



From Lord Alton of Liverpool

The Rt Hon David Lammy MP

Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs

12 June 2025

Dear David,

Members of the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) have met with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, who both expressed concerns about potential funding cuts to the international humanitarian sector, including to UN agencies and bodies.

Between 2013 and 2020, the UK spent 0.7% of its Gross National Income (GNI) on foreign aid, in keeping with international targets set by the Pearson Commission.¹ In 2020, contributions were reduced to 0.5% of GNI.² On 25th February 2025, the Prime Minister announced plans to further reduce foreign aid to 0.3% of GNI from 2027, to facilitate increased investment in defence. This would be the lowest level dedicated to foreign aid since 1999.³ As part of its foreign aid budget, the UK makes substantial contributions to UN agencies and bodies. For example, in 2023, the UK contributed £18.4 million to the UNHCR⁴ and \$243 million to UNICEF.⁵ It is unclear what the UK contributions to the UN bodies and agencies will be in the coming years, given the planned reductions to aid.

Volker Turk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has spoken about the impact of foreign aid cuts to human rights protection:

“Sweeping cuts to domestic social safety nets, climate finance and foreign aid signal a massive setback for human rights protection, for conflict prevention, and for global stability.”⁶

Tom Fletcher, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, said:

¹ House of Lords Library, [In Focus - Overseas aid: the 0.7% target](#), 04 August 2021.

² Ibid.

³ House of Commons Library, [UK to reduce aid to 0.3% of gross national income from 2027](#), 28 February 2025.

⁴ The UN Refugee Agency United Kingdom for the UNHCR, [2023 Annual Report \(2023\)](#).

⁵ UNICEF, [The United Kingdom: UNICEF public sector partner](#).

⁶ UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' [statement](#) at 58th session of the Human Rights Council, 03 March 2025.



Joint Committee on Human Rights

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“The pace and scale of the funding cuts are a seismic shock to the sector... many will die because aid is drying up. Right now, programmes are shutting down, staff are being laid off, and we are being forced to choose which lives to prioritise.”⁷

Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said:

“Funding cuts in the humanitarian sector are putting millions of lives at risk. The consequences for people fleeing danger will be immediate and devastating... Slashing aid will make the world less safe, driving more desperate people to become refugees or keep moving onward”.⁸

These statements strongly suggest that funding cuts have the potential to greatly disrupt efforts to uphold and promote human rights globally. Further, as the High Commissioner for Refugees notes, the impact of funding cuts will not only be felt overseas: less funds available to support people at risk might create or worsen conditions that make people flee from danger, potentially forcing more refugees and asylum seekers to move onward, including to the UK.

Considering this, could we please ask you to provide answers to the questions below by **2 July**:

- 1) To what extent are reductions to UN contributions planned, given the announced foreign aid cuts?
- 2) Does the Government accept that funding cuts for foreign aid could seriously disrupt efforts to uphold human rights globally? If so, how does the Government intend to counteract the potential negative effects of the expected cuts?

Yours sincerely,

Lord Alton of Liverpool

Chair, Joint Committee on Human Rights

⁷ United Nations, [Humanitarian system at breaking point as funding cuts force life-or-death choices](#), 12 March 2025.

⁸ [Statement](#) by UNHCR's Filippo Grandi on the impact of global aid cuts on refugees, 20 March 2025.