively scrutinise all aid spending.

If the Government does succeed in abolishing the IDC, the House will additionally lose the skills of the specialist development committee team and the development seats on the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, on the Committees on Arms Export Controls and on the Liaison Committee.

The Government should not be afraid of the IDC. We can help steer the ship through what is the most significant Government change in aid policy since DFID was established in 1997. As

the UK navigates its new position in the world, parliamentarians must have the resources to make sure Government policy is being targeted properly and efficiently.

Parliamentary scrutiny strengthens Government, even if it may seem unpalatable to Ministers at the time. If a motion is presented to the House to abolish IDC, I hope you will instead support our proposal to change our remit to scrutinise ODA spending across all departments. Please do contact me if I can provide more information that will help you make your decision.

Kindest regards,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Sarah Champion MP

Chair of the Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'V Sharma'.

Virendra Sharma MP

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Pauline Latham'.

Pauline Latham MP

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Chris Law'.

Chris Law MP