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International Development
Committee

From Srebrenica to a safer tomorrow: Preventing future mass atrocities around the world

Third Report of Session 2022–23

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to the report*

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The International Development Committee

The International Development Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for International Development and its associated public bodies.

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Summary

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has filled our television screens and social media with shocking images of likely war crimes and crimes against humanity. Suspected mass atrocities in many other countries have passed with less public attention but are no less damaging and morally repugnant. Such acts inflict horrific suffering and long-lasting societal scars. They also set back global development and stability. More people are fleeing violence and persecution now than at any other point since World War Two.

Entrenched divisions between countries, on display within the United Nations Security Council, have constrained multilateral action in response to many crises of the last decade, including in Myanmar, China, Syria, Yemen and Ethiopia. Many now fear that we are living through an age of impunity for those who commit atrocities. Other trends are likely to fuel further violence, including the strains on societies and livelihoods caused by climate change, threats to democracies, hate speech online and the role being played by non-state actors in conflict. The UK Government believes that international peace and security will deteriorate by 2030 in the absence of "concerted action".

The Prime Minister has expressed her personal commitment to preventing mass atrocities, seeing this as morally right and "absolutely" in the UK's strategic interest. Now is the time to drive forward this commitment.

Alongside continued diplomacy and a push for institutional reform at the multilateral level, the Government must introduce a strategy for preventing and responding to mass atrocities globally, heeding repeated calls from within Parliament and beyond. This new strategy must focus on atrocities both within and outside of conflicts. It must involve the whole of Government in mitigating risks, covering not only diplomacy, development and defence, but trade, supply chains, arms exports, education, asylum and border policy.

The new strategy should build on the Government's efforts to secure justice for victims of suspected atrocity crimes in Ukraine and apply these to other contexts. To achieve its goals, the Government must work with like-minded partners. In particular, this should include the United States, which, in July, released its own Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities.

To make the new strategy effective, the Government should:

- give greater priority to preventing atrocities by addressing this at the Foreign Policy and Security Council, using intelligence to track imminent/escalating atrocities and submitting an annual report to Parliament;
- ensure that UK Missions overseas are no longer left without the support they need by mandating relevant training for Ambassadors and introducing an Atrocity Prevention Toolkit;
- strengthen the role of UK aid in tackling the drivers of atrocities, re-assessing whether enough aid is reaching communities in states at risk and introducing a new budget line in the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund;

- allocate appropriate funds and staff to the new—and highly welcome—Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation.

The genocide in Srebrenica, July 1995, represented the worst of humanity. Its legacy endures. Learning from the past, this Report's recommendations will help put the UK at the forefront of preventing and ending mass atrocities around the world.

1 Introduction

1. In 2005, the United Kingdom committed to protect populations from extreme forms of violence and persecution, specifically genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.¹ Prevention is the “single most important dimension” of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (R2P).² Since the UK and other UN Member States recognised that duty in 2005, however, mass atrocities have occurred in most regions of the world.³ Atrocities may well increase in the 21st century.⁴

2. In May 2022, then Foreign Secretary Right Hon. Liz Truss MP told us that preventing mass atrocities is “absolutely” in the UK’s strategic interest and “morally right”.⁵ In March 2021, the Government’s Integrated Review stated that the UK would adopt a more integrated approach to tackling conflict and instability, with an increased emphasis on atrocity prevention.⁶

Inquiry

3. In December 2021, the Committee launched this inquiry to examine the UK Government’s efforts to prevent mass atrocities globally, in light of the commitments made in the Integrated Review. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the subsequent atrocities demonstrated the urgency and relevance of this work.

4. To inform our work and building on previous inquiries,⁷ we took oral evidence from UK Missions abroad, experts and a Minister from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) (see list at the end of this report). We invited the submission of written evidence (see list at the end of this report), received a private briefing from the FCDO’s new Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM) and heard from the US State Department. We visited Bosnia and Herzegovina in February 2022 to see the UK’s atrocity prevention work in practice. Dr Ferguson⁸ was the Committee’s Specialist Adviser for this inquiry. We thank everyone who contributed to this work.

5. This Report does not make country-specific recommendations. However, the visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina informed the conclusions and recommendations of this Report. We also drew lessons from other countries that recently experienced, or are currently experiencing, suspected atrocities.

1 UN General Assembly, [2005 World Summit Outcome](#), Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 September 2005 (A/RES/60/1), paras 138, 139.

2 International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), [The Responsibility to Protect](#), 2001, XI

3 For example, see Professor Adrian Gallagher ([DPA0005](#)) para 5.

4 See Chapter 2 of this Report.

5 Oral evidence taken on 18 May 2022, HC (2022–2023) 148, [Q318](#) [Liz Truss]

6 Cabinet Office, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, [CP 403](#), March 2021, p 79

7 For example, International Development Committee, Tenth Report of Session 2019–21, [The humanitarian situation in Tigray](#), HC 1289; Foreign Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2017–19, [Violence in Rakhine State and the UK’s response](#), HC 435; Foreign Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2021–22, [Never Again: The UK’s Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond](#), HC 198; Foreign Affairs Committee, Twelfth Report of Session 2017–19, [Global Britain: The Responsibility to Protect and Humanitarian Intervention](#), HC 1005.

8 Dr Kate Ferguson is Co-Executive Director and co-founder of the human rights NGO Protection Approaches. In addition, she is Chair of Policy at the European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and Visiting Research Fellow at King’s College London’s Centre for Grand Strategy. Protection Approaches convenes the UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group.

6. Throughout this Report, we define ‘atrocities prevention’ as the use of tools and strategies to prevent the four atrocities covered by the Responsibility to Protect, namely genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.⁹ The Report uses ‘mass atrocities’ as a collective term for these acts, which normally also represent ‘atrocities crimes’ in international law.¹⁰

7. This Report focuses on preventive tools and strategies that do not involve the use of force. This Committee acknowledges that interventions involving force may sometimes be necessary to save lives. However, as the International Development Committee, our primary interest is peaceful steps that can prevent violence or de-escalate it at the earliest stages.

9 This definition of atrocity prevention builds upon Peace Direct, [Atrocity Prevention and Peacebuilding](#), 2018, p 7. The UK Government does not define atrocity prevention in its relevant policy paper (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [UK approach to preventing mass atrocities](#), 2019). Lord Ahmad told us atrocity prevention is an “intervention that prevents issues of conflict escalating in a given country” but that “most importantly, [...] it is about protecting those innocent civilians in a given situation”. [Q67](#) [Lord Ahmad]

10 Genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes are recognised international atrocity crimes. Although ‘ethnic cleansing’ is not legally defined as an atrocity crime, it includes acts that represent serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and which may reach the level of one of the three recognised atrocity crimes. UN Member States directly chose to extend the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ to ethnic cleansing. For definitions, see Appendix of this Report.

2 Mass atrocities in the 21st century

8. Mass atrocities mark the outer edge of inhumanity towards other human beings. Savita Pawnday, Executive Director of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, called them “conscience-shocking crimes” that “take away and affect our humanity as a whole. [...] The Holocaust, the genocide in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia—all of these are stains on our collective conscience.”¹¹ The Srebrenica genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina, after which this Report is named, involved the systematic killing of more than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys by Bosnian Serb forces in July 1995.¹² In July 2020, the UK Foreign Secretary described it as “the worst atrocity in Europe since the end of the Second World War”.¹³

9. In addition to inflicting “horrific tolls”¹⁴ and “incalculable human suffering”¹⁵ on those whom they directly affect, mass atrocities set back the development of the communities and countries where they occur. Dr Stefan, Founding Co-Director of the European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, stated that mass atrocities

cause enduring adverse effects on social, political, economic, and cultural development. The multi-generational impacts of gross violations of human rights are increasingly recognised as one of the main obstacles to achieving the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the target date of 2030.¹⁶

Countries with a history of mass atrocities must also grapple with the aftermath and legacy of such atrocities.¹⁷

10. Despite the international community agreeing after the Holocaust that mass atrocities would “never again” occur,¹⁸ mass atrocities remain a feature of today’s world.¹⁹ At least 37 countries “experienced mass atrocities or had serious concerns raised that they could take place” between 2000 and 2020.²⁰ Recent reports of mass atrocities include:

11 [Q43](#)

12 Srebrenica Memorial Center, [Genocide in Srebrenica](#), accessed 8 September 2022

13 [Srebrenica genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Foreign Secretary’s statement on the 25th anniversary](#), UK Government Press Release, 11 July 2020

14 US Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide ([DPA0030](#)). There are also considerable humanitarian consequences, as described by Lord Ahmad, [Q76](#).

15 All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG) ([DPA0010](#)) para 1.7

16 Dr Cristina G. Stefan ([DPA0024](#)) para 2.1

17 Since the conflict and atrocities of the 1990s, politicians, NGOs and international organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to grapple with body identification, war crimes processing, commemoration, reconstruction and reconciliation. See, for example, the work of the Srebrenica Memorial Center, the International Commission on Missing Persons, Medica Zenica, the Post-Conflict Research Center, the War Childhood Museum, TRIAL, Most Mira, Mothers of Srebrenica and others. Contributors of written evidence also spoke of legacy issues, such as Gillian McKay ([DPA0009](#)) para 15.

18 Yet Again UK ([DPA0023](#)).

19 For example, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, [Populations At Risk](#), accessed 7 September 2022

20 Professor Adrian Gallagher ([DPA0005](#)) para 5. The 37 countries listed in the evidence are Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, China, Colombia, Cote d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, DPRK: North Korea, Egypt, Eritrea, Georgia, Guinea, Iraq, Israel, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Uganda, Ukraine, Venezuela, Yemen, Zimbabwe. This list is the aggregate of data collected by three organisations: the International Criminal Court, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect. As discussed in this Report, in many of these countries, mass atrocities are ongoing. This list is not exhaustive and omits Ethiopia, where atrocities began in the second half of 2020.

- Suspected crimes against humanity and war crimes by Russia in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.²¹ Possible cases include the “arbitrary killing of civilians”, the destruction of large urban areas, as well as attacks on schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure.²²
- In Myanmar, a military campaign of “indiscriminate killings, rape and sexual violence, arbitrary detention, torture, beatings, and forced displacement”²³ against the mostly Muslim Rohingya in 2016 and 2017. The United States Government believes that those “well-planned and co-ordinated” operations constituted crimes against humanity and genocide.²⁴
- In China, the Chinese Government has undertaken the “mass detention of more than 1 million Uyghurs”, “forcing them into industrial-scale forced labour programmes” and “attempting to wipe out Uyghur and Islamic culture” using “forced sterilisation of women, destruction of cultural sites, and separation of children from families”.²⁵ Parliamentarians in the UK have declared that that is genocide.²⁶ The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recently stated the treatment of Uyghur Muslims “may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity”.²⁷
- In Ethiopia’s civil war, media and situation reports have implicated “various armed actors” in possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in Tigray (Ethiopia), including an alleged massacre in Axum in November 2020, extrajudicial killings, forced displacement, rape and other forms of gender-based violence.²⁸

11. Violence and persecution may undermine global stability. By the end of 2021, an estimated 89.3 million people globally had to flee their homes as a result of conflict, violence, fear of persecution and human rights violations.²⁹ That number, which is greater than the entire population of modern Germany, is the highest since World War Two³⁰ and excludes the millions of people who have subsequently been displaced by Russia’s war in Ukraine. The UK Government stated that global displacement is now at a “desperate” level.³¹

21 [Opening statement: Press conference by the Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine the conclusion of its first visit to Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine](#), UN Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, 15 June 2022; [Russia accused of deliberately targeting Ukraine’s medical facilities](#), Atlantic Council, 11 June 2022

22 [Opening statement: Press conference by the Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine the conclusion of its first visit to Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine](#), UN Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, 15 June 2022

23 Global Justice Center (DPA0015); see also Internews Europe (DPA0011)

24 US Department of State, [Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya in Burma](#), 21 March 2022. See also [Investigation Myanmar](#), Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA).

25 Foreign Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2021–22, [Never Again: The UK’s Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond](#), HC 198, p 3.

26 HC Deb, 22 April 2021, [col 1246](#) [Commons Chamber]: “Resolved, That this House believes that Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region are suffering crimes against humanity and genocide; and calls on the Government to act to fulfil its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide and all relevant instruments of international law to bring it to an end.”

27 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, [OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China](#), 31 August 2022, para 48

28 International Development Committee, Tenth Report of Session 2019–21, [The humanitarian situation in Tigray](#), HC 1289, para 12

29 UNHCR, [Global Trends Report 2021](#), 2022, p 2

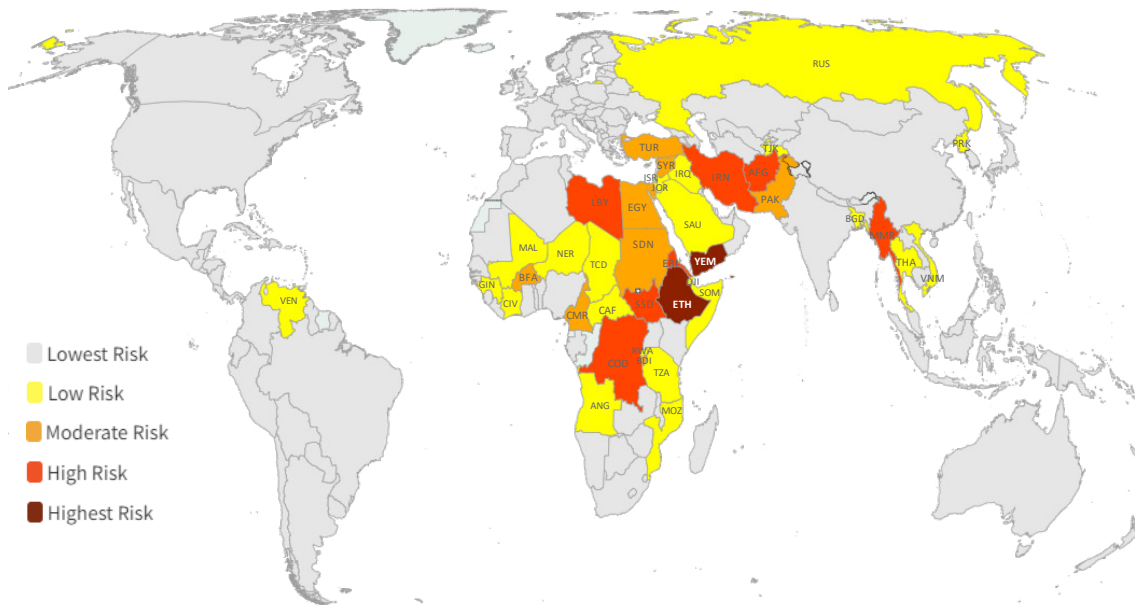
30 UNHCR, [Global Trends, 2022](#)

31 UK Government, [Wherever there is war or armed conflict, civilians are always caught in the middle: UK Statement at the UN Security Council](#), 25 May 2022

Drivers of mass atrocities

12. Mass atrocities are forecast to continue. In April 2021, the Australia National University Atrocity Forecasting Project, one of many global alert systems,³² identified atrocity risks across the world for the 2021–2023 period. It identified particular risks in Africa and the Middle East (see Figure 1). Although imperfect,³³ such alert systems are relatively reliable indicators. For example, most countries judged at ‘high’ or ‘highest’ risk in April 2021 have since experienced atrocities.³⁴

Figure 1: World map of forecasts (made in April 2021) of atrocity risks for the period 2021–2023



Source: Australia National University Atrocity Forecasting Project³⁵

13. The UK Government observed that the two years 2016 and 2019 involved the greatest number of active armed conflicts since 1946.³⁶ Although the relationship between conflict and atrocities is complex (see paras 37–40), history suggests that armed conflicts correlate

