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By email:

26 February 2023

The Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP
Chair, Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA
Dear Colleagues,

Dear

Dame Margaret,

UK Integrated Security Fund

I undertook to update the Committee on major developments during the period of transition from the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) to the Integrated Security Fund (ISF) in line with the Committee's continued engagement and interest.

As you know, the ISF was announced as part of the Integrated Review Refresh (IRR) and it will come into effect on 1 April. Ahead of this, on 26 February, a Written Ministerial Statement will be laid in both the House of Lords and the House of Commons, outlining our plans for the ISF. I will also address an audience at the Royal United Services Institute on the launch of the Fund.

Following a Write Round to the National Security Council and relevant ISF Ministers across Government, the Prime Minister has agreed allocations for the next financial year 2024/25. As the Government's response on 6 December to the Committee's report explained, robust evidence on the effectiveness of policies and programmes are used to inform allocation recommendations and decisions.

I visited Nigeria from 15-16 February and had the opportunity to witness first-hand the impact of the CSSF's work there and its stabilising effects in the West Africa region. Under the ISF the UK's engagement in Africa is set to expand, including through the new Africa Cyber Programme which begins in April. This programme, the training and our MoU with Nigeria that commits to developing a joint action plan are all based on our integrated national security approach under the IRR and the National Cyber Strategy.

The ISF will build on the important work currently undertaken by the CSSF. It will be a key means of supporting the delivery of the IRR in the year ahead, with an integrated, agile, catalytic and high-risk approach to find solutions to meet increasingly complex national security challenges. New areas of ISF programming will reflect the priorities set out in the IRR and will add additional priorities to those of the CSSF. This includes emerging and disruptive technology such as AI and quantum computing, maritime security and economic security.

In its review the Committee noted that its desire to ensure that the identity of the Fund is not diluted amongst different policy aims or domestic issues and that conflict reduction should remain a priority. The CSSF Annual Report FY 2022/23 highlighted the Fund's involvement with over 600 women in conflict-prone areas in the Philippines to support their meaningful participation in peace processes and local governance, improving gender equality in the region and decreasing risk of future conflict. The ISF will continue to prioritise programmes such as this which tackle conflict and instability.

Finally, I wish to offer a short update in line with the Deputy Prime Minister's commitment to update the Committee on the ISF following decisions on allocations [Oral Evidence Session 5: Ransomware, Question 82, 15 November 2023]. The Rt Honourable Stephen McPartland MP raised the Committee's concern about the wide domestic and international scope of the Fund and the possible impact on the Fund's ability to deliver on strategic objectives. I can reassure you that the Fund will continue to prioritise spending on those geographies and thematic issues linked to conflict, stability and security overseas that pose the greatest direct threat to the UK. As many of the threats identified in the IRR originate outside of the UK - such as cyber attacks - our focus must adapt to integrate domestic and international threats to ensure the most robust protection of our national security.

I trust that this provides a helpful update on the Fund's activities and on its transition to the ISF.

*Warm regards
Lucy*