



The Rt. Hon. Dominic Raab MP
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth
and Development Affairs

3 December 2020

Dear Dominic,

Official development assistance (ODA) and the creation of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)

In my letter dated 25 November 2020, I expressed the Committee's opposition to the Government's intention to break the UK's commitment to spend 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) on ODA from 2021.¹ At its meeting this week, the Committee discussed your letter on this subject, dated 2 December 2020,² and the creation of the FCDO.

We have a number of questions to which we request your response.

ODA

1. Your letter states that the Government will return to spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA "when the fiscal situation allows". What criteria will be used to determine whether the fiscal situation allows a return to 0.7%? What will be the role of the FCDO in this process?
2. Your letter states that bilateral programmes will "become the default" for UK ODA. However, in evidence to our current inquiry on Afghanistan, the FCDO stated that spending ODA through co-ordinated financing mechanisms is consistent with "best practice in aid effectiveness".³ Could you please explain the rationale for why bilateral programmes will become the default, and explain how this transition will be achieved?
3. We are concerned that poverty reduction does not feature in the list of seven global challenges on which you state in your letter that all UK aid will in future be focussed. *UK aid: tackling global challenges in the national interest*, published in 2015, listed "tackling extreme poverty and helping the world's most vulnerable" as one of four priorities for aid.⁴ Do the strategic priorities of the 2015 aid strategy still stand? How do the seven challenges fit with the objectives for UK aid laid down in the existing legislation, which place a strong emphasis on poverty reduction?

¹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/3682/documents/35810/default/>

² <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/3685/documents/38128/default/>

³ <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/11193/html/>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478834/ODA_strategy_final_web_0905.pdf

The FCDO

4. In his statement to the House of Commons on 16 June 2020, the Prime Minister said that “the British taxpayer has the right to expect that we achieve the maximum value with every pound we spend”.⁵ How will the merger of the two departments produce value for money? What cost savings do you expect to realise from the merger?
5. The Department for International Development (DfID) had a reputation for professionalism and expertise on development issues. What steps have you taken to ensure that this professionalism is retained, and that specialists remain responsible for overseeing ODA in the new department?
6. We are concerned that the profile of international development in cabinet has been reduced by the merger. What consideration has been given to a minister representing international development attending cabinet meetings, to ensure that this important portfolio is given the appropriate profile?
7. Your letter states that the FCDO will decide the allocation of ODA to other departments. Do you anticipate that the percentage of ODA spent by departments other than the FCDO will change? Does this reflect a change to the 2015 aid strategy, which established that more aid would be administered by government departments other than DfID?⁶
8. What arrangements have been made, under the new departmental structure, for the oversight of UK ODA spending?
9. Will the existing arrangements established by DfID for engaging with and managing relationships with NGOs be maintained by the FCDO? If yes, how?

Other

10. Your letter states the UK’s desire to reform the international humanitarian system. Could you please provide us with further information on the reforms you would like to see?

Finally, we consider that the House of Commons International Development Committee has played an important and effective role in scrutinising DfID. While noting that it is a decision for the House of Commons to take, we hope that a committee will be retained to continue to scrutinise the UK’s ODA spending. In the House of Lords, the International Relations and Defence Committee will continue to scrutinise the work of the FCDO and the UK’s ODA as part of its wider remit.

I am copying this letter to Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Yours, as ever



Baroness Anelay of St Johns
Chair, International Relations and Defence Committee

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-statement-to-the-house-of-commons-16-june-2020>

⁶ *Op. cit.*