- 32 For example, the project showcased in Figure 1, as well as the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect’s [Populations at Risk](#) monitor and the [Early Warning Project](#) (a joint initiative of the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College). The methodology of each forecasting system differs.
- 33 Some countries judged at risk will not go on to experience atrocities. Furthermore, some countries where atrocities were ongoing at the time of the forecast (such as China) or are now ongoing (such as Ukraine) are not covered. Some systems may have gaps in regional data, such as for Latin America. In addition, suspected crimes against humanity committed against certain populations or communities, for example refugee and migrant populations, or LGBT+ people, are rarely covered by such risk lists.
- 34 Map forecasts for 2021–2023: highest risk: Ethiopia, Yemen; high risk: Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Iran, Libya, Myanmar, South Sudan. In practice, since April 2021, there have been atrocities in over half of these countries, as well as atrocities in some countries assigned lower risk profiles.
- 35 The map is based on forecasts made by the Australian National University (ANU) [‘Atrocity Forecasting Project’](#), produced in April 2021, with sources from that year and from 2020. The ANU approach uses a statistical model (a Generalised Additive Model (GAM)), which allows the non-linear functions of independent variables to be combined, trained on data from 1946 to 2017. This allows it to predict a risk, or probability, of genocide or politicide occurring in a country in 2020, which they use as a forecast for the 2021–23 period. There are around twenty variables in this model, which range from instability, regime change and the years since a genocide/‘politicide’ to ethnic fractionalisation.
- 36 Cabinet Office, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, [CP 403](#), March 2021, p 29

with atrocities.³⁷ The UK Government projected a deterioration in international peace and security by 2030 “unless concerted action is taken to address underlying political, social, economic and environmental drivers, especially in fragile states”.³⁸

14. Witnesses highlighted other trends that might drive mass atrocities, including:

- **Climate change.** Competition to “control natural resources and wealth” at a time of growing resource and food scarcity may drive atrocities.³⁹ Fred Carver, then Head of Policy at UNA-UK, highlighted the risks in the Sahel, where recent drought, desertification and soil loss have contributed to scarcity and worsened power imbalances. He noted that young people “with less to lose and less to farm see fewer reasons not to take up arms”.⁴⁰ Climate change has been described as a “threat multiplier”.⁴¹
- The participation⁴² of **non-state armed actors in conflict**, who may have “increasing sway”.⁴³ Non-state actors face limited accountability if they perpetrate atrocity crimes.⁴⁴ The International Rescue Committee warned of a growing “lawlessness of war”. It catalogued the range of non-state actors involved in conflict today, including private military contractors, armed opposition groups, criminal gangs and transnational militias.⁴⁵
- **A permissive environment for hate speech**,⁴⁶ which can incite identity-based violence (see paras 37–44). Internews Europe told us that “media, online and social media platforms with significant reach” have been “deployed as part of deliberate efforts to dehumanise particular ethnic or religious groups, to disseminate grievance-based narratives and to incite violence”.⁴⁷ For example, Myanmar saw a rapid increase in internet users between 2010 and 2017, from 130,000 to 17 million users.⁴⁸ In March 2018, the UN’s Fact-Finding Mission to

37 Data from between 1945 and 2010 suggest that most mass atrocities occurred in the context of armed conflicts. Professor Bellamy, [Mass Atrocities and Armed Conflict: Links, Distinctions, and Implications for the Responsibility to Prevent](#), Stanley Centre, 2011, p 2. On the link between atrocities and conflict, see also Lord Ahmad, [Q67](#), as well as Denisa Delić, [Q3](#), who stated that civilians make up 70% of victims in today’s conflicts.

38 Cabinet Office, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, [CP 403](#), March 2021, p 29

39 REDRESS Trust Limited ([DPA0014](#)) para 8

40 Fred Carver, [As the Sahel becomes Sahara](#), 18 September 2017

41 [Q21](#) [Savita Pawnday]

42 All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG) ([DPA0010](#)); International Rescue Committee UK ([DPA0026](#)); Coalition for Genocide ([DPA0021](#)); US Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide ([DPA0030](#)). Upcoming research from the European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect will map the role of non-state armed groups in mass atrocities in Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Somalia, the DRC and the Central African Republic.

43 International Rescue Committee UK ([DPA0026](#)) para 3.3

44 Coalition for Genocide Response ([DPA0021](#)).

45 International Rescue Committee UK ([DPA0026](#)) para 3.5.3. Specifically, it lists private military contractors in Central African Republic and Mozambique, armed opposition groups in Yemen, Syria and Myanmar, well-armed criminal gangs in Haiti and Honduras, and transnational jihadist groups/‘self-defence’ militias in the Sahel. These actors are also present in other countries.

46 [Q21](#) [Savita Pawnday]

47 Internews Europe ([DPA0011](#))

48 [Internet users in Myanmar increased by 97% in 1 year, 70% are mobile users](#), Internet in Myanmar, 11 April 2017; [Upgrading Myanmar’s internet access](#), The Myanmar Times, 21 June 2018.

Myanmar declared that Facebook played a “determining role” in violence against the Rohingya people.⁴⁹ Armed groups in Ethiopia reportedly used Facebook to incite violence against ethnic minorities.⁵⁰

- **Threats to democracies and to “institutions that guarantee individual freedoms”.**⁵¹ Denisa Delić, Advocacy Director at the International Rescue Committee UK, warned that the “system of international law, with rights for citizens and responsibilities for states, is in retreat”.⁵²

Dr Beth Van Schaack, now the United States Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice, observed in October 2021 that “the shocks of a global pandemic, the enduring throes of populism and authoritarianism, and relentless climate change” reflect the “continuing urgency” of global leadership to prevent atrocities.⁵³ The All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group warned of “what appears to be the growing risk” of identity-based mass atrocity crimes worldwide.⁵⁴

15. Mass atrocities not only reflect deep inhumanity but undermine global stability at a time when population displacement is more pronounced than at any point since World War Two. Key trends today may fuel greater violence, for instance climate change, threats to democracies and the involvement of non-state actors in conflict. The Prime Minister has expressed her personal commitment to preventing mass atrocities, seeing this as morally right and “absolutely” in the UK’s strategic interest. Without concerted action, however, mass atrocities are likely to become more common, which will constrain global development.

49 [UN: Facebook has turned into a beast in Myanmar](#), BBC News, 13 March 2018

50 [Facebook knew it was being used to incite violence in Ethiopia. It did little to stop the spread, documents show](#), CNN, 3 July 2022

51 [Q21](#) [Savita Pawnday]. See also Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 2.5

52 [Q4](#)

53 Dr Beth Van Schaack, [Atrocities Prevention and Response; a good governance blueprint](#), American Bar Association, 2021

54 All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG) ([DPA0010](#)) para 1.2

3 Policy response

16. The UK has long-standing commitments to prevent mass atrocities under not only the ‘Responsibility to Protect’,⁵⁵ but international law.⁵⁶ Witnesses repeatedly argued that, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the UK has a particular responsibility to prioritise preventing atrocities⁵⁷ that “disturb the peace and security of the international system”.⁵⁸

Current limits to multilateral action

17. In theory the international community, and in particular the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), plays a central role in protecting populations. The UNSC has several relevant powers at its disposal, which are set out in Figure 2.⁵⁹

Figure 2: UNSC powers to protect populations

- Introducing international sanctions;⁶⁰
- Setting up peacekeeping operations;
- Making referrals to the International Criminal Court, if atrocity crimes appear to have been committed;⁶¹
- Authorising intervention involving the use of force, if peaceful means of protection prove “inadequate”⁶²; and
- Agreeing resolutions that are legally binding on the international community.

55 See para 1 above.

56 For example, on preventing genocide, respecting human rights, protecting civilians in conflict and regulating the transfer of arms. These obligations stem from customary international law and from treaties that the UK has ratified, including (but not limited to) the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the Geneva Conventions, the Hague Conventions, the Arms Trade Treaty, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

57 Search for Common Ground ([DPA0002](#)) para 2; Dr Aidan Hehir ([DPA0004](#)); UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group ([DPA0013](#)) para 2.4; Oxford Institute for Ethics Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) ([DPA0016](#)); The Jo Cox Foundation ([DPA0018](#)) para 5.1; Dr Cristina G. Stefan ([DPA0024](#)) para 2.3.

58 Dr Cristina G. Stefan ([DPA0024](#)) para 2.3.

59 According to the Responsibility to Protect, states have primary responsibility for protecting populations within their borders, but the international community (via the United Nations) has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian or other peaceful means to protect civilian populations. The UN Security Council is the body with primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. UN General Assembly, [2005 World Summit Outcome](#), Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 September 2005 (A/RES/60/1), paras 138, 139.

60 These can be general (economic and trade sanctions) and targeted (such as arms embargoes, travel bans and financial/commodity restrictions).

61 International Criminal Court, [Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court](#), Article 13.

62 If a state is manifestly failing to protect its population and peaceful means are “inadequate”, the international community also commits to take “timely and decisive” action, through the Security Council, in accordance with Chapter VII of the UN Charter, “on a case-by-case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations”. UN General Assembly, [2005 World Summit Outcome](#), Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 September 2005 (A/RES/60/1), paras 138, 139; United Nations, [UN Charter](#), Chapter VII, Articles 39–42.

18. The Security Council has used these powers to protect populations.⁶³ However, several witnesses,⁶⁴ including the UK Government,⁶⁵ emphasised that, in many cases, the UN Security Council is failing to act in response to mass atrocities. The veto power held by the five permanent members (P5)⁶⁶ prevents the Council from authorising any multilateral action that threatens the interests of one or more permanent members. Witnesses told us that gridlock in the Security Council had held back multilateral action on several crises in the last decade, including Myanmar, Syria, Yemen and Ethiopia. Furthermore, the threat of the veto prevented referrals to the International Criminal Court of suspected atrocities in China, Myanmar, Syria and beyond.⁶⁷

19. Owing to entrenched and potentially deepening divisions between the permanent members of the Security Council,⁶⁸ witnesses generally warned of a “new age of impunity”,⁶⁹ “a rising sense of impunity among perpetrators”⁷⁰ and “an environment where impunity is rampant, where every human right or human rights-oriented norm or protection-oriented norm is under attack”.⁷¹ Natalie Samarasinghe, then Chief Executive Officer of UNA-UK, warned in January of the threat to the legitimacy of the UN “if we fail in that very fundamental promise to protect people”.⁷²

20. The UK Government emphasised its diplomatic engagement at the multilateral level to prevent atrocities. It “supports the deployment of all appropriate tools available to the UN”.⁷³ It engages with the UNSC, General Assembly and the Human Rights Council,⁷⁴ and it has “pledged never to vote against a credible draft UNSC resolution that seeks to

63 There have been over 80 resolutions in the Security Council that mention R2P. Recent examples include extending the UN peacekeeping missions in South Sudan, the DRC and the Central African Republic. See [Q20](#) [Savita Pawnday]; Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, [UN Security Council Resolutions and Presidential Statements Referencing R2P](#), 2 June 2022.

64 For instance, UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group ([DPA0013](#)) para 2.4; Coalition for Genocide ([DPA0021](#)); International Rescue Committee UK ([DPA0026](#)) para 3.5.2

65 Speaking at the UN Security Council, UK Ambassador James Roscoe stated “the reality is that time and time again, Members — especially some Permanent Members of this Council — block our attempts to protect civilians. They often use spurious arguments, designed to obscure their real self-interested reasons, and when they do this, they negate the true purpose of this Council — to save civilians from the horrors of war.” UK Government, [Wherever there is war or armed conflict, civilians are always caught in the middle: UK Statement at the UN Security Council](#), 25 May 2022

66 The five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States) have the power to vote against a Council decision, which it strikes it down entirely.

67 Coalition for Genocide ([DPA0021](#)); [Q23](#) [Savita Pawnday]

68 The International Rescue Committee judges that P5 members are “increasingly willing to deploy their vetoes to prevent action on conflicts where they have an interest”. International Rescue Committee UK ([DPA0026](#)) para 3.5.2

69 [Q3](#) [Denisa Delić]

70 Coalition for Genocide Response ([DPA0021](#))

71 [Q21](#) [Savita Pawnday]

72 [Q22](#)

73 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [UK approach to preventing mass atrocities](#), 2019

74 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [UK approach to preventing mass atrocities](#), 2019

prevent or halt mass atrocities”.⁷⁵ The UK participates in the Global Network of R2P Focal Points⁷⁶ and was one of 83 UN Member States to back a recent initiative to improve scrutiny by the General Assembly when the veto is used.⁷⁷

21. The UK has joined other UN Member States in working to strengthen accountability for mass atrocities, warning that “atrocities can recur if there is a history of widespread impunity”.⁷⁸ It has made particular effort to create avenues for justice for Ukrainian victims of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.⁷⁹ It has also supported work to preserve evidence of mass atrocities in other contexts.⁸⁰

22. Dr Stefan, Founding Co-Director of the European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, believed that the UK could do “much more” to “match” its multilateral commitments with “an integrated strategy on prevention of, and protection from, atrocities”.⁸¹ Protection Approaches told us that since 2019 the UK had started to take “welcome” steps towards a “more holistic agenda”, recognising that its ‘Responsibility to Protect’ should represent a “strategic objective to be embedded across UK national government”, rather than solely “via rhetorical and diplomatic contributions in New York”.⁸²

23. Despite the UN Security Council’s role in protecting populations and its considerable powers, it faces gridlock in practice. The threat of an UNSC permanent member exercising its veto constrains international action to prevent and end “conscience-shocking” mass atrocities, which raises fears of an ‘age of impunity’. The UK Government must therefore pursue other means and use other channels to prevent atrocities, while simultaneously advocating multilateral diplomacy and institutional reform.

Unilateral policy

24. Since 2019, the Government has taken steps to clarify its approach to preventing mass atrocities, as set out in Figure 3.

75 Department for International Development, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence, [UK Approach to Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict](#), 27 August 2020

76 An R2P Focal Point is a senior official within a national government who facilitates national mechanisms for atrocity prevention and promotes international cooperation by participating in the Global Network. The UK Government has an R2P Focal Point and is a Member of the Network. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, [Global Network of R2P Focal Points](#), accessed 22 September 2022. See also [Q19](#) [Savita Pawnday]

77 [General Assembly Adopts Landmark Resolution Aimed at Holding Five Permanent Security Council Members Accountable for Use of Veto](#), UN Press Release, GA/12417, 26 April 2022

78 FCDO ([DPA0022](#)) para 20

79 For example, joining a group referral of the atrocities to the International Criminal Court, using targeted economic sanctions and supporting evidence-gathering efforts of the UN Human Rights Council and OSCE. Oral evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 7 March 2022, HC (2021–22) 518, [Qq 639, 640, 660–661](#) [Elizabeth Truss], [Q 664](#) [Thomas Drew]. See also UK Government, [EU, US, and UK establish Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group \(ACA\) for Ukraine: joint statement](#), 25 May 2022

80 For instance, Syria and Myanmar. See [Q23](#) [Savita Pawnday]

81 Dr Cristina G. Stefan ([DPA0024](#)) para 4.1

82 Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) paras 3.1, 3.4

Figure 3: UK Government actions on atrocity prevention

Timing	Action	Detail
2019	Release of the policy paper, the "UK Approach to Preventing Mass Atrocities". ⁸³	<p>Designated the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (now FCDO) as the lead Department for policy on atrocity prevention.</p> <p>Identified that the Department for International Development (now FCDO), Ministry of Defence and other Departments have responsibilities.</p> <p>Set out the tools that the UK uses to prevent mass atrocities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - early warning mechanisms to identify countries at risk of instability, conflict and atrocities - diplomacy to help de-escalate tensions and resolve disputes - development/programmatic support to address the root causes of conflict - defence and policing tools, which may include deployments of UK armed forces, to assist with training and capacity building in the security sector. <p>Identified the responsible Minister (Lord Ahmad, Minister of State for the United Nations and the Commonwealth).⁸⁴</p>
(March) 2021	Release of the Government's Integrated Review ⁸⁵	<p>Prioritised an integrated approach to conflict and instability.</p> <p>Committed to place "greater emphasis on addressing the drivers of conflict (such as grievances, political marginalisation and criminal economies), atrocity prevention and strengthening fragile countries' resilience to external interference".</p> <p>Foresaw the creation of a conflict centre to develop and lead a new 'strategic conflict agenda'.⁸⁶</p>
(February) 2022	Launch of the conflict centre in the Integrated Review. ⁸⁷	Officially known as the 'Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation' (OCSM), this leads atrocity prevention work at the heart of Government.

