



House of Commons
International Development
Committee

**From Srebrenica to
a safer tomorrow:
Preventing future mass
atrocities around the
world: Government
response to the
Committee's Third Report**

**Fourth Special Report of Session
2022–23**

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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.

On 1 September 2020, DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were merged to form the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The Committee remains responsible for scrutiny of those parts of FCDO expenditure, administration and policy that were formerly the responsibility of DFID.

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Fourth Special Report

The International Development Committee published its Third Report of Session 2022–23, *From Srebrenica to a safer tomorrow: Preventing future mass atrocities around the world* (HC 149) on 17 October 2022. The Government response was received on 16 December 2022 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

Introduction

1. The Government is grateful to the International Development Committee (IDC) for their report on the UK's approach to atrocity prevention, titled *From Srebrenica to a safer tomorrow: Preventing future mass atrocities around the world*.
2. As set out in the Integrated Review, HMG is committed to taking an integrated approach to work on conflict and instability, placing greater emphasis on addressing the drivers of atrocity crimes, and strengthening fragile countries' resilience to external influence.
3. The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion that mass atrocities undermine global stability and drive population displacement, and that conflict and atrocity prevention are linked but separate. The Government recognises the significant benefits of early engagement to avoid imminent or ongoing crises, including the number of lives saved. As situations escalate, options for preventive action become more limited and there is greater likelihood of cycles of violence becoming embedded and escalatory.
4. The Government appreciates a systematic approach to tackling atrocity risks is required. Interventions will have to support long term change in countries and regions, including by promoting inclusive, resilient societies, addressing identity-based grievances, and giving ownership to local communities and organisations. Collaboration with international partners and civil society organisations is central to atrocity prevention efforts and ensures we maximise our effect.
5. Since the IDC enquiry began in December 2021, the FCDO's Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM) established a Mass Atrocity Prevention Hub. The Hub has central policy ownership of HMG's approach to mass atrocity prevention in both non-conflict and conflict settings and works closely with thematic and geographic teams. This new team will grow over the coming year, and we look forward to updating the Committee on its work in due course.
6. We look forward to continuing to work with the IDC, civil society organisations and international partners to draw on lessons learned and expertise, and to strengthen the UK's approach to preventing atrocities.
7. This response seeks to address the Committee's recommendations in the order in which they appear in the 'Conclusions and Recommendations' section of the inquiry report.

Policy responses

Recommendation 1: The UK Government must pursue other means and use other channels to prevent atrocities, while simultaneously advocating multilateral diplomacy and institutional reform.

Agree.

8. The Government agrees that in its efforts to prevent mass atrocities the full range of tools, multilateral or otherwise, should be considered, and decisions should be made based on the context. The Government will continue to use multilateral mechanisms wherever appropriate, including relevant bodies across the UN system, such as the General Assembly, Human Rights Council, Security Council, and the Agencies, Funds, and Programmes, each of which can play a vital role in preventing atrocities, galvanising international response, and delivering justice for victims and survivors.

9. The UK Government will continue to use its influence to advocate for strengthened mechanisms, greater cohesion and integration of the UN system, and investment in a system-wide approach to conflict and atrocity prevention.

10. In addition to the UN, the UK works multilaterally with likeminded countries through international working groups and the Group of Friends for the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), and bilaterally with individual member states. We are collaborating closely with US counterparts on approaches to atrocity prevention, including through the recently published US Atrocity Prevention Strategy. We are increasing awareness of these approaches across the FCDO through joint training sessions with US and European counterparts.

11. On conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), the UK launched a new initiative, Accountability Commission and Taskforce (ACT) for Survivors, at the PSVI Conference in November 2022. The initiative aims to strengthen accountability for CRSV crimes at the national level through increased analysis and best practice sharing, including an online repository and guidance for states; capacity building for states to support them to build better judicial mechanisms to prosecute CRSV; and support for survivors, including broader justice and accountability measures.

Recommendation 2: 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.

Agree.

12. The Government highly values its positive bilateral and multilateral partnerships on atrocity prevention, including with the United States, with whom we have a strong and productive relationship. The UK engages with the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, coordinated by the Global Centre for R2P, a New York-based NGO, and with the Group of Friends for R2P in New York and Geneva by, for example, feeding into joint statements for the Group of Friends at UN Security Council debates and the Human Rights Council.

We have provided the Global Centre for R2P with £75,000 of funding in 2022/23 to finance the work of research analysts in monitoring populations at risk of mass atrocities and producing atrocity alerts and other analyses which are circulated to subscribers in governments and elsewhere.