83 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [UK approach to preventing mass atrocities](#), 2019

84 During this inquiry, the Government also told us that the Foreign Secretary is ultimately responsible for UK atrocity prevention policy across government. FCDO ([DPA0032](#))

85 Cabinet Office, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, [CP 403](#), March 2021

86 Cabinet Office, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, [CP 403](#), March 2021, p 79

87 [Letter](#) from Vicky Ford MP, then Minister for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, to the Right Hon. Baroness Anelay of St Johns DBE, Tom Tugendhat MP, Sarah Champion MP, 9 February 2022

Timing	Action	Detail
(May) 2022	Announcement of a new hub in the OCSM ⁸⁸	This “conflict and atrocity prevention hub” will pilot “approaches to conflict and atrocity prevention” and develop “a new conflict and early warning system” ⁸⁹

25. In addition to the actions in Figure 3, the Government highlighted other atrocity prevention work that overlaps with existing policies.⁹⁰ Some of those policies focus on preventing atrocities in certain contexts or ending discrimination and persecution based on certain characteristics:

- the **Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) initiative** addresses religious persecution around the world.⁹¹
- the **Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict (PSVI) initiative** is a long-standing policy to raise awareness of sexual violence in conflict and to “rally global action” to end such violence.⁹²
- the **Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda** seeks to “reduce the impact of conflict on women and girls” and to promote their inclusion in peacebuilding.⁹³
- the **Protection of Civilians initiative** promotes the compliance of State and non-State actors with the agreed rules of war, which seek to protect civilians while acknowledging military considerations.⁹⁴

Those policies are interlinked. For instance, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy argued that prioritising women’s political inclusion in conflict prevention and peacebuilding via the Women, Peace and Security agenda can support a “degree of political consensus

88 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, *The UK Government’s Strategy for International Development*, CP 676, May 2022, para 23; Q86 [Leigh Stubblefield]

89 Q86 [Leigh Stubblefield]. See Chapter 4 for more discussion of this hub

90 Those listed in the Government’s 2019 policy paper include Women, Peace and Security; Girls’ Education, the Protection of Civilians; Children and Armed Conflict; Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict; tackling Modern Slavery; promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief (including tackling the persecution of Christians); and Freedom of the Media. The government has since highlighted that its sanctions work is also relevant. Foreign Affairs Committee, Fifth Special Report of Session 2021–22, *Never Again: The UK’s Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond: Government Response to the Committee’s Second Report*, HC 840, p 16

91 The Government has recently published an Independent Report that assesses progress on its relevant work. Work is at an “advanced stage” to “convene ministers across government to agree a consistent international approach to FoRB ultimately to establish a standard FoRB Scale of Persecution (to include discrimination through to extreme violence)”. Additionally, the Government considers FoRB within “relevant conflict and violence risk factors”, although it has not developed a dedicated early warning mechanism on FoRB. Professor Sir Malcolm Evans, Professor Nazila Ghanea, Professor Ahmed Shaheed, Dr Gehan Gunatilleke and Dr Caroline Roberts, *Assessment of the implementation of recommendations of Bishop of Truro’s independent review of FCDO support for persecuted Christians*, 4 July 2022, para 2.2.1 and Annex

92 UK Government, *About us - Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative*. The UK has funded several relevant projects around the world and is considering a new International Convention. In May, the Government stated that it plans to release a new PSVI strategy. The UK will host an international PSVI conference later in 2022. Oral evidence taken on 18 May 2022, HC (2022–2023) 148, Q319 [Liz Truss]; Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, *The UK Government’s Strategy for International Development*, CP 676, May 2022, para 17.

93 FCDO (DPA0022) paras 9, 42. Consultation on a new National Action Plan will begin in 2023.

94 Specifically, it promotes compliance with international humanitarian law. Department for International Development, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence, *UK Approach to Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, 27 August 2020

that allows for stability and progress”.⁹⁵ Promoting the role of women in peace agreements may make such agreements more sustainable.⁹⁶ The FCDO believes that the new conflict centre (OCSM) will allow “greater integration” of its relevant work.⁹⁷

Cross-departmental strategy

26. Although the Government published a short policy paper in 2019 (see Figure 3), it has not set out an in-depth, cross-departmental strategy on preventing mass atrocities. We heard repeated calls for the UK to adopt such a strategy to guide its approach to preventing and responding to atrocity risks around the world.⁹⁸ Such arguments have also been advanced in Parliament.⁹⁹ In January 2022, Natalie Samarasinghe, then CEO of UNA-UK, told us that a strategy would allow for “greater intentionality” across different initiatives and clearer country prioritisation rather than a “mish-mash” of initiatives.¹⁰⁰

27. Other witnesses highlighted the interlinkages between the Government’s agendas for human protection.¹⁰¹ Dr Stefan, Founding Co-Director of the European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, judged that atrocity prevention must be “an intersecting agenda” and must also be “elevated to an institutionalised priority agenda alongside existing policies related to conflict prevention, development, democracy, and human rights promotion”.¹⁰²

28. Some organisations contended that the lack of a strategy undermined the UK Government’s response in key cases.¹⁰³ The UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group, a coalition of relevant Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), warned that

95 Westminster Foundation for Democracy (DPA0006) para 5

96 Laurel Stone, “[Women Transforming Conflict: A Quantitative Analysis of Female Peacemaking](#)”, SSRN, Working Paper (24 August 2014).

97 FCDO (DPA0022) para 41

98 Search for Common Ground (DPA0002) para 4; Ben Willis (DPA0008) paras 3.2, 3.9; All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG) (DPA0010) paras 5.1, 5.2; UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group (DPA0013) para 4.2; Oxford Institute for Ethics Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) (DPA0016) para I(7); The Jo Cox Foundation (DPA0018); Dr Cristina G. Stefan (DPA0024) paras 2.1–2.4; Protection Approaches (DPA0031) para 4.2. Also, implicitly Peace Direct (DPA0012) para 6; REDRESS Trust Limited (DPA0014) para 10

99 Both the International Development Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee (in this and previous Parliaments) have called for a cross-government strategy on atrocity prevention (the FAC generally, the IDC in the context of Tigray, Ethiopia). Foreign Affairs Committee, Twelfth Report of Session 2017–19, [Global Britain: The Responsibility to Protect and Humanitarian Intervention](#), HC 1005; International Development Committee, Tenth Report of Session 2019–21, [The humanitarian situation in Tigray](#), HC 1289, para 23. See also Policy Exchange, [The Cost of Doing Nothing The price of inaction in the face of mass atrocities](#), 2017, authored by Tom Tugendhat MP, Alison McGovern MP and Professor John Bew and based on the work of the late Jo Cox MP.

100 [Q27](#)

101 Westminster Foundation for Democracy (DPA0006) para 5; Dr Blake Lawrinson (DPA0017) para 5.1; Dr Cristina G. Stefan (DPA0024) para 3.2.

102 Dr Cristina G. Stefan (DPA0024) para 3.2.

103 Protection Approaches argued that it hampered the UK’s response to atrocities in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, Ethiopia, India, Myanmar, Russia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Protection Approaches (DPA0031) para 3.9. See also The Jo Cox Foundation (DPA0018) para 2.1; written evidence taken by the Foreign Affairs Committee, HC (2019–21), Burma Campaign UK (XIN0056) paras 1, 7

the persistent reluctance to look at cross-cutting, systemic gaps and to recognise the distinct challenge posed by mass atrocity crimes have left the UK repeatedly unprepared in the face of appalling situations of atrocity.¹⁰⁴

29. The UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group and others stated that a cross-departmental strategy could capture atrocity prevention work that falls outside the FCDO's remit, such as supply chains, export licensing, security sector assistance, border policy and trade.¹⁰⁵ Some witnesses questioned the extent to which the prevention of mass atrocities is currently a priority across the whole of Government.¹⁰⁶ Protection Approaches concluded that UK atrocity prevention currently lacks a budget, a policy, a strategy and a means of institutional co-ordination.¹⁰⁷

30. In the past, the Government argued that an atrocity prevention strategy was unnecessary, noting that its approach empowered FCDO geographical departments to consider atrocity risks in their specific regions, allowing for "agility and flexibility".¹⁰⁸ More recently, the Government has displayed greater willingness to consider the merits of such a strategy alongside its efforts to develop a strategic conflict framework.¹⁰⁹ The Government has also committed to include atrocity prevention in this framework.¹¹⁰ As the strategic conflict framework is not in the public domain, however, it is not possible to assess the extent to which atrocity prevention is a distinct priority separate from general conflict prevention. The FCDO has recognised the importance of an "institutionalised capability" to co-ordinate relevant activities across Government.¹¹¹

31. In 2019, the Government set out the tools that it can use to prevent mass atrocities, even at a time of multilateral gridlock. These tools include early warning mechanisms, diplomacy to de-escalate tensions, development support to address the root causes of conflict, and defence and policing tools.

32. Since 2019, the Government's approach to preventing mass atrocities has become clearer. In particular, welcome changes were implemented in the course of this inquiry. The Government has launched the Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation

104 UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group (DPA0013) para 2.3. This submission was co-signed by: Burma Campaign UK, Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Jo Cox Foundation, Korea Future, Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict, Peace Direct, Protection Approaches, Rights for Peace, Remembering Srebrenica, Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice, United Against Inhumanity, UNA-UK, Videre est Credere, Waging Peace.

105 UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group (DPA0013) para 2.5. Similar points in Ben Willis (DPA0008); All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG) (DPA0010); Oxford Institute for Ethics Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) (DPA0016); Protection Approaches (DPA0031).

106 For example, Ben Willis (DPA0008) para 1.4; Peace Direct (DPA0012) para 35. Peace Direct believed that other aspects of UK foreign policy could undermine atrocity prevention, pointing to the examples of support to authoritarian and violent regimes or multinationals, weapons exports, military campaigns that may strengthen support for armed and extremist groups, support for large infrastructure projects that exacerbate community tensions.

107 Protection Approaches (DPA0031) para 3.8

108 Foreign Affairs Committee, Fifth Special Report of Session 2021–22, [Never Again: The UK's Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report](#), HC 840, p 17 Q70 [Lord Ahmad]

110 The other areas of emphasis in the framework are addressing the drivers of conflict, strengthening fragile countries' resilience to external interference and delivering greater support to peace processes. [Letter](#) from Vicky Ford MP, Minister for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, to the Rt Hon. Baroness Anelay of St Johns DBE, Tom Tugendhat MP, Sarah Champion MP, 9 February 2022

111 Foreign Affairs Committee, Fifth Special Report of Session 2021–22, [Never Again: The UK's Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report](#), HC 840, p 17

(OCSM), which will contain a new hub to consider atrocity prevention. This hub will pilot interventions to prevent atrocities in ‘priority countries’ and build a new warning system for atrocities and conflict.

33. The UK must do more. A new cross-departmental strategy to prevent mass atrocities offers opportunities. It can drive greater coherence between existing policy initiatives on human protection. As the UK will not always be able to prevent mass atrocities, a strategy can also clarify the metrics by which the UK will measure the success of its efforts. The Government appears open to a new strategy, which NGOs, academics and many Members of Parliament have advocated for many years.

United States’ strategy

34. Witnesses highlighted the opportunities for the UK to learn from the United States.¹¹² The US recently released a Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities (SAPRA)¹¹³ (Figure 4). Both countries also aim to encourage others to “respect human rights, give freedom to their citizens and ultimately become democracies”, as well as to “move in a less autocratic direction”.¹¹⁴

112 Oxford Institute for Ethics Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) ([DPA0016](#)) para 21; US Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide ([DPA0030](#)).

113 US Department of State, [2022 United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities - United States Department of State](#), 15 July 2022

114 Oral evidence taken on 18 May 2022, HC (2022–2023) 148, [Q319](#) [Liz Truss]. For similar US objectives, see US Department of State, [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#), accessed 31 August 2022.

Figure 4: United States' approach

President Obama first recognised preventing mass atrocities as a US national security priority. Since then, its status has been elevated in US foreign policy, with the passage of legislation such as the Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017, the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018, the Caesar Civilian Protection Act of 2019, and the 2019 Global Fragility Act.

For example, the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act set up training for US Foreign Service Officers and established the Complex Crises Fund, as well as proposing that annual intelligence reports to Congress include greater atrocity crime information. The US Government must also periodically report back to Congress on its progress.¹¹⁵

There is currently a bill before the US Congress on 'Geospatial Support for Atrocity Accountability'. This aims to enable the State Department to obtain geospatial intelligence and satellite imagery, as well as to share this data with international partners like the International Commission on Missing Persons, international courts and local civil society. Uses of such data include locating missing people, providing evidence on war crimes and bringing perpetrators to justice.¹¹⁶

In July, the US Government released the (inter-agency) United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities (SAPRA). This reaffirms that atrocity prevention is central to the national security of the United States. It aims to "prevent, respond to, and recover from atrocities".

The Strategy identifies a coordinating body at the centre of Government: the White House-led Atrocity Prevention Task Force. The White House National Security Council leads the Task Force, which includes representatives from the Departments of State, Defense, Homeland Security and Justice, as well as the FBI, the Treasury, the US Agency for International Development, and the Intelligence Community. The Strategy makes clear the atrocity prevention responsibilities of each of these actors.

The Strategy sets three goals:

Pursue Action and Locally Driven Solutions in Priority Countries. The Task Force is responsible for identifying countries most at risk of atrocities and identifying priority countries for an "intensive focus".

Promote International Cooperation, Civil Society Engagement, and Strategic Public Messaging

Enable an Effective, Integrated US Government Prevention Architecture. Among other things, this involves ensuring that US Government personnel (including Foreign Service Officers in Task Force countries and other personnel) are trained to recognise and report on early warning indicators, escalatory risk and potential interventions.

Sources: US Department of State, [2022 United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities - United States Department of State](#), 15 July 2022; Beth Van Schacck; [Atrocities Prevention and Response; a good governance blueprint](#), the American Bar Association, October 2021; US Holocaust Memorial Museum's Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide ([DPA0030](#)); Oxford Institute for Ethics Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) ([DPA0016](#))

35. Although then Foreign Secretary Liz Truss MP told us in May that atrocity prevention is in the UK's strategic interest (para 2), atrocity prevention apparently does

115 For the most recent report, see [2022 Report to Congress Pursuant to Section 5 of the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 \(P.L. 115-441\)](#), 15 July 2022

116 [Stefanik, Spanberger Introduce Geospatial Support for Atrocity Accountability Act](#), Press Release of Congresswoman Elise Stefanik, 12 May 2022

not occupy the same place at the centre of government as it does in the United States.¹¹⁷ The UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group argued that the National Security Council's remit must encompass mass atrocities.¹¹⁸ Making the case for considering this topic within the NSC, witnesses highlighted the strategic and security benefits of preventing atrocities.¹¹⁹ Natalie Samarasinghe pointed to the “tangible” risks of failing to prevent atrocities, such as extremism, instability, lack of trade and refugee movements.¹²⁰ Acting to prevent atrocities before they occur may result in the loss of fewer lives and resources than responding afterwards.¹²¹ FCDO Minister Lord Ahmad told us that “where you can prevent an atrocity from occurring, it is in the best interest not just of the country but of us all.”¹²²

36. The United States has introduced sophisticated legislation on atrocity prevention, and it recently adopted an (inter-agency) Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities. The UK Government should take all opportunities to learn from, and collaborate with, the United States and like-minded partners in the Global Network of R2P Focal Points. Partnership is critical in the face of rising atrocity risks today. When possible, the UK and its partners should share the results of country risk assessments and collectively agree which national governments have the greatest leverage and/or influence to lead prevention initiatives in specific countries/regions.

Recognising identity-based violence

37. The Government has repeatedly underlined that its current approach to preventing atrocities prioritises preventing conflict, owing to its belief that atrocities are most likely in conflict situations.¹²³ Witnesses criticised taking an overly conflict-centred approach

117 The FCDO confirmed in June that the Foreign Secretary sits on the National Security Council and is responsible for atrocity prevention policy across the UK Government. However, atrocity prevention is not mentioned in the latest List of Cabinet Committees nor are atrocities mentioned in the 2020 National Risk Register. FCDO (DPA0032); Cabinet Office, [List of Cabinet Committees and their membership](#), accessed 31 August 2022; HM Government, [National Risk Register: 2020 edition](#), accessed 31 August 2022.

118 UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group (DPA0013) paras 2.5, 4.1. In September 2022, the Government published an updated list of Cabinet committees, which indicated that there is a new Foreign Policy and Security Council. This appears to have replaced the National Security Council. HM Government, [September 2022 Gov.uk committee list](#), accessed 28 September 2022.

119 [Qq 41, 42](#) [Natalie Samarasinghe]; UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group (DPA0013) para 4.1; [Qq 82, 85](#) [Lord Ahmad]; Protection Approaches (DPA0031) para 2.9

120 [Q41](#)

121 Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies is a multi-stakeholder partnership of 43 UN member states, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector. In relation to conflict prevention, the partnership stated that: “If current trends persist and no additional conflict prevention action is taken [...] it is expected that there will be three more countries at war and nine more countries at high risk of war by 2030 as compared to 2020. This translates into roughly 677,250 conflict-related fatalities (civilian and battle-deaths) between the present and 2030. By contrast, under our most pessimistic scenario, a 25% increase in effectiveness of conflict prevention would result in 10 more countries at peace by 2030, 109,000 fewer fatalities over the next decade and savings of over \$3.1 trillion. [...] These scenarios are approximations, yet demonstrate concrete and defensible estimates of both the benefits (saved lives, displacement avoided, declining peacekeeping deployments) and cost-effectiveness of prevention (recovery aid, peacekeeping expenditures).” Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, [Forecasting the dividends of conflict prevention from 2020–2030](#), July 2020, p 1. See also United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, [Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention](#), 2016, p 43.

122 [Q78](#)

123 In 2019, the Government stated “Given that the majority of atrocities occur in and around conflict, the UK has dedicated significant resources to addressing crises and conflict by means of a comprehensive cross-government response”. It maintained this approach in later statements. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [UK approach to preventing mass atrocities](#), 2019; FCDO (DPA0022) para 4; [PQ 9044 1](#) [on Crimes against humanity], 30 November 2021

to preventing atrocities.¹²⁴ The Oxford University Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict warned that the tools and strategies to prevent conflict are “sometimes unsuited” or even “diametrically opposed” to preventing mass atrocities.¹²⁵ It contended that conflict prevention strategies may “inadvertently create perverse incentives”:

Take, for example, the negotiation of peace and ceasefire agreements: armed groups may utilise violence against civilians as a way to assure themselves a seat at the negotiating table, or to utilise commitments to cease attacks as a bargaining tool in negotiations.¹²⁶

The Institute pointed to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s, where, it argued, the international community’s decision to prioritise conflict resolution contributed to mass atrocities perpetrated against Bosnian Muslims.¹²⁷

38. Many witnesses warned that over-focusing on conflict prevention could fail to protect the groups who face violence outside ‘hot’ conflicts. They cited the examples of North Korea, Venezuela and China and observed that atrocities can occur independently of conflict.¹²⁸ Protection Approaches stated that atrocities can also be a “major driver of modern conflict” rather than a consequence.¹²⁹ For instance, in Myanmar, violence against the Rohingya in 2017 “emboldened” the military to seize power. A similar effect was observed in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.¹³⁰ The NGO judged that

preparing for and enhancing atrocity prevention approaches requires analysis both of countries such as Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo where many risk factors for conflict and atrocity are present, but also countries such as Brazil, Egypt and Nigeria where hate speech and compromised state institutions give rise to the risks of so-called peacetime atrocities¹³¹

39. Some witnesses noted that the causes of atrocities can differ from those of conflict. Atrocity prevention therefore requires different processes of mapping and prediction. An approach overly focused on conflict may miss critical atrocity risks.¹³²

124 For example, Dr Ewelina U. Ochab ([DPA0001](#)); UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group ([DPA0013](#)) para 4.1; [Q25](#) [Savita Pawnday]; [Q25](#) [Natalie Samarasinghe]; Ben Willis ([DPA0008](#)) para 3.2; Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 2.4, Annex

125 Oxford Institute for Ethics Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) ([DPA0016](#)) para 5

126 Oxford Institute for Ethics Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) ([DPA0016](#)) para 6. See also [Q25](#) [Natalie Samarasinghe], who discussed the risks of prioritizing stability and disarmament in a way that leaves certain groups vulnerable.

127 Specifically, the Oxford Institute for Ethics Law and Armed Conflict argued that the arms embargo (which affected all sides equally) “inhibited the capacity of victims to protect themselves from imminent threats”, citing work by UNA-UK. Oxford Institute for Ethics Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) ([DPA0016](#)) para 5.

128 Dr Ewelina U. Ochab ([DPA0001](#)); Dr Cristina G. Stefan ([DPA0024](#)) para 2.2; Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) Annex I. See also Dr Blake Lawrinson ([DPA0017](#)) para 2.2. The EU’s Atrocity Prevention task force has reported that, since the end of World War Two, 32 percent of all cases of mass atrocities have occurred outside of a period of armed conflict. Examples include the Cambodian Genocide of the late 1970s, large-scale killings and disappearances in Chile and Argentina in 1980s, and the killings in East Timor in 1999. Task Force on the EU Prevention of Mass Atrocities, [The Distinction between Conflict Prevention and Mass Atrocity Prevention](#), p 2, accessed 31 August 2022.

129 Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) Annex I

130 Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) Annex I

131 Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 2.4

132 Ben Willis ([DPA0008](#)) para 1.5. Implicit in Dr Blake Lawrinson ([DPA0017](#)) para 3.2; Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 3.10.

40. Many witnesses, including the Government, underlined that identity-based targeting and marginalisation can act as a precursor to atrocities, even outside conflict.¹³³ Protection Approaches noted a specific pathology of violence, which is often motivated by “a politics of identity-based grievance, discrimination and/or human rights deficits” and which differs from the pathology of armed conflict.¹³⁴ The UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group described atrocities as “gross, widespread and systemic violations of human rights, often linked to identity”.¹³⁵

41. To take one example of identity-based targeting, many witnesses underlined the role that gender plays in the planning and perpetration of atrocities.¹³⁶ The Global Justice Center judged that “both men and women are targeted for specific types of harm and with particular intent as a consequence of their gender”.¹³⁷ For instance, perpetrators of mass atrocities may perceive men and boys as a greater threat, due to perceiving them as leaders or protectors. Consequentially, they may first target men and boys at the outbreak of violence. Alternatively, perpetrators may see women and girls as mothers, wives, providers of domestic work and protectors of family/community honour. These gender norms may make women and girls “more likely to experience sexual and reproductive violence, and killings further removed from the outbreak of violence”.¹³⁸ Indeed, the IRC UK noted that gender-based violence can “become normalised” in conflict. It estimated that one in five displaced women have experienced sexual violence, which “would amount to over 14 million women worldwide”.¹³⁹ In June 2022, UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN James Kariuki warned of a “disturbing” rise in sexual violence during the Russia-Ukraine war.¹⁴⁰ Sexual violence has been used with intent to wipe out a people, as occurred when “Serbian authorities planned the genocidal mass rapes of Bosnian [Muslim] women, aiming to destroy the continuity of their lineage”.¹⁴¹ Dr Stefan, Founding Co-Director of the European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, called for a ‘gender-sensitive framework’ when working to prevent atrocities.¹⁴² To be truly inclusive, atrocity

133 [Q93](#) [Lord Ahmad]; All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG) ([DPA0010](#)) para 4.5; Dr Anicee Van Engeland and Dr Gemma Collantes-Celador ([DPA0019](#)) paras 14, 16; Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 2.2; [Q28](#) [Savita Pawnday]; [Q29](#) [Natalie Samarasinghe]. See also Cabinet Office, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, [CP 403](#), March 2021, p 79, which notes grievances, political marginalisation and criminal economies as drivers of conflict.

134 Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 2.2. See this source for further explanation of this pathology of violence.

135 [Integrating atrocity prevention across UK policy: The need for a national strategy](#), Submission to the Integrated Review of International Policy from the UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group, August 2020

136 For example, Global Justice Center ([DPA0015](#)); Dr Martha O’Reilly ([DPA0020](#)) sections C and D; Saferworld ([DPA0003](#)) para 3; Yet Again UK ([DPA0023](#)); Dr Cristina G. Stefan ([DPA0024](#)) para 3. Other sources advocate gender-sensitivity in general, for example Conciliation Resources ([DPA0025](#)) para 12; Dr Blake Lawrinson ([DPA0017](#)) para 4.1.

137 Global Justice Center ([DPA0015](#))

138 Global Justice Center ([DPA0015](#))

139 International Rescue Committee UK ([DPA0026](#)) para 2.3.2

140 UK Government, [Russia’s illegal aggression in Ukraine has led to a disturbing increase in conflict-related sexual violence: UK Statement at the UN Security Council](#), 6 June 2022. Rape and other forms of sexual violence have also been used recently in Myanmar and Ethiopia (Tigray). See Independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar, Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar, [A/HRC/39/64](#), 12 September 2018, para 79; International Development Committee, Tenth Report of Session 2019–21, [The humanitarian situation in Tigray](#), HC 1289.

141 Yet Again UK ([DPA0023](#))

142 Dr Cristina G. Stefan ([DPA0024](#)) para 3.2

prevention must account for the range of identity factors that affect risks to individuals. Those factors include not only gender, but ethnicity, sexuality, religion, political opinion, disability and others.¹⁴³

42. In 2021, the Foreign Affairs Committee recommended a stronger UK focus on preventing atrocities outside conflict situations, when it examined the treatment of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, China.¹⁴⁴ Many witnesses to our inquiry supported early preventive action by the Government, rather than awaiting a court decision on the nature of a particular atrocity.¹⁴⁵ To show how awaiting court judgments can delay action, Yet Again UK cited past atrocities in Darfur, Sudan, and suspected atrocities ongoing in China.¹⁴⁶

43. The Government is apparently beginning to acknowledge the distinct value of atrocity prevention, as a related but separate objective from conflict prevention. It stated that it is “committed to doing all it can on atrocity prevention in all settings, including non-conflict settings”.¹⁴⁷ Then Foreign Secretary Liz Truss MP cited “appalling crimes” in Ukraine by Russian forces and stated that “these atrocities have not happened in isolation”. She argued that those crimes occurred because of

the culture that has developed in that country [Russia] over a number of years, and the impunity towards crimes against people. That is a result of Russia not having a free press and not having a proper democracy, and as a result of a degradation of the value of being human [...] it is important that we focus on the specifics of atrocity prevention, but we also need to be working towards a world where it is simply not acceptable to send your army into another country and commit those appalling war crimes.¹⁴⁸

44. In May 2022, FCDO Minister Lord Ahmad underlined the importance of protecting individuals outside conflict.¹⁴⁹ He told us that, when atrocities affect a particular community or group

the first thing you will see is discrimination. Then you will see persecution. Then that persecution will lead to violence and much worse. Our intervention should be at the early signs of discriminatory practice.¹⁵⁰

143 On specific threats to LGBT+ people, see Global Justice Center ([DPA0015](#)); Protection Approaches, [Queering Atrocity Prevention](#), 2022. On inclusivity and identity-based violence, see Protection Approaches, [Identity-Based Violence](#), accessed 8 September 2022.

144 It advocated specific actions, including clear guidance and mandatory training for all relevant departments about responsibilities for mass atrocity prevention, the implementation of early warning tools and mainstreaming non-conflict atrocity prevention thinking into the work of the new FCDO conflict centre. Foreign Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2021–22, [Never Again: The UK’s Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond](#), HC 198, paras 62–64

145 Specifically, there were concerns over awaiting judicial determinations of genocide, due to the difficulties and possible delays in proving this atrocity crime. Witnesses making this point included Dr Ewelina U. Ochab ([DPA0001](#)); Coalition for Genocide ([DPA0021](#)); Yet Again UK ([DPA0023](#)).

146 Yet Again UK ([DPA0023](#))

147 Foreign Affairs Committee, Fifth Special Report of Session 2021–22, [Never Again: The UK’s Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond: Government Response to the Committee’s Second Report](#), HC 840, p 16

148 Oral evidence taken on 18 May 2022, HC (2022–2023) 148, [Q319](#) [Liz Truss]

149 [Q67](#)

150 [Q93](#)

45. **Armed conflict and mass atrocities are linked, but overfocusing on conflict is likely to miss atrocity risks, to leave groups unprotected and to ignore how atrocities themselves can drive conflict. In addition to conflict prevention, the Government must explicitly recognise the separate but interlinked priority of atrocity prevention.**

46. **The Government must introduce a cross-departmental strategy for preventing and responding to mass atrocities globally, both within and outside of conflicts. It must strive for greater consistency of purpose across Government. The strategy must:**

- a) **support development by considering prevention at all stages of the policy cycle, recognising that prevention must begin before judicial determinations, and should continue even if atrocities are committed;**
- b) **clarify training, tools and methods to prevent atrocities, including the role of the UK's new sanctions regime;**
- c) **demonstrate and formalise how the UK will act in concert with like-minded international partners, particularly the United States;**
- d) **be inclusive to the many groups at risk of atrocities and recognise the wider circumstances that can drive discrimination and persecution, such as grievances, political marginalisation and criminal economies;**
- e) **prioritise the mitigation of atrocity risks across the whole of Government, including trade, supply chains, arms exports, education, asylum and border policy;**
- f) **take account of new threats and challenges, including new technology, climate change and the wide range of conflict actors; and**
- g) **build on the UK's positive efforts to secure justice for Ukrainian victims and consider how these can be applied to other contexts.**

47. **The Government must ensure consistency between a new strategy on atrocity prevention and the 'strategic conflict framework' under development. This framework itself must articulate atrocity prevention objectives, as distinct from general conflict prevention objectives.**

48. **The Government should ensure that Ministers provide regular and strategic direction to the UK's atrocity and conflict prevention policy by adding this to the agenda of the Foreign Policy and Security Council and giving the Secretariat responsibility for tracking implementation of the new atrocity prevention strategy (see para 46).**

49. **The UK Government must submit an annual report to Parliament on its actions to prevent atrocities. That report should be produced by the new Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (see paras 24, 51), with input from other teams in the FCDO and other relevant departments.**

50. **The new atrocity prevention strategy should be developed in consultation with civil society and relevant experts.**

4 Skills and capabilities

Conflict and atrocity prevention hub

51. The FCDO stated that its new Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM)¹⁵¹ will allow “greater integration” of its work on identity-based violence and mass atrocities through “more effective analysis of data, lesson learning and the sharing of expertise”.¹⁵² The OCSM is designed to “identify and develop capabilities where the UK has a comparative advantage”¹⁵³ and to provide “technical expertise and advice to HMG officials”.¹⁵⁴

52. As stated in Figure 3 (para 24), the OCSM’s new “conflict and atrocity prevention hub” will pilot “approaches to conflict and atrocity prevention” in “priority countries” and develop “a new conflict and early warning system”.¹⁵⁵ The Deputy Director leading that project told us that the hub will provide a mandate to drive “more of a coherent and co-ordinated approach to atrocity risks”.¹⁵⁶

53. It is not clear which countries the Government currently considers to be at risk of mass atrocities.¹⁵⁷ It is also unclear how it will decide ‘priority’ countries for piloting new approaches¹⁵⁸ and what the current budget for the new hub is.¹⁵⁹ In May 2022, the OCSM included some 100 staff deployed across four thematic areas, namely conflict and atrocity prevention, gender and conflict, security and stability, and mediation and peace processes.¹⁶⁰