13. Working closely with the US and other likeminded countries, we share risk and early warning analysis, explore options to mitigate ongoing, emerging, and future atrocities, and build our own and others' capacity. We will continue to strengthen these relationships and expand partnerships with others, including independent experts, to support our capabilities to assess atrocity risks.

Recommendation 3: In addition to conflict prevention, the Government must explicitly recognise the separate but interlinked priority of atrocity prevention.

Agree.

14. The Government recognises atrocity prevention as separate from conflict. By establishing a Mass Atrocity Prevention Hub, the OCSM seeks to identify and work with convergences between conflict prevention and atrocity prevention where they exist but provides for dedicated focus where they are distinct. The Mass Atrocity Prevention Hub focuses on mass atrocities that occur both in conflict and non-conflict settings.

15. The UK is a global leader on action to tackle Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV), committing £50 million since the launch of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) in 2012. Marking 10 years from the launch of the PSVI, on 28th and 29th November the UK hosted an ambitious international Conference to encourage much-needed global action to stop CRSV.

Recommendation 4: 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.**

Disagree.

16. The Government agrees with the importance of a comprehensive whole-of-government approach to mass atrocity prevention but cannot commit to developing a written strategy at this time. The Mass Atrocity Prevention Hub is directing resource towards implementation across a range of workstreams and working closely with geographic and thematic teams, and, where appropriate, across Government, to deliver and monitor progress on preventing atrocities.

17. We recognise that prevention must be considered at all stages of the policy cycle. We will continue to bolster monitoring capabilities to identify and escalate atrocity risks before they occur and work with partners on how we develop our approaches to take account of new threats and challenges, ensuring that we are aware and inclusive of groups at risk.

18. We will continue to work closely with international partners to prevent mass atrocities. This includes the United States, with whom we regularly exchange best practice, but we are also eager to build a wide range of partnerships.

19. On Ukraine, there is ongoing work to develop a more forward leaning workstream on accountability in support of the investigatory process. The Government has looked across current activity to identify where we could do more and has considered new ideas for future action.

Recommendation 5: 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.

Disagree.

20. The Government acknowledges there must be cohesion and consistency between its approaches to atrocity prevention and conflict prevention, whilst being aware of the crossover and potential tensions between them. The Government has made explicit its recognition of atrocity prevention as a separate agenda to conflict prevention and established distinct teams for the two areas of work.

21. As has been stated previously, the UK Government is committed to taking an effective and focused approach to addressing conflict and instability through prevention.

22. As mentioned in response to Recommendation 4 (above), the Government cannot commit to developing a written strategy at this time.

Recommendation 6: 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.

Partially agree.

23. The Government cannot commit to a written strategy at this time but is committed to taking a whole-of-government approach to atrocity prevention. The responsibility for atrocity prevention falls under the Minister of State for Human Rights within FCDO who sets the strategic direction and engages with other Ministers within FCDO and across Government as appropriate. Ministers will continue to regularly engage on atrocity prevention, especially when specific country contexts arise. Within the NSC structure, atrocity prevention and conflict prevention fall under development. Terms of Reference for the NSC can be found on the Government's website.

Recommendation 7: 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, with input from other teams in the FCDO and other relevant departments.

Partially agree.

24. From 2023, we will expand the existing atrocity prevention section of the annual Human Rights and Democracy Report. The OCSM will complete this section drawing information from a range of other teams within FCDO and other relevant Government departments.

Recommendation 8: The new atrocity prevention strategy should be developed in consultation with civil society and relevant experts.

Agree.

25. Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a critical role in atrocity prevention efforts. Although we are not able to commit to producing an atrocity prevention strategy at this time, the Government is committed to working in partnership with a diverse range of CSOs and local organisations to understand best practice approaches and specific country contexts. We will continue to work closely with CSOs by, for example, building on the work currently underway on strengthening monitoring atrocity risks and learning from their valuable expertise through information and training sessions for colleagues across FCDO. Representatives from Protection Approaches, the Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide, Search for Common Ground, and other organisations have delivered learning sessions, and FCDO officials have attended roundtable events organised and attended by CSO partners.

Skills and capabilities

Recommendation 9: 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.

Partially agree.

26. The FCDO's budgets for financial year 2023/24 have not yet been confirmed. Given fiscal constraints, we cannot guarantee the allocation of any additional resource until budgets are confirmed. The Government is currently prioritising essential overseas aid funding, while also meeting needs of people seeking sanctuary in the UK from conflict in Ukraine and Afghanistan. The Government remains committed to transparency and will provide updates to Parliament on spending plans in due course.

Recommendation 10: 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.**

Agree.