54. Pete Vowles, Head of the UK Mission in Myanmar, stated that Heads of Mission should have access to the latest evidence on different approaches to prevention.¹⁶¹ In May 2022, the OCSM convened a “leadership group” for Heads of Mission and Ambassadors to learn from one another.¹⁶²

151 The Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM) has undergone name changes. It covers both the ‘conflict centre’ foreseen in the Integrated Review and the ‘conflict directorate’ sometimes referred to by Government. Oral evidence taken on 18 May 2022, HC (2022–2023) 148, [Qq 321–322](#) [Sir Philip Barton]; [Q80](#) [Leigh Stubblefield]

152 FCDO ([DPA0022](#)) para 41

153 Foreign Affairs Committee, Fifth Special Report of Session 2021–22, [Never Again: The UK’s Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond: Government Response to the Committee’s Second Report](#), HC 840, p 18

154 FCDO ([DPA0022](#)) para 16

155 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, *The UK Government’s Strategy for International Development*, [CP 676](#), May 2022, para 23; [Q86](#) [Leigh Stubblefield]

156 [Q86](#) [Leigh Stubblefield]

157 The FCDO has said that an indicator of atrocity risks can be “a significant increase in violations and abuses of international human rights law and breaches of international humanitarian law”. It noted that “UK action includes condemning human rights violations and abuses in Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, Libya, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, and violations of human rights occurring in China. Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, the FCDO has been working with partners to protect human rights.” PQ [1067 2](#) [on Crimes against humanity], 26 January 2022

158 Lord Ahmad told us that the UK’s atrocity prevention efforts focus on “various countries where there are conflict situations”, as well as “countries where perhaps by definition there are non-conflict associations, but there is a humanitarian crisis unfolding”. He cited Bosnia and Herzegovina, where a conflict is not taking place but where “you cannot take your eye off the ball”. [Q73](#)

159 [Q89](#) [Leigh Stubblefield]

160 [Q80](#) [Leigh Stubblefield]

161 [Q53](#) [Pete Vowles]

162 [Q103](#) [Leigh Stubblefield]

55. *The Government must empower the new Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM) in the FCDO by allocating appropriate funds and staff to meet the scale of the UK's ambitions.*

56. *The OCSM must:*

- a) *ensure that UK posts and desks for priority countries can access the training and resources that they need, including when factoring relevant thematic objectives into country plans;*
- b) *provide the expertise to enable greater awareness of atrocity risks; and*
- c) *strengthen co-ordination, the exchange of lessons and intelligence-sharing across related teams in the FCDO, such as the Open Societies and Sanctions teams, and related Departments, such as the Ministry of Defence, the Joint Intelligence Office, the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and the Treasury.*

Maximising UK diplomacy

Supporting UK missions overseas and FCDO country desks

57. The FCDO's geographic departments lead atrocity prevention in "close partnership with UK Embassies and High Commissions overseas".¹⁶³ Within individual countries, Ambassadors and other Heads of Mission are expected to deliver all the UK's objectives and see themselves as ultimately responsible for the success of the UK's atrocity prevention efforts.¹⁶⁴ Pete Vowles, Head of UK Mission, Myanmar, told us that "the buck stops with me".¹⁶⁵ UK Heads of Mission are also set to have greater power to decide how funding is allocated in-country.¹⁶⁶ Other personnel in Embassy teams may also have relevant responsibilities.¹⁶⁷

58. The FCDO has stated that "all geographical departments have access to relevant expertise on atrocity prevention when formulating policy".¹⁶⁸ The FCDO's International Academy provides training for all staff in sanctions and conflict prevention, "including a dedicated training module on atrocity prevention". Data on the uptake of training showed that in the year up to 5 June 2022:

- 262 people completed at least one of the three Conflict Prevention modules; and
- 45 people "engaged with" the 'Atrocity Response' module, which is separately and interchangeably referred to by the Government as the atrocity prevention module.¹⁶⁹

163 FCDO (DPA0022) para 7

164 Q47 [Matthew Field]; Q47 [Pete Vowles]. Lord Ahmad confirmed the "consolidated" responsibility sits with the ambassador or the high commissioner. Q101

165 Q47 [Pete Vowles]

166 Oral evidence taken on 18 May 2022, HC (2022–2023) 148, Q255 [Liz Truss]

167 For example, human rights advisers, political counsellors and officials leading relationships with civil society organisations. Although the allocation of responsibilities "depends on the nature of the country", Lord Ahmad confirmed that each country team will include an individual with "specific responsibility" for monitoring the early warnings of atrocities. Q101

168 Foreign Affairs Committee, Fifth Special Report of Session 2021–22, *Never Again: The UK's Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report*, HC 840, p 17

169 FCDO (DPA0032)

59. The FCDO does not hold collated data on the grade and the role of learners, which makes it impossible to assess the number of, for example, Ambassadors who completed these training modules. The geographic distribution of training uptake is unclear. The FCDO highlighted “engagement from across the network”.¹⁷⁰ In the year to 5 June 2022:

- Conflict prevention training was accessed by UK Posts in five countries: Kuwait, Tunis (Tunisia), Bogota (Colombia), Juba (South Sudan), and Tbilisi (Georgia).
- ‘Atrocity Response’ training was accessed by UK Posts in five countries: Kathmandu (Nepal), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Bilbao (Spain), Yangon (Myanmar), and Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina).¹⁷¹

60. In June 2022, UK Posts covered 180 countries and territories.¹⁷² This means that UK Posts in the vast majority of countries and territories, which equates to more than 90%, do not appear to have recently accessed the available training on conflict and atrocity prevention. In addition, such training has not been completed by UK Missions or geographic teams in countries subject to ongoing human rights violations and abuses.¹⁷³ Protection Approaches was concerned whether Embassies are accessing the right support:

Our work has found that requests from HMG embassy teams to Whitehall for support on atrocity prevention, from modest funds for training to guidance on where in Whitehall to direct urgent concerns, are often left unsatisfied or unanswered. [...] Country teams are increasingly coming to Protection Approaches to request training or other support but are unable to pay for the costs of those activities.¹⁷⁴

It warned that “leading” country teams are “curtailed in their efforts by the persistent lack of clarity on what HMG’s positions are in relation to mass atrocities, their prevention, and possible policy responses in the face of rising risk.”¹⁷⁵

61. The provision of additional support beyond training is currently opaque (see Figure 5).

170 FCDO ([DPA0032](#))

171 FCDO ([DPA0032](#))

172 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office posts overseas: June 2022](#), updated 16 June 2022, accessed 2 September 2022

173 In January, the FCDO told us the UK condemns human rights violations/abuses in: Cameroon, Central African Republic, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, Libya, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. It has also been working to protect human rights in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover. PQ [1067 2](#) [on Crimes against humanity], 26 January 2022. Of this list, only Myanmar is explicitly named in the FCDO data as a country where the Post has engaged with the Atrocity Response module in the year up to 5 June 2022. There is some ambiguity over whether the FCDO data omits any UK missions that have accessed training.

174 Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 3.11

175 Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 3.11

Figure 5: Missing information about additional sources of support

Source of support	Missing information
Over 90 (permanent) conflict advisers , advising in-country teams, geographic departments and the Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM). ¹⁷⁶	Which regions/ countries they support and how advisers are assigned. ¹⁷⁷ The specific expertise they have in atrocity prevention.
An FCDO “roster” of around 500 external experts ¹⁷⁸	How much country desks/missions use the roster; The specialisms of these experts
“Technical expertise and advice” from the (new) Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation. ¹⁷⁹	Nature and level of OCSM support available; Uptake of existing support.

Case studies: UK Missions in Myanmar and in Bosnia and Herzegovina

62. To understand further the experiences of UK Heads of Mission, we heard from the outgoing UK Ambassador in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the Head of the UK Mission in Myanmar¹⁸⁰ (see Figure 6).

176 These FCDO advisers “deliver policy and programmatic support to reduce conflict and build peace”. FCDO (DPA0022) para 23

177 Lord Ahmad explained that as conflicts arise and situation worsen, “we are able to despatch specialists as per requirements”. [Q77](#)

178 [Q78](#) [Leigh Stubblefield]

179 FCDO (DPA0022) para 168

180 Officially, Chargé d’Affaires.

Figure 6: Context for UK Missions in Myanmar and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced atrocities and conflict in the 1990s, including the 1995 Srebrenica genocide. While the 1995 Dayton Accord brought peace, the Ambassador described the situation as a “frozen peace”. He added that the country is still dealing with legacy issues from that agreement.

Speaking in May 2022, the Ambassador said that, if anything, the situation has got worse in the past year, due to increases in hate speech, the denial of genocide and recent steps by some to undermine the institutions set up after the conflict. The Ambassador’s concerns led him to seek greater support from London, other posts and external experts. He opined that the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is “uniquely complicated” but added that “many of the things we are talking about are entirely consistent” with challenges in Uganda, Sudan, Myanmar, Colombia and other places.¹⁸¹

In **Myanmar**, the country’s military carried out a campaign of “indiscriminate killings, rape and sexual violence, arbitrary detention, torture, beatings, and forced displacement”¹⁸² against the Rohingya minority in 2016 and 2017. The United States Administration concluded that those operations constitute crimes against humanity and genocide.¹⁸³ The military coup in February 2021 led to civil war and further violence against civilians.¹⁸⁴

The Head of the UK Mission in Myanmar warned that the political situation in-country has made it difficult for the Mission to operate.¹⁸⁵ Some witnesses argued that the UK missed warning signs before the mass violence against the Rohingya,¹⁸⁶ and the Government has spoken of lessons it has learned since the crisis.¹⁸⁷

63. Myanmar and Bosnia and Herzegovina represent two of the five UK Posts known to have accessed some of the FCDO’s relevant training. The Heads of Mission in these countries both found training they accessed useful.¹⁸⁸ Additionally, HMA Matthew Field in Bosnia and Herzegovina felt “supported and directed by FCDO”, including via “ministerial and senior official support” in “recent months”.¹⁸⁹ Both Heads of Mission praised key individuals in the Mission. For instance, the Head of the UK Mission in Myanmar, Pete Vowles, picked out the “fantastic conflict team”, as well as the “dedicated human rights and atrocity prevention officer”. He added:

We are thinking about atrocity prevention within conflict and outside of the conflict as absolutely integral to everybody’s work, whether you are a humanitarian adviser or whether you are thinking about sanctions [...] It is built in across the whole embassy¹⁹⁰

181 [Qq44–45, 47](#) [Matthew Field]

182 Global Justice Center ([DPA0015](#)). See also Internews Europe ([DPA0011](#)).

183 US Department of State, [Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya in Burma](#), 21 March 2022

184 [One year on from Myanmar’s military coup](#), Commons Library Briefing 9445, 2 February 2022

185 [Q53](#)

186 For example, [Q35](#) [Savita Pawnday]; Gillian McKay ([DPA0009](#)) paras 6, 14, 20–21; Ben Willis ([DPA0008](#)) para 1.6; UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group ([DPA0013](#)) para 2.3. The Head of Mission in Myanmar discussed lessons after the crisis. [Q54](#). See also Dr Kate Ferguson, “[For the Wind Is in the Palm-Trees: The 2017 Rohingya Crisis and an Emergent UK Approach to Atrocity Prevention](#)”, *Global Responsibility to Protect*, vol 13 (2021), pp 244–271

187 [Q54](#) [Pete Vowles]

188 [Q52](#) [Matthew Field]; [Q52](#) [Pete Vowles]. Both referred to modules on the intranet, which are likely to have been either the Conflict Prevention training or the Atrocity Response training.

189 [Q47](#)

190 [Q47](#)

The UK Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina does not include a dedicated atrocity prevention adviser. However, the Ambassador found it “incredibly useful” to have a conflict adviser, “especially [...] in the western Balkans”.¹⁹¹ The Heads of Mission also praised the support that they receive from locally engaged staff, external partners and experts.¹⁹² The Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina emphasised that, even with a strong Embassy team, he needs to draw on external expertise in crises.¹⁹³

64. Although the UK Ambassador in Bosnia and Herzegovina had positive views on the training, “with hindsight” he wished that he had undertaken it when he was new in post and before the situation in-country worsened. He pointed out that it is “very difficult to make time for the learning” during a crisis. He stated that, “Of course you don’t know a crisis is coming, but I think particularly coming into a country like Bosnia and Herzegovina, where this clearly will be a major focus, I would do things differently.”¹⁹⁴

Other training concerns

65. Ambassadors and other staff are not compelled to undertake training on atrocity prevention before going to work in a country, but they are subject to “diplomatic and gentle encouragement”.¹⁹⁵ Despite the voluntary nature of training before deployment, Lord Ahmad assured us that staff “are versed in the drivers to a particular conflict in advance”, and that they receive training on sensitive matters, such as religious intolerance.¹⁹⁶ He added that the training is widely shared so that “all our high commissioners and ambassadors are fully aware” of it.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, “details of the latest atrocity response module were circulated to all FCDO staff in 2021”.¹⁹⁸

66. Information on the content of training is limited.¹⁹⁹ Some witnesses expressed concerns about the training content. Ben Willis, Associate Lecturer at the University of Plymouth, expressed doubts about the appropriateness of some training that he had seen. He noted that the ‘Conflict’ module contained little on atrocity prevention.²⁰⁰ He stated that the ‘Atrocity Response’ module

does not address prevention issues—such as identifying risk factors and early warning signs or developing programming and policy responses—and instead addresses investigative, criminal prosecution, and transitional justice measures. The training is also entirely voluntary for staff in at-risk countries.²⁰¹

191 [Q47](#)

192 [Q52](#) [Matthew Field]; [Qq 52–53](#) [Pete Vowles]

193 [Q53](#) [Matthew Field]

194 [Q52](#) [Matthew Field]

195 [Q105](#) [Lord Ahmad]. The Government did not directly accept a recommendation of the Foreign Affairs Committee in 2021 to introduce a “mandatory refresher course [on atrocity prevention] every three years for all staff in diplomatic, programming, or policy-related roles”. Foreign Affairs Committee, Fifth Special Report of Session 2021–22, [Never Again: The UK’s Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond: Government Response to the Committee’s Second Report](#), HC 840, p 17

196 [Q97](#)

197 [Q104](#)

198 FCDO ([DPA0022](#)) para 26

199 For instance, the atrocity prevention training covers “different options for action with country cases”. FCDO ([DPA0032](#))

200 There is “a brief sub-section” on R2P and its implementation at the UN. Ben Willis ([DPA0008](#)) para 2.6

201 Ben Willis ([DPA0008](#)) para 2.6

He called on the FCDO to develop an ‘Atrocity Prevention Toolkit’.²⁰² The UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group wanted UK country teams to receive atrocity prevention training on “how to monitor, analyse, communicate and respond to risks of mass violence”.²⁰³ Similarly, Peace Direct believed that Embassies need training on how to spot the early warning signs of mass atrocities.²⁰⁴ The FCDO is currently considering how it might improve its training offer.²⁰⁵

67. Some witnesses called for atrocity prevention to be embedded more clearly in the work of UK Missions abroad and/or to be incorporated into country plans.²⁰⁶ Several witnesses called for a clearer communication protocol to allow UK embassies to raise the alarm when atrocities begin or are believed to be imminent.²⁰⁷ The UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group concluded that

Recent experiences in Myanmar, DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo], Sudan and Afghanistan have illustrated the extent to which Government would benefit from establishing a clear, light-touch internal communications protocol setting out how to monitor imminent warning signs, triggering moments, indicators and risk factors; when and how to raise the alarm—both across government and externally—and guidance on escalation.²⁰⁸

68. UK Missions overseas are not getting the support that they need on atrocity prevention. Current training and support appear to attach insufficient weight to prevention, which risks leaving staff without the information that they need to recognise and act on the warning signs of atrocities. Although some Missions acknowledged the value of the training, Missions in more than 90% of countries and territories do not appear to have recently accessed it. Some of the Missions that have apparently not accessed the training are based in countries where the FCDO believes that human rights violations and abuses are ongoing. Such critical training cannot be left to individual discretion. That point is especially pertinent, because the Government plans to give greater power to Heads of Missions.

69. *The FCDO must mandate short, introductory atrocity prevention training for all Ambassadors/Heads of UK Missions, with a refresher every three years and more in-depth training for at-risk countries. Training should also be mandatory for other key*

202 This was previously recommended by the Foreign Affairs Committee.

203 UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group ([DPA0013](#)) para 4.7

204 Peace Direct ([DPA0012](#)) para 31

205 In March, during an exchange with Alicia Kearns MP, then Foreign Secretary Rt Hon Liz Truss MP committed to “look at” strengthening the expertise, resources and frameworks to support Posts to undertake atrocity prevention. Lord Ahmad subsequently told us that the FCDO is considering ‘internationalising’ this training (for example, via a shared academy in the Commonwealth) and making it accessible to other Departments. [Q97](#) [Lord Ahmad]; Oral evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 7 March 2022, HC (2021–22) 518, [Q664](#) [Elizabeth Truss]

206 Ben Willis ([DPA0008](#)) para 2; Oxford Institute for Ethics Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) ([DPA0016](#)) paras 15–20; Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 5.3. The PHRG also wanted more information on whether and how mass atrocity prevention is factored into country plans. All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG) ([DPA0010](#)) para 5.3.

207 For example, Ben Willis ([DPA0008](#)) para 2.5; Peace Direct ([DPA0012](#)) para 33; UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group ([DPA0013](#)) para 4.4; Oxford Institute for Ethics Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) ([DPA0016](#)) para 9; Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) paras 3.8, 4.8, 5.3

208 UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group ([DPA0013](#)) para 4.4

Embassy staff, such as conflict advisers and military attachés, in priority countries. The UK may benefit from studying similar training provided by its international allies, such as the United States.

70. *The FCDO should review its existing training and consider whether it provides sufficient support to UK Missions. Such training may require greater preventive focus.*

71. *The FCDO should introduce a new Atrocity Prevention Toolkit to provide applied, day-to-day guidance to UK Posts and desks on existing support and how to raise the alarm in a crisis.*

72. *The OCSM should track training uptake and ensure that Posts in priority countries are accessing enhanced, specialist support, in the form of conflict advisers, dedicated internal atrocity prevention and human rights advisers or external experts. Data on training uptake should be included in the proposed annual report to Parliament (see para 49).*

73. *Although ultimate responsibility must lie with the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, Ambassadors and other UK Heads of Mission should have a central role in preventing atrocities in the countries where they work. That role should be explicitly articulated in their job descriptions.*

74. *The OCSM should continue to foster learning between Embassies and to provide opportunities for exemplary teams to showcase their approach.*

Assessing risks and prioritising countries

75. The Government uses international, and other, sources of information to assess the risk of global conflict and instability.²⁰⁹ It conducts two types of analysis, which are known as the Countries at Risk of Instability (CRI) process²¹⁰ and the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS).²¹¹ The CRI process can help the Government to “prioritise countries and regions for diplomatic engagement”.²¹² The JACS provides in-depth analysis of the situation in a particular country to shape the UK’s objectives in that country.²¹³ The results of those analyses are not publicly available.

209 The Government has noted specific international mechanisms: “the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and other regional organisations have their own systems. The UK is able to draw on these mechanisms, and receives regular updates from the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which the UK helps to fund. The UK also has regular meetings with the UN’s Special Advisers on Genocide Prevention and R2P and likeminded countries to share our analysis of atrocity risks.” Foreign Affairs Committee, Fifth Special Report of Session 2021–22, [Never Again: The UK’s Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond: Government Response to the Committee’s Second Report](#), HC 840, p 18

210 This “internal annual exercise” assists policy-makers to “prioritise countries and regions for potential government engagement; reporting from our diplomatic missions overseas, in-depth internal analyses; reporting from international partners, multilateral and non-governmental organisations and wider open-source reporting”. The CRI process calculates a country’s risk of instability by assessing the pressure on its government and the resilience of its institutions. It includes over 80 indicators including respect for human rights, respect for the law, displacement and political stability. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [UK approach to preventing mass atrocities](#), 2019; PQ [1103 5](#) (on Crimes against Humanity), 31 January 2022

211 The JACS is “all source cross-government analyses that are used to underpin National Security Council Strategies”. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [UK approach to preventing mass atrocities](#), 2019

212 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [UK approach to preventing mass atrocities](#), 2019

213 [Q56](#) [Pete Vowles]; UK Government, [Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability: Guidance Note](#), June 2017, p 2. For example, a JACS prepared in 2019 for Myanmar “helped to shape policy in areas such as the UK Government’s approach to dealing with identity-based and gender based violence”, as well as allowing the Government to assess its ongoing programming in the country. FCDO ([DPA0022](#)) para 29

76. Some witnesses questioned the effectiveness of those tools in predicting and preventing mass atrocities. As of November 2021, geographic departments in the FCDO were able to commission a JACS for a country from the OCSM.²¹⁴ Ben Willis, Associate Lecturer at the University of Plymouth, noted that that happens on “a relatively ad hoc basis”.²¹⁵ Witnesses also questioned the extent to which the Government analyses specific risk factors in relation to identity-based violence.²¹⁶ It is unclear how and whether monitoring tools account for specific groups who may be at risk.²¹⁷

77. Some witnesses stated that the Government’s early warning tools cannot necessarily capture a rapidly changing situation within a particular country.²¹⁸ Protection Approaches told us that, although the CRI and JACS are “powerful analytical tools”, it is

regularly told by country teams that they are in need of a lightweight means of monitoring and assessing day-to-day and month-to-month trends of identity-based violence and atrocity risks, but that they lack the time, opportunity and often the skills to do so.²¹⁹

In addition, some witnesses recommended that the Government should strengthen its capabilities for network analysis,²²⁰ which can expose

the full spectrum of actors that enable the perpetration of violence, including supply chains, human trafficking networks, the arms trade, media outlets, armed groups, and communities themselves. Network analysis allows actors to target those weak spots—be they financial flows, communication systems, or other forms of enablement.²²¹

78. The Government has addressed some witnesses’ concerns. It recently provided new guidance on how atrocity risks can be assessed within the JACS produced for a specific country.²²² It is working to improve its central warning system for mass atrocities. Although that work is “embryonic”, the OCSM is monitoring a “stability tracker” every two months. Leigh Stubblefield, Deputy Director, OCSM, pointed out that

214 Foreign Affairs Committee, Fifth Special Report of Session 2021–22, [Never Again: The UK’s Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond: Government Response to the Committee’s Second Report](#), HC 840, p 18

215 He stated that no JACS was conducted on Myanmar until 2018. It is unclear whether a JACS has been conducted on China. Ben Willis ([DPA0008](#)) para 2.3. See also [Qq57–58](#) [Pete Vowles]

216 Dr Ochab, for example, referred to the 2017 Guidance Note for JACS to warn that the Government’s framework focuses on conflict only. Dr Ewelina U. Ochab ([DPA0001](#)). See also Ben Willis ([DPA0008](#)) para 2.1; UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group ([DPA0013](#)) para 4.5; Oxford Institute for Ethics Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) ([DPA0016](#)) para 8; Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 3.10

217 Data gaps may lead to particular difficulties to monitoring the risk of violence towards specific minority groups, for example LGBT+ people, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities. The Global Justice Center also warns of a lack of “gender-informed early warning systems”. Global Justice Center ([DPA0015](#))

218 Ben Willis ([DPA0008](#)) paras 2.4–2.5; Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 3.10

219 Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 3.10

220 Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 4.9; Oxford Institute for Ethics Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) ([DPA0016](#)) para 20

221 Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 4.9

222 Guidance for the JACS was updated in March 2021 to “include a section to analyse and assess the risk of atrocities occurring or recurring”. The analysis is now expected to “take into account a country’s record of atrocities, human rights violations and tensions between population groups.” FCDO ([DPA0022](#)) para 30. This Guidance is not publicly available, although this change was described by Ben Willis as “extremely welcome”. Ben Willis ([DPA0008](#)) para 2.3

If we see countries, whether new conflicts or existing conflicts, are getting worse, we can flag that up through the internal system within the FCDO to the management board [...] every two months. [...] we would get in touch with the country team and say, “Would you like some support? [...]”²²³

The elements monitored are “context-specific”.²²⁴ For example, the FCDO is currently developing a stability tracker for Russia and Ukraine that considers prices, military movements, social media and hate speech. Leigh Stubblefield added that, as the system is new, the Government is working to develop a “more systematic offer” and to assess what will work.²²⁵

79. The FCDO gave examples of positive work within specific UK Missions abroad. It explained that, learning from the atrocities against the Rohingya in 2017, the UK Embassy in Myanmar has improved “information flows on atrocity risks”.²²⁶ As well as making atrocity prevention “explicit” within the UK’s strategic objectives for Myanmar, the Embassy is working to “mainstream” the assessment of human rights risks across its programmes. It considers

risks of identity-based violence; focusing on resources to verify potential abuses of minorities; and working with humanitarian and health actors to build an understanding of atrocity risk factors and flagging concerns early.²²⁷

The UK Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina learnt directly from the UK Mission in Myanmar on tracking risks.²²⁸ The NGO Protection Approaches acknowledged “encouraging changes” by individual thematic and country teams.²²⁹ However, the Committee does not have the information to judge whether atrocity prevention is one of the UK’s strategic objectives for Bosnia and Herzegovina and other countries, as it is for Myanmar.

80. *The OCSM must continue to develop the analytical capabilities to monitor and identify countries and groups at risk of mass atrocities, working closely with UK Posts and desks. This work should inform the UK’s policy and programming objectives in countries at risk.*

81. *The Government should invest in network analysis capabilities within both the OCSM and priority geographic teams to highlight enablers of atrocities, such as financial flows or key information channels. Such capabilities will support effective sanctions designation.*

82. *In addition to the OCSM’s processes of longer-term monitoring and analysis, the Government should introduce a system for tracking and responding to imminent or escalating mass atrocities. This system for ‘raising the alarm’ should:*

223 [Q87](#)

224 [Q87](#)

225 [Q87](#)

226 FCDO ([DPA0022](#)) para 25. The Mission now uses tech and data to verify atrocities. [Q53](#) [Pete Vowles]

227 FCDO ([DPA0022](#)) para 25

228 [Q55](#) [Matthew Field]

229 The evidence singled out country teams in Myanmar, the DRC and South Sudan. Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) paras 3.6, 5.3. On Myanmar, see also Dr Kate Ferguson, “[For the Wind Is in the Palm-Trees: The 2017 Rohingya Crisis and an Emergent UK Approach to Atrocity Prevention](#)”, *Global Responsibility to Protect*, vol 13 (2021), pp 244–271

- a) *provide UK Missions with a simple tool for reporting and urgent warning to be used when officials perceive an imminent or rapidly escalating risk;*
- b) *include a clear communication protocol between senior responsible officials in London, the OCSM and the relevant Mission to fast-track ministerial decisions and policy responses. The process for responding should also have been agreed and rehearsed in advance; and*
- c) *draw on the resources and latest intelligence offered by the situation centre in the Cabinet Office if suspected atrocities are occurring.*

5 Aid programming

83. Several witnesses, including the Government, recognised that aid programmes can help to prevent atrocities,²³⁰ even if the relationship between development and atrocity prevention is complex.²³¹ The Government argued that aid programmes can address the drivers of conflict and instability by “tackling corruption, promoting good governance, improving access to security and justice, and inclusive economic development”.²³² In particular, aid programmes supporting Sustainable Development Goal 16 relate to atrocity prevention.²³³

84. In the UK, such work is primarily delivered through Official Development Assistance (ODA) and, in particular, the cross-government Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). The CSSF “supports and delivers activity to prevent instability and conflicts” and blends ODA and non-ODA funds.²³⁴

85. It is difficult to assess the exact level of UK funding for atrocity prevention, due to the spread of the funding across programmes in different thematic areas and the lack of a clear budget line. Lord Ahmad told us that the “specifics” of funding are “still being finalised”, but that “the whole issue of atrocity prevention will be at the core of our policymaking thinking going forward”.²³⁵ Civil society organisations have criticised the lack of ring-fenced funding for atrocity prevention work.²³⁶

86. Overall reductions to the UK aid budget in recent years are likely to have affected programmes relating to atrocity prevention.²³⁷ Such programmes include ODA programming on Open Societies and Conflict Resolution²³⁸ and the CSSF. Peace Direct

230 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [UK approach to preventing mass atrocities](#), 2019; Professor Adrian Gallagher ([DPA0005](#)); Westminster Foundation for Democracy ([DPA0006](#)) para 2; Justice Call, Women’s Regional Network for Prevention ([DPA0007](#)) para 16; Ben Willis ([DPA0008](#)) paras 1.1–1.3; Gillian McKay ([DPA0009](#)) para 12; All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG) ([DPA0010](#)) para 4.6; Dr Anicee Van Engeland and Dr Gemma Collantes-Celador ([DPA0019](#)) (in the context of fostering human rights-centred institutions); International Rescue Committee UK ([DPA0026](#)) para 1.6.6; [Q28](#) [Savita Pawnday]. Implicitly, Saferworld ([DPA0003](#)) para 7; Peace Direct ([DPA0012](#)) para 7; UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group ([DPA0013](#)) para 2.5; Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 3.12.

231 Professor Adrian Gallagher ([DPA0005](#)); All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG) ([DPA0010](#)) para 4.6. For instance, the PHRG calls on the FCDO to ensure that “aid policy, programmes and/or disbursements do no harm, by not furthering the exclusion, marginalisation or victimisation of groups, particularly on the basis of their identity, in recipient countries”. It also recommends that the FCDO “proactively” consider the risk of mass atrocity crimes “at all stages of the aid process, including through support for and funding of dialogue, peace-building and reconciliation processes.”

232 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [UK approach to preventing mass atrocities](#), 2019

233 SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

234 UK Government, [About us - Conflict, Stability and Security Fund](#), accessed 2 September 2022. The CSSF has provided a range of peacebuilding and good governance-focused interventions across the globe, from supporting the peace process in Colombia to seeking to strengthen democratic participation in Lebanon

235 [Q115](#)

236 Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 3.12; UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group ([DPA0013](#)) para 3.3 (in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

237 For examples of relevant programmes, see Peace Direct ([DPA0012](#)), Saferworld ([DPA0003](#)), Westminster Foundation for Democracy ([DPA0006](#))

238 See National Audit Office, [Managing reductions in Official Development Assistance spending](#), 31 March 2022, p 34

cited a £348.9 million decrease in funding for the CSSF last year, “as well as deep cuts in bilateral funding to the most fragile and conflict-affected states and regions including the DRC and Somalia.”²³⁹ Saferworld told us that

Saferworld analysis shows that comparing the CSSF’s 2021–2 budget allocation and 2020–1 actual spend reveals: £19 million in ODA cut to programming in Africa, £90 million cut to programming in the Middle East and North Africa, £50 million cut to programming in South Asia and a £23 million cut to the multilateral strategy. CSSF spent £25.9 million (ODA and non-ODA) less in the Western Balkans in 2020–21 than originally allocated. There was a further reduction of £16.5 million from the CSSF ODA spend in the Western Balkans in 2020–21 to the budget allocation for 2021–2.²⁴⁰

Considering these reductions, witnesses questioned the Government’s commitment to aid that supports atrocity prevention.²⁴¹ It was reported in late July that the UK Treasury is currently blocking ‘non-essential’ aid spending until the autumn,²⁴² with little information available on how the Government will judge whether programmes are essential.

87. Adrian Gallagher, Professor in Mass Atrocity Prevention and Global Security at the University of Leeds, used quantitative data to argue that atrocities are more likely in countries with a lower level of socio-economic development, but that a higher level of socio-economic development is not a total protection against atrocities.²⁴³ The Government’s new International Development Strategy was published in May.²⁴⁴ It emphasised trade and economic investment as tools of international development. It did not include a commitment to spend 50% of funding in fragile and conflict-affected states and regions,²⁴⁵ unlike the previous strategy.²⁴⁶

88. UK aid programmes that strengthen institutions and civil society can foster environments where atrocities are less likely, when these programmes are sensitive to atrocity and conflict risks. We are concerned that successive reductions in those programmes may have blunted their effectiveness. The new International Development Strategy fails to reiterate the previous commitment to direct half of aid spending to fragile and conflict-affected states, which may dilute the UK’s efforts to prevent atrocities.