27. The OCSM's Mass Atrocity Prevention Hub acts as a central coordination point for HMG working with geographic and thematic departments including teams working on Open Societies, Human Rights and Sanctions. FCDO's International Academy's training on atrocity prevention, human rights, sanctions, conflict prevention policy and the UN is available to all FCDO staff based at Headquarters and overseas and to colleagues in other Government departments. The Hub is also working to strengthen understanding and knowledge of atrocity prevention by organising learning sessions delivered by external organisations and international partners, promoting collaboration and best practice, sharing between country teams, and incorporating atrocity prevention into relevant internal training offerings. The Hub is prioritising support and guidance on monitoring so that relevant Staff can effectively monitor atrocity risks.

Recommendation 11: 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.

Partially agree.

28. The Government agrees with the importance of strong atrocity prevention knowledge and capacity across the organisation. We plan to carry out a learning needs analysis to understand how the existing training offer could be expanded and targeted to increase impact and ensure staff in certain Posts are confident and upskilled on atrocity prevention work. We will also harness existing expertise and capabilities.

29. Recognising atrocity prevention training will be more relevant for some Heads of Mission (HoMs) than others, the learning needs assessment will consider how to take forward training with HoMs and wider groups of staff overseas to achieve maximum learning impact.

30. FCDO staff are already partaking in and benefitting from atrocity prevention training delivered online and in-person by the US State Department, which complements our in-house offer.

Recommendation 12: The FCDO should review its existing training and consider whether it provides sufficient support to UK Missions. Such training may require greater preventive focus.

Agree.

31. Training modules on conflict and atrocities are available and promoted to all staff in the organisation through the Global Learning Opportunities platform and the Open University. As part of the planned learning needs analysis, we will review modules and assess the need to shift the focus of the atrocity response module towards prevention, which would ensure it is in line with HMG's policy approach. The learning needs analysis will engage with a full range of stakeholders to understand how training can best service the needs of staff and identify gaps which need addressing. In addition, we are exploring how atrocity prevention modules can be added to existing human rights training courses, delivered to UK and overseas staff.

Recommendation 13: 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.

Partially agree.

32. The OCSM is currently scoping the needs for additional centralised guidance and will use this analysis to develop and expand existing resources available to Post and in the UK. Through our assessment of how to strengthen existing reporting and communication systems (see Recommendation 19), OCSM will develop and integrate specific guidance on reporting urgent risks into training. The Mass Atrocity Prevention Hub currently directs desks and Posts towards existing resources and support, such as analysis frameworks and atrocity prevention toolkits authored by United Nations Offices, the United States Agency for International Development, and civil society organisations.

Recommendation 14: 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.

Partially agree.

33. Staff at Post are supported by various experts when developing their approach to atrocity prevention. Specialist support will vary from Post to Post: experts include, but are not limited to, conflict advisors, governance advisors, and research analysts. There are approximately 65 Conflict Advisers and 50 Humanitarian Advisers working at UK Missions overseas and in geographic teams to deliver policy and programmatic support to reduce conflict and build peace. We also work with and fund external organisations who monitor human rights using Open-Source Intelligence and remote technologies, and we are exploring how to share this information across HMG and with international partners. Additional specialist human rights support is available to Posts where required.

Recommendation 15: 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.

Partially agree.

34. Whilst primary responsibility for preventing atrocities lies with the state in question, we agree that HoMs play an important role in the UK's atrocity prevention approach. This informs how we prepare HoMs for postings, and the additional staffing support, funding and training that is available. The Hub will play a greater role in co-ordinating this support for priority posts.

Recommendation 16: The OCSM should continue to foster learning between Embassies and to provide opportunities for exemplary teams to showcase their approach.

Agree.

35. The OCSM is working to foster learning, build knowledge and share best practice between teams and Embassies. We will work closely with colleagues across Government (and beyond) to ensure that lessons are captured and shared. The experiences of colleagues based at Post will inform the templates, approaches and guidance being developed and updated by the OCSM.

Recommendation 17: 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.

Agree.

36. We agree that robust analytical capabilities to monitor and identify countries and groups at risk of mass atrocities are essential. The OCSM will continue to innovate its analytical capabilities, as well as working with Posts and teams across FCDO and wider

HMG who focus on risk, data, and analysis. The OCSM is currently designing and testing new analytical templates and guidance, including for atrocity prevention, which have been informed by best practice. The OCSM will continue to focus on atrocity prevention as part of improving its broader analytical tools such as the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS). We are also working with open-source and data specialists (internal and external) to develop tools and resources that the OCSM and Posts will be able to employ to remotely monitor risks.

Recommendation 18: 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.

Agree.