239 Peace Direct ([DPA0012](#)) para 29

240 Saferworld ([DPA0003](#)) para 8

241 Saferworld ([DPA0003](#)) para 11; Peace Direct ([DPA0012](#)) paras 19, 29; International Rescue Committee UK ([DPA0026](#)) para 5.3.2; Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#)) para 3.12. Gillian McKay has a nuanced view, calling the cuts “devastating” but noting they may drive “more effective aid spending”. Gillian McKay ([DPA0009](#)) para 7

242 [UK Treasury blocks ‘non-essential’ overseas aid payments](#), FT, 25 July 2022

243 The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development. Using data from the Index from the period 1990–2020, Professor Gallagher showed that most mass atrocities occurred in Medium or Low-ranking countries, but that many Low-ranking countries did not experience mass atrocities. Furthermore, while High-ranking countries were less at risk in this period, “no country is immune to mass atrocities”. Professor Adrian Gallagher ([DPA0005](#)).

244 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, *The UK Government’s Strategy for International Development*, [CP 676](#), May 2022.

245 Oral evidence taken before the Joint Committee for the National Security Strategy on 23 May 2022, HC (2022–23) 133, [Q7](#) [Michael Ellis], [Q9](#) [Ben Merrick]

246 HM Treasury and Department for International Development, *UK aid: tackling global challenges in the national interest*, [Cm 9163](#), November 2015, p 4, para 3.8

89. *The Government must increase the share of UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) spent on development programmes that strengthen inclusive and accountable institutions and that reinforce civil society organisations, consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 16.*

90. *The Government must adopt a marker to tag aid programmes with a substantial atrocity prevention component, which it should use when reporting spending to the International Aid Transparency Index.*

91. *The Government should reassess whether the new International Development Strategy allows for a sufficient share of ODA to reach communities in fragile and conflict-affected states, as well as other states it assesses as being at risk of mass atrocities. It must also introduce a dedicated budget line for atrocity prevention within the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund.*

Civil society

92. Under the Responsibility to Protect (para 1), state authorities have primary responsibility for protecting populations within their own countries. However, Justice Call and the Women’s Regional Network on Prevention expressed concern that state and state-affiliated authorities can sometimes have “vested interests in turning a blind eye to atrocity crime indicators” or even “fostering violence between communities”.²⁴⁷

93. Witnesses suggested that local actors may be better placed than international or outside actors to support atrocity prevention and response.²⁴⁸ Although international bodies may struggle to understand the historical roots of current atrocities and lack “detailed and accurate information”,²⁴⁹ local actors often have:

- greater understanding of the “deep historical roots” of atrocities²⁵⁰ and knowledge of local identities and cultures;²⁵¹
- a better view of what is happening due to their proximity;²⁵²
- greater ability to offer alternative assistance²⁵³ and to collect evidence of atrocities, if necessary;²⁵⁴ and
- access to informal communication channels to dissuade violence.²⁵⁵

Staff from local civil society organisations (CSOs) may also have lived through atrocities and have experience of delivering atrocity prevention programmes.²⁵⁶ Peace Direct believed that increasing engagement with local CSOs would be beneficial:

247 Justice Call, Women’s Regional Network for Prevention ([DPA0007](#)) para 13(a)(i)

248 Peace Direct ([DPA0012](#)) para 3; Justice Call, Women’s Regional Network for Prevention ([DPA0007](#)) para 13.

249 Justice Call, Women’s Regional Network for Prevention ([DPA0007](#)) para 13(a)(ii). See also Lighthouse Advocacy ([DPA0027](#)) para 3

250 Peace Insight, [Atrocity prevention](#), accessed 29 June 2022

251 Justice Call, Women’s Regional Network for Prevention ([DPA0007](#)), para 13(a)(ii).

252 [Q15](#) [Denisa Delić]; Peace Direct ([DPA0012](#)) para 31

253 [Q34](#) [Savita Pawnday]. This point was expressed in reference to the Afghan people.

254 [Q15](#) [Denisa Delić]

255 Justice Call, Women’s Regional Network for Prevention ([DPA0007](#)), para 13(a)(ii)

256 [Q52](#) [Matthew Field]. This point was made on the subject of local hires working for the FCDO embassy.

With clear and systematic alert systems and communications protocols [...], UK posts would then be able to use this information to support atrocity prevention [...] by sharing it across embassies, FCDO and Whitehall.²⁵⁷

94. The UK has funded a number of programmes that promote peacebuilding by local actors.²⁵⁸ Saidi Zirhumana, Deputy Director of a peacebuilding organisation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, stated that an FCDO programme there had supported a local organisation to develop a “community-based early warning mechanism” in the province of Ituri in the east of the country.²⁵⁹ This mechanism warns individuals when there is an imminent risk of atrocities in their community, by distributing data to local authorities or to MONUSCO, the UN peacekeeping mission in-country. As another example, during its visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Committee met representatives of several NGOs that receive UK funding for their work to promote reconciliation and dialogue.

95. Witnesses identified barriers to CSOs delivering atrocity prevention programmes. Peace Direct stated that big international donors often do not trust local CSOs and do not want to fund their programmes.²⁶⁰ Funding for small CSOs is often short-term and project-based rather than long-term and flexible.²⁶¹ Even when funding is available, applying may be difficult due to “the hoops and numbers of forms”.²⁶²

96. We heard that CSOs may not always have relationships with the UK Government, including a formal role within early warning mechanisms. To Peace Direct, the advantages that CSOs can bring to monitoring and responding to atrocities can only be used when “staff in embassies and other UK diplomatic posts engage directly and consult with local peacebuilders and communities”.²⁶³ Lord Ahmad implied that the UK Government had not engaged sufficiently with local CSOs in Afghanistan before the Taliban took over in 2021.²⁶⁴ He suggested that this was a lesson for Ukraine now, in that the UK is now “ensuring that [civil society] organisations within Ukraine are also supported through the international agencies”.²⁶⁵

97. Civil society organisations in the UK and overseas must be empowered to play an active role in preventing atrocities, as they are often the first to be exposed to potential warning signs.

98. *The Government must simplify funding streams for local civil society organisations and formalise the relationship between these organisations and relevant Government teams, building a more consistent role for these organisations in the Government’s early warning systems.*

257 Peace Direct ([DPA0012](#)) para 33

258 For example, the programmes described by Saidi Zirhumana in Qq9–14; Peace Direct ([DPA0012](#)) paras 20–22; Q111 [Lord Ahmad]

259 [Qq9–14](#)

260 Peace Direct ([DPA0012](#)) paras 18 and 28. Saidi Zirhumana made a similar point in [Q14](#).

261 Peace Direct ([DPA0012](#)) para 28

262 [Q29](#) [Natalie Samarasinghe]. Saidi Zirhumana said similarly ([Q14](#)) that ‘procedures’ for funding ‘are very long and do not give a chance to local organisations’.

263 Peace Direct ([DPA0012](#)) para 31

264 [Q111](#) [Lord Ahmad]

265 [Q111](#) [Lord Ahmad]

Conclusions and recommendations

Mass atrocities in the 21st century

1. Mass atrocities not only reflect deep inhumanity but undermine global stability at a time when population displacement is more pronounced than at any point since World War Two. Key trends today may fuel greater violence, for instance climate change, threats to democracies and the involvement of non-state actors in conflict. The Prime Minister has expressed her personal commitment to preventing mass atrocities, seeing this as morally right and “absolutely” in the UK’s strategic interest. Without concerted action, however, mass atrocities are likely to become more common, which will constrain global development. (Paragraph 15)

Policy response

2. Despite the UN Security Council’s role in protecting populations and its considerable powers, it faces gridlock in practice. The threat of an UNSC permanent member exercising its veto constrains international action to prevent and end “conscience-shocking” mass atrocities, which raises fears of an ‘age of impunity’. *The UK Government must therefore pursue other means and use other channels to prevent atrocities, while simultaneously advocating multilateral diplomacy and institutional reform.* (Paragraph 23)
3. In 2019, the Government set out the tools that it can use to prevent mass atrocities, even at a time of multilateral gridlock. These tools include early warning mechanisms, diplomacy to de-escalate tensions, development support to address the root causes of conflict, and defence and policing tools. (Paragraph 31)
4. Since 2019, the Government’s approach to preventing mass atrocities has become clearer. In particular, welcome changes were implemented in the course of this inquiry. The Government has launched the Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM), which will contain a new hub to consider atrocity prevention. This hub will pilot interventions to prevent atrocities in ‘priority countries’ and build a new warning system for atrocities and conflict. (Paragraph 32)
5. The UK must do more. A new cross-departmental strategy to prevent mass atrocities offers opportunities. It can drive greater coherence between existing policy initiatives on human protection. As the UK will not always be able to prevent mass atrocities, a strategy can also clarify the metrics by which the UK will measure the success of its efforts. The Government appears open to a new strategy, which NGOs, academics and many Members of Parliament have advocated for many years. (Paragraph 33)
6. The United States has introduced sophisticated legislation on atrocity prevention, and it recently adopted an (inter-agency) Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities. *The UK Government should take all opportunities to learn from, and collaborate with, the United States and like-minded partners in the Global Network of R2P Focal Points. Partnership is critical in the face of rising atrocity risks today. When possible, the UK and its partners should share the results of country*

risk assessments and collectively agree which national governments have the greatest leverage and/or influence to lead prevention initiatives in specific countries/regions. (Paragraph 36)

7. *Armed conflict and mass atrocities are linked, but overfocusing on conflict is likely to miss atrocity risks, to leave groups unprotected and to ignore how atrocities themselves can drive conflict. In addition to conflict prevention, the Government must explicitly recognise the separate but interlinked priority of atrocity prevention. (Paragraph 45)*
8. *The Government must introduce a cross-departmental strategy for preventing and responding to mass atrocities globally, both within and outside of conflicts. It must strive for greater consistency of purpose across Government. The strategy must:*
 - a) *support development by considering prevention at all stages of the policy cycle, recognising that prevention must begin before judicial determinations, and should continue even if atrocities are committed;*
 - b) *clarify training, tools and methods to prevent atrocities, including the role of the UK's new sanctions regime;*
 - c) *demonstrate and formalise how the UK will act in concert with like-minded international partners, particularly the United States;*
 - d) *be inclusive to the many groups at risk of atrocities and recognise the wider circumstances that can drive discrimination and persecution, such as grievances, political marginalisation and criminal economies;*
 - e) *prioritise the mitigation of atrocity risks across the whole of Government, including trade, supply chains, arms exports, education, asylum and border policy;*
 - f) *take account of new threats and challenges, including new technology, climate change and the wide range of conflict actors; and*
 - g) *build on the UK's positive efforts to secure justice for Ukrainian victims and consider how these can be applied to other contexts. (Paragraph 46)*
9. *The Government must ensure consistency between a new strategy on atrocity prevention and the 'strategic conflict framework' under development. This framework itself must articulate atrocity prevention objectives, as distinct from general conflict prevention objectives. (Paragraph 47)*
10. *The Government should ensure that Ministers provide regular and strategic direction to the UK's atrocity and conflict prevention policy by adding this to the agenda of the Foreign Policy and Security Council and giving the Secretariat responsibility for tracking implementation of the new atrocity prevention strategy (see para 46). (Paragraph 48)*
11. *The UK Government must submit an annual report to Parliament on its actions to prevent atrocities. That report should be produced by the new Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (see paras 24, 51), with input from other teams in the FCDO and other relevant departments. (Paragraph 49)*

12. *The new atrocity prevention strategy should be developed in consultation with civil society and relevant experts. (Paragraph 50)*

Skills and capabilities

13. *The Government must empower the new Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM) in the FCDO by allocating appropriate funds and staff to meet the scale of the UK's ambitions. (Paragraph 55)*
14. *The OCSM must:*
- a) *ensure that UK posts and desks for priority countries can access the training and resources that they need, including when factoring relevant thematic objectives into country plans;*
 - b) *provide the expertise to enable greater awareness of atrocity risks; and*
 - c) *strengthen co-ordination, the exchange of lessons and intelligence-sharing across related teams in the FCDO, such as the Open Societies and Sanctions teams, and related Departments, such as the Ministry of Defence, the Joint Intelligence Office, the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and the Treasury. (Paragraph 56)*
15. *UK Missions overseas are not getting the support that they need on atrocity prevention. Current training and support appear to attach insufficient weight to prevention, which risks leaving staff without the information that they need to recognise and act on the warning signs of atrocities. Although some Missions acknowledged the value of the training, Missions in more than 90% of countries and territories do not appear to have recently accessed it. Some of the Missions that have apparently not accessed the training are based in countries where the FCDO believes that human rights violations and abuses are ongoing. Such critical training cannot be left to individual discretion. That point is especially pertinent, because the Government plans to give greater power to Heads of Missions. (Paragraph 68)*
16. *The FCDO must mandate short, introductory atrocity prevention training for all Ambassadors/Heads of UK Missions, with a refresher every three years and more in-depth training for at-risk countries. Training should also be mandatory for other key Embassy staff, such as conflict advisers and military attachés, in priority countries. The UK may benefit from studying similar training provided by its international allies, such as the United States. (Paragraph 69)*
17. *The FCDO should review its existing training and consider whether it provides sufficient support to UK Missions. Such training may require greater preventive focus. (Paragraph 70)*
18. *The FCDO should introduce a new Atrocity Prevention Toolkit to provide applied, day-to-day guidance to UK Posts and desks on existing support and how to raise the alarm in a crisis. (Paragraph 71)*
19. *The OCSM should track training uptake and ensure that Posts in priority countries are accessing enhanced, specialist support, in the form of conflict advisers, dedicated*

internal atrocity prevention and human rights advisers or external experts. Data on training uptake should be included in the proposed annual report to Parliament (see para 49). (Paragraph 72)

20. *Although ultimate responsibility must lie with the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, Ambassadors and other UK Heads of Mission should have a central role in preventing atrocities in the countries where they work. That role should be explicitly articulated in their job descriptions. (Paragraph 73)*
21. *The OCSM should continue to foster learning between Embassies and to provide opportunities for exemplary teams to showcase their approach. (Paragraph 74)*
22. *The OCSM must continue to develop the analytical capabilities to monitor and identify countries and groups at risk of mass atrocities, working closely with UK Posts and desks. This work should inform the UK's policy and programming objectives in countries at risk. (Paragraph 80)*
23. *The Government should invest in network analysis capabilities within both the OCSM and priority geographic teams to highlight enablers of atrocities, such as financial flows or key information channels. Such capabilities will support effective sanctions designation. (Paragraph 81)*
24. *In addition to the OCSM's processes of longer-term monitoring and analysis, the Government should introduce a system for tracking and responding to imminent or escalating mass atrocities. This system for 'raising the alarm' should:*
 - a) *provide UK Missions with a simple tool for reporting and urgent warning to be used when officials perceive an imminent or rapidly escalating risk;*
 - b) *include a clear communication protocol between senior responsible officials in London, the OCSM and the relevant Mission to fast-track ministerial decisions and policy responses. The process for responding should also have been agreed and rehearsed in advance; and*
 - c) *draw on the resources and latest intelligence offered by the situation centre in the Cabinet Office if suspected atrocities are occurring. (Paragraph 82)*

Aid programming

25. *UK aid programmes that strengthen institutions and civil society can foster environments where atrocities are less likely, when these programmes are sensitive to atrocity and conflict risks. We are concerned that successive reductions in those programmes may have blunted their effectiveness. The new International Development Strategy fails to reiterate the previous commitment to direct half of aid spending to fragile and conflict-affected states, which may dilute the UK's efforts to prevent atrocities. (Paragraph 88)*
26. *The Government must increase the share of UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) spent on development programmes that strengthen inclusive and accountable institutions and that reinforce civil society organisations, consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 16. (Paragraph 89)*

27. *The Government must adopt a marker to tag aid programmes with a substantial atrocity prevention component, which it should use when reporting spending to the International Aid Transparency Index. (Paragraph 90)*
28. *The Government should reassess whether the new International Development Strategy allows for a sufficient share of ODA to reach communities in fragile and conflict-affected states, as well as other states it assesses as being at risk of mass atrocities. It must also introduce a dedicated budget line for atrocity prevention within the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund. (Paragraph 91)*
29. Civil society organisations in the UK and overseas must be empowered to play an active role in preventing atrocities, as they are often the first to be exposed to potential warning signs. (Paragraph 97)
30. *The Government must simplify funding streams for local civil society organisations and formalise the relationship between these organisations and relevant Government teams, building a more consistent role for these organisations in the Government's early warning systems. (Paragraph 98)*

Appendix: International definitions of the four atrocities covered by the 'Responsibility to Protect'

Excerpts from the UN, Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes²⁶⁶

Genocide

Genocide is defined in Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and has become a norm of customary international law. The same definition can be found in other documents of international law: Article 6 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; Article 4(2) of the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and Article 2(2) of the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

Box 1: Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

Article 2

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Crimes against Humanity

Crimes against humanity have not been codified in a treaty, similar to genocide and war crimes. However, the definition has developed under customary law and through the jurisdiction of international courts. Article 7(1) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; Article 5 of the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and Article 3 of the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, include definitions of crimes against humanity, even though they do not totally coincide.

²⁶⁶ This Appendix presents excerpts from UN, [Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A tool for prevention](#), 2014, pp 26–32

Box 2: Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court**Article 7**

1. For the purpose of this Statute, "crime against humanity" means any of the following acts when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack:

- (a) Murder;
- (b) Extermination;
- (c) Enslavement;
- (d) Deportation or forcible transfer of population;
- (e) Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law;
- (f) Torture;
- (g) Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity;
- (h) Persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender as defined in paragraph 3, or other grounds that are universally recognized as impermissible under international law, in connection with any act referred to in this paragraph or any crime within the jurisdiction of the Court;
- (i) Enforced disappearance of persons;
- (j) The crime of apartheid;
- (k) Other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health.

2. For the purpose of paragraph 1:

- (a) "Attack directed against any civilian population" means a course of conduct involving the multiple commission of acts referred to in paragraph 1 against any civilian population, pursuant to or in furtherance of a State or organizational policy to commit such attack;

War Crimes

War crimes are those violations of international humanitarian law that incur perpetrators in individual criminal responsibility under international law. There is no one single document that codifies all war crimes. Lists can be found in both international humanitarian law and international criminal law treaties, as well as in international customary law. The 1949 Geneva Conventions and 1977 Additional Protocol I contain lists. Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; Article 2 and 3 of the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and Article 4 of the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, also include lists of war crimes. They do not always coincide.

Box 3: Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court**Article 8**

1. The Court shall have jurisdiction in respect of war crimes in particular when committed as part of a plan or policy or as part of a large-scale commission of such crimes.

2. For the purpose of this Statute, "war crimes" means:

(a) Grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, namely, any of the following acts against persons or property protected under the provisions of the relevant Geneva Convention:

(i) Wilful killing;

(ii) Torture or inhuman treatment, including biological experiments;

(iii) Wilfully causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or health;

(iv) Extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly;

(v) Compelling a prisoner of war or other protected person to serve in the forces of a hostile Power;

(vi) Wilfully depriving a prisoner of war or other protected person of the rights of fair and regular trial;

(vii) Unlawful deportation or transfer or unlawful confinement;

(viii) Taking of hostages.

(b) Other serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict, within the established framework of international law, namely, any of the following acts:

(i) Intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities;

(ii) Intentionally directing attacks against civilian objects, that is, objects which are not military objectives;

(iii) Intentionally directing attacks against personnel, installations, material, units or vehicles involved in a humanitarian assistance or peacekeeping mission in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, as long as they are entitled to the protection given to civilians or civilian objects under the international law of armed conflict;

(iv) Intentionally launching an attack in the knowledge that such attack will cause incidental loss of life or injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects or widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment which would be clearly excessive in relation to the concrete and direct overall military advantage anticipated;

- (v) Attacking or bombarding, by whatever means, towns, villages, dwellings or buildings which are undefended and which are not military objectives;
- (vi) Killing or wounding a combatant who, having laid down his arms or having no longer means of defence, has surrendered at discretion;
- (vii) Making improper use of a flag of truce, of the flag or of the military insignia and uniform of the enemy or of the United Nations, as well as of the distinctive emblems of the Geneva Conventions, resulting in death or serious personal injury;
- (viii) The transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, or the deportation or transfer of all or parts of the population of the occupied territory within or outside this territory;
- (ix) Intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not military objectives;
- (x) Subjecting persons who are in the power of an adverse party to physical mutilation or to medical or scientific experiments of any kind which are neither justified by the medical, dental or hospital treatment of the person concerned nor carried out in his or her interest, and which cause death to or seriously endanger the health of such person or persons;
- (xi) Killing or wounding treacherously individuals belonging to the hostile nation or army;
- (xii) Declaring that no quarter will be given;
- (xiii) Destroying or seizing the enemy's property unless such destruction or seizure be imperatively demanded by the necessities of war;
- (xiv) Declaring abolished, suspended or inadmissible in a court of law the rights and actions of the nationals of the hostile party;
- (xv) Pillaging a town or place, even when taken by assault;
- (xvi) Employing poison or poisoned weapons;
- (xvii) Employing asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and all analogous liquids, materials or devices;
- (xviii) Employing bullets which expand or flatten easily in the human body, such as bullets with a hard envelope which does not entirely cover the core or is pierced with incisions;
- (xix) Employing weapons, projectiles and material and methods of warfare which are of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering or which are inherently indiscriminate in violation of the international law of armed conflict, provided that such weapons, projectiles and material and methods of warfare are the subject of a comprehensive prohibition and are included in an annex to this Statute, by an amendment in accordance with the relevant provisions set forth in articles 121 and 123;

- (xxi) Committing outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
- (xxii) Committing rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, as defined in article 7, paragraph 2 (f), enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence also constituting a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions;
- (xxiii) Utilizing the presence of a civilian or other protected person to render certain points, areas or military forces immune from military operations;
- (xxiv) Intentionally directing attacks against buildings, material, medical units and transport, and personnel using the distinctive emblems of the Geneva Conventions in conformity with international law;
- (xxv) Intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including wilfully impeding relief supplies as provided for under the Geneva Conventions;
- (xxvi) Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into the national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities.
- (c) In the case of an armed conflict not of an international character, serious violations of article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, namely, any of the following acts committed against persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed hors de combat by sickness, wounds, detention or any other cause:
- (i) Violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
- (ii) Committing outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
- (iii) Taking of hostages;
- (iv) The passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgement pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all judicial guarantees which are generally recognized as indispensable.
- (d) Paragraph 2 (c) applies to armed conflicts not of an international character and thus does not apply to situations of internal disturbances and tensions, such as riots, isolated and sporadic acts of violence or other acts of a similar nature.
- (e) Other serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in armed conflicts not of an international character, within the established framework of international law, namely, any of the following acts:
- (i) Intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities;

- (ii) Intentionally directing attacks against buildings, material, medical units and transport, and personnel using the distinctive emblems of the Geneva Conventions in conformity with international law;
 - (iii) Intentionally directing attacks against personnel, installations, material, units or vehicles involved in a humanitarian assistance or peacekeeping mission in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, as long as they are entitled to the protection given to civilians or civilian objects under the international law of armed conflict;
 - (iv) Intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not military objectives;
 - (v) Pillaging a town or place, even when taken by assault;
 - (vi) Committing rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, as defined in article 7, paragraph 2 (f), enforced sterilization, and any other form of sexual violence also constituting a serious violation of article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions;
 - (vii) Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into armed forces or groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities;
 - (viii) Ordering the displacement of the civilian population for reasons related to the conflict, unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand;
 - (ix) Killing or wounding treacherously a combatant adversary;
 - (x) Declaring that no quarter will be given;
 - (xi) Subjecting persons who are in the power of another party to the conflict to physical mutilation or to medical or scientific experiments of any kind which are neither justified by the medical, dental or hospital treatment of the person concerned nor carried out in his or her interest, and which cause death to or seriously endanger the health of such person or persons;
 - (xii) Destroying or seizing the property of an adversary unless such destruction or seizure be imperatively demanded by the necessities of the conflict;
- (f) Paragraph 2 (e) applies to armed conflicts not of an international character and thus does not apply to situations of internal disturbances and tensions, such as riots, isolated and sporadic acts of violence or other acts of a similar nature. It applies to armed conflicts that take place in the territory of a State when there is protracted armed conflict between governmental authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups.

Ethnic Cleansing

Ethnic cleansing has not been recognized as an independent crime under international law. In the context of the war in former Yugoslavia, a United Nations Commission of Experts defined it as:

Box 4: Reports of the Commission of Experts

Interim Report of the Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992),

U.N. SCOR, U.N. Doc. S/25274 (26 January 1993), at 16

“... rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of given groups from the area,”

Final Report of the Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 780 (1992),

U.N. SCOR, U.N. Doc. S/1994/674 (27 May 1994), Annex, at 3, 33

“... a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas.”

The same Commission of Experts stated that the coercive practices used to remove the civilian population can include: murder, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, extrajudicial executions, rape and sexual assaults, severe physical injury to civilians, confinement of civilian population in ghetto areas, forcible removal, displacement and deportation of civilian population, deliberate military attacks or threats of attacks on civilians and civilian areas, use of civilians as human shields, destruction of property, robbery of personal property, attacks on hospitals, medical personnel, and locations with the Red Cross/Red Crescent emblem, among others.

The Commission of Experts added that these practices can “... constitute crimes against humanity and can be assimilated to specific war crimes. Furthermore, such acts could also fall within the meaning of the Genocide Convention.”

Formal minutes

Tuesday 11 October 2022

Members present:

Sarah Champion, in the Chair

Nigel Mills

Navendu Mishra

Mr Virendra Sharma

Draft Report (*From Srebrenica to a safer tomorrow: Preventing future mass atrocities around the world*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 98 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Adjournment

[Adjourned till Tuesday 18 October at 2.00 p.m.]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 11 January 2022

Denisa Delić, Advocacy Director, International Rescue Committee; **Saidi Zirhumana**, Deputy Director, Support Office for Peacebuilding in the DRC (Bureau de Soutien pour la Consolidation de la Paix)

[Q1–17](#)

Savita Pawnday, Executive Director, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect; **Natalie Samarasinghe**, Chief Executive Officer, United Nations Association – UK

[Q18–43](#)

Tuesday 24 May 2022

Matthew Field, Her Majesty's Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina; **Pete Vowles**, Chargé D'Affaires ad interim at the British Embassy Yangon

[Q44–65](#)

The Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for South Asia, the United Nations and the Commonwealth, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office; **Leigh Stubblefield**, Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

[Q66–115](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

DPA numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG) ([DPA0010](#))
- 2 Coalition for Genocide ([DPA0021](#))
- 3 Conciliation Resources ([DPA0025](#))
- 4 Cubbon, John (Barrister, Guernica 37 Chambers) ([DPA0028](#))
- 5 FCDO ([DPA0022](#))
- 6 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([DPA0032](#))
- 7 Gallagher, Professor Adrian (Professor in Global Security and Mass Atrocity Prevention, School of Politics and International Relations, University of Leeds. Also, co-director of the European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.) ([DPA0005](#))
- 8 Global Justice Center ([DPA0015](#))
- 9 Hehir, Dr Aidan (Reader in International Relations, University of Westminster) ([DPA0004](#))
- 10 International Rescue Committee UK ([DPA0026](#))
- 11 Internews Europe ([DPA0011](#))
- 12 Justice Call and Women's Regional Network for Prevention (WRNP) ([DPA0007](#))
- 13 Lawrinson, Dr Blake (Teaching Assistant, University of Leeds) ([DPA0017](#))
- 14 Lighthouse Advocacy ([DPA0027](#))
- 15 McKay, Gillian ([DPA0009](#))
- 16 Ochab, Dr Ewelina U. ([DPA0001](#))
- 17 O'Reilly, Martha (Senior Lecturer, Leeds Beckett University) ([DPA0020](#))
- 18 Oxford Institute for Ethics Law and Armed Conflict (ELAC) ([DPA0016](#))
- 19 Peace Direct ([DPA0012](#))
- 20 Protection Approaches ([DPA0031](#))
- 21 REDRESS Trust Limited ([DPA0014](#))
- 22 Saferworld ([DPA0003](#))
- 23 Search for Common Ground ([DPA0002](#))
- 24 Stefan, Dr Cristina G. (Associate Professor of International Relations / Founding Co-Director of the European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (ECR2P), University of Leeds / European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (ECR2P)) ([DPA0024](#))
- 25 The Jo Cox Foundation ([DPA0018](#))
- 26 UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group; and Protection Approaches ([DPA0013](#))
- 27 US Holocaust Memorial Museum's Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide ([DPA0030](#))
- 28 Van Engeland, Dr Anicee (Associate Professor, Cranfield University); and Collantes-Celador, Dr Gemma (Senior Lecturer, Cranfield University) ([DPA0019](#))
- 29 Westminster Foundation for Democracy ([DPA0006](#))

- 30 Willis, Ben (Associate Lecturer in Politics and International Relations, University of Plymouth) ([DPA0008](#))
- 31 Yet Again UK ([DPA0023](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	Racism in the aid sector	HC 150
2nd Report	Food insecurity	HC 504
1st Special Report	Afghanistan: UK support for aid workers and the Afghan people: Government response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 152

Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	Assessing DFID's results in nutrition Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 103
2nd Report	Global Britain in demand: UK climate action and international development around COP26	HC 99
3rd Report	The UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 104
4th Report	International climate finance: UK aid for halting deforestation and preventing irreversible biodiversity loss: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 730
5th Report	Afghanistan: UK support for aid workers and the Afghan people	HC 919
6th Report	UK aid to Pakistan	HC 102
1st Special Report	The humanitarian situation in Tigray: Government Response to the Committee's Tenth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 554
2nd Special Report	The UK's Support to the African Development Bank Group: report from the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 555
3rd Special Report	DFID's results in nutrition Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's First Report	HC 780
4th Special Report	Global Britain in demand: UK climate action and international development around COP26: Government response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 1008

Number	Title	Reference
5th Special Report	The UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 1021

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: the Rohingya	HC 259
2nd Report	Effectiveness of UK aid: interim findings	HC 215
3rd Report	The Newton Fund review: report of the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI	HC 260
4th Report	Effectiveness of UK aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger	HC 596
5th Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus (interim findings)	HC 292
6th Report	The Changing Nature of UK Aid in Ghana Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 535
7th Report	Progress on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries	HC 605
8th Report	Covid-19 in developing countries: secondary impacts	HC 1186
9th Report	The UK's support to the African Development Bank Group: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 1055
10th Report	The humanitarian situation in Tigray	HC 1289
1st Special Report	Follow up: sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector: Government Response to the First Report of the Committee	HC 127
2nd Special Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: the Rohingya: Government Response to the First Report of the Committee	HC 658
3rd Special Report	The Newton Fund review: report of the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 742
4th Special Report	Effectiveness of UK Aid: Interim Report & Effectiveness of UK Aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger: Government Response to the Second & Fourth Reports	HC 820
5th Special Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus (interim findings): Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 1160
6th Special Report	The Changing Nature of UK Aid in Ghana Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's Sixth Report	HC 1198

Number	Title	Reference
7th Special Report	Progress on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries: Government Response to the Seventh Report of the Committee, Session 2019–21	HC 1332
8th Special Report	Covid-19 in developing countries: secondary impacts: Government Response to the Eighth Report of the Committee	HC 1351