37. Using network analysis to look at actors, contexts, and interrelations, such as potential perpetrators, their motivations, and potential coalitions that could prevent atrocities from occurring is central to our approach. In respect of sanctions, such tools are routinely used to assess corporate structures and financial linkages between individuals and entities, and HMG continues to invest in them.

Recommendation 19: 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.**

Partially agree.

38. There are existing communication, reporting, and decision-making processes used within Government through which atrocity risks are raised, including for getting Ministerial decisions, when required. The FCDO continuously assesses its approach and will make necessary improvements to how it monitors and responds to risk.

Aid programming

Recommendation 20: 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.

Partially agree.

39. Sustainable Development Goal 16 is a priority for the UK Government. This commitment is reaffirmed in the 2022 International Development Strategy (IDS), which states:

'Our approach to international development will be as a patient partner that champions openness, predictability, and the rule of law. [...] We will [...] help our partners tackle the structural problems they face and reduce their strategic dependence on others. We know that development progress depends on strong economic and social foundations – underpinned by effective institutions, from functioning markets to a free press and from a credible central bank to fair courts. Open and accountable institutions ensure systems work for everyone.'

40. Civil society has an important role to play in this, and the UK Government is committed to working in partnership with a diverse range of CSOs to move to a model of development that increasingly strengthens and empowers civil society in developing countries.

41. Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) allocations will be aligned with development priorities. The UK's International Development Strategy (IDS) also delegates more authority to HoMs on bilateral ODA spend at post.

Recommendation 21: 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.

Partially agree.

42. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee, of which the UK Government aligns aid markers to, does not currently have an atrocity prevention marker to tag aid programmes. We will consider whether it would be appropriate to use another approach for marking atrocity prevention programmes.

Recommendation 22: 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.

Partially agree.

43. Fragile and Conflict Affected States (FCAS) are important for the IDS, which aims to tackle the causes of crises and build the long-term foundations for lasting development. We cannot end extreme poverty in low- and middle-income countries without tackling conflict and fragility. As the IDS states, we must go beyond ODA and draw on the full HMG toolkit to deliver our development and foreign policy ambitions. This is particularly true when addressing fragility and conflict. In these contexts, we will combine our diplomatic, defence, economic and development levers to achieve our objectives.

44. While the IDS does not make specific commitments on ODA spend in FCAS or states at risk of mass atrocities, it does state that the majority of our ODA will be allocated to low-income countries, only spending in middle-income countries where necessary. We know that a higher proportion of low-income countries are FCAS. Our funding for humanitarian assistance prioritises people in greatest need in times of crisis, most of whom are in FCAS. ODA allocations will be aligned with development priorities.

45. The IDS also delegates more authority to HoMs on bilateral ODA spend at post. This allows more agile responses to conflicts and crises in FCAS, informed by those with the best understanding of the context and drivers of fragility and conflict. Development technical specialists across FCDO, including conflict and governance advisers, support our programming and advise teams on analysis of what works when programming in FCAS.

46. The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund's (CSSF) focus on conflict and stability, women, peace and security, and transnational threats provides a valuable source of funding for work that underpins Government objectives. The CSSF very recently conducted a strategic priorities review which aligned Portfolios with Government priorities, as set out the Integrated Review (IR). The Fund's focus evolves with these priority areas. Following the IR refresh, expected early in the New Year, all Portfolios will look to reflect any changes accordingly, including in specific emerging themes.

Recommendation 23: 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.

Partially agree.

47. The FCDO is committed to shifting towards a more locally led approach, in line with international commitments such as the Grand Bargain¹ and Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation². The IDS makes our ambitions in this area clear, stating:

'Those who benefit from our work must have a voice in what we do, and how we do it. The difficult reforms and good policies that drive progress must be locally owned. Our country partnerships will be anchored in our respect for the rights of our partners to self-determination. Our support will strengthen their sovereignty.'

48. We recognise that these shifts, like all widespread organisational change, will require time to overcome the challenges involved. We are already piloting new approaches to working with local CSOs through our innovative £60m partnership with Comic Relief to build the capacity of Southern CSOs, as well as new programmes to support local Disabled Peoples Rights Organisations and local Women's Rights Organisations.

1 An agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations who have committed to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action.

2 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation is the outcome document of the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, in 2011

49. The IDS also identified 'reducing bureaucracy' among our priorities for future aid delivery. We are working with CSOs to determine how we can make our programme approvals and implementation mechanisms more agile.

50. As stated above, the UK Government values the contribution made by CSOs and will continue to work closely with them on atrocity prevention where appropriate. The OCSM will work with civil society groups to explore how analysis from local organisations can support early warning systems.