



Foreign, Commonwealth  
& Development Office

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Tom Tugendhat MP  
Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
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Dear Tom,

I was pleased to appear before the Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday 6 July. During the evidence session I agreed to provide further information on a few points.

**Q503. Lebanon**

In response to your comments on Lebanon, I promised to set out details of the UK's support. The UK is a long-standing friend of Lebanon and the Lebanese people. Our core interests lie in a strong, stable, prosperous Lebanon with an open and democratic society. We stand with Lebanon in its time of need, but are clear that Lebanon's leaders need to form a capable Government and a credible reform process needs to start now.

Much of the UK's development work in Lebanon is focused on managing the humanitarian, stability and security implications of the war in neighbouring Syria. At the Brussels Conference in March, the UK pledged at least £205 million to the Syrian crisis for 2021. This includes critical support to vulnerable Lebanese and refugee communities in Lebanon. We are supporting Lebanon to meet the humanitarian needs of both refugees and vulnerable Lebanese communities, to provide quality education to all children, and to bolster the fragile economy by investing in job opportunities for Syrians and Lebanese people.

Since 2011, the UK has allocated over £780 million in humanitarian and development funding to Lebanon. We have provided 1.1 million people with sustainable access to clean water and sanitation; and helped provide access to education and psychosocial support to 300,000 children. UK support has improved infrastructure and services in over 220 municipalities, helped create over 1,300 new jobs for both Lebanese and Syrian communities, and supported nearly 400 small and medium enterprises. Since 2015, over 450 ex-fighters and ex-prisoners have been rehabilitated and reintegrated into their communities. Our humanitarian assistance in Lebanon will continue to provide the most in need with timely, flexible assistance and protection services to cover their basic survival needs and reduce gender-based violence, saving lives and reducing suffering.

A stable and prosperous Lebanon is inextricably linked to the security, stability and prosperity of the region and of the UK. To that end the UK is a long-standing supporter of the Lebanese Armed Forces, the sole, legitimate defender of Lebanon's security. Our support helps to maintain Lebanon's stability and reduce the threat of terrorism in Lebanon and the wider region. The UK has provided over £84m since 2010 to help the Lebanese Armed Forces secure the border with Syria. This includes building 39 border watch towers and 37 Forward Operating Bases along the border. We have provided £37m since 2009 to the Internal Security Forces, the Lebanese police force, to help professionalise the service and better manage public safety and internal security threats. We have donated 100 armoured patrol vehicles (Jan 2021) which will help strengthen the border with Syria against smugglers and terrorist movement, and ultimately protect both of our countries' national security.

#### **Qs505-07. FCO/DFID Merger**

On the merger, I want to be clear and correct Mr Coyle's assertions regarding our engagement with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Mr Coyle asked whether engagement with NGOs had taken place before the FCDO was created on 2 September 2020. As both I and Sir Philip Barton confirmed in correspondence with you of 9 November and 23 December last year, Baroness Sugg, as the then Ministerial lead on engagement with NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), met 16 organisations on 19 August 2020 to listen to their views on the merger. We also had other engagement with NGOs, CSOs and international partners such as the World Bank and the World Health Organisation in the period between the Prime Minister's announcement of the merger on 16 June 2020 and the creation of the FCDO.

Mr Coyle also asked whether there has been engagement with Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) on the FCO/DFID merger prior to the Prime Minister's announcement on 16 June 2020. I have been clear that, as with any Government change of this nature, the announcement of the merger came first to Parliament.

#### **Q511. International Development Strategy**

You asked about consultation plans with external stakeholders on the International Development Strategy. We look forward to engaging with UK and overseas stakeholders, including from Governments, academia, civil society and Parliament, over the coming months. This will build on the extensive engagement and call for evidence that was undertaken to inform the Integrated Review.

#### **Q512. Vietnam**

You asked whether ODA spending would continue in Vietnam. Vietnam will continue to receive UK ODA spending through bilateral, regional and multilateral projects and programmes under our 2021-22 spending plans. Our ODA spending in Vietnam will continue to provide support in priority areas such as climate, tackling modern slavery, and health, including Covid-19. As you will be aware, overall plans are being finalised and details of the spend will be announced in due course.

#### **Q523. Conflict Centre**

Following interest from the committee, I am happy to provide some additional information on the conflict centre. The FCDO is in the process of establishing a new conflict centre, which will take forward the priorities laid out in the Integrated Review. This will include a focus on developing a more integrated UK approach to conflict and instability, harnessing conflict expertise from across FCDO, HMG and beyond, and applying these where the UK can make the most difference. It will identify and develop capabilities where the UK has a comparative advantage, working bilaterally and with

international partners to increase our impact in preventing, managing and resolving conflict.

This Government is committed to establishing a more integrated approach to work on conflict and instability, supporting a wide range of interconnected agendas aimed at building inclusive and stable environments and preventing possible atrocities. A core part of the centre's role will be to draw on expertise to support the UK's work on conflict, including from civil society, academia, and the private sector, and through cooperation with bilateral partners and multilateral organisations.

**Qs564-65. Counter Disinformation Unit**

You asked me to write to you on the permanency of the Counter Disinformation Unit. Addressing the challenges of disinformation and misinformation is a whole of Government effort, led by DCMS. DCMS stood up the Cross-Whitehall Counter Disinformation Unit on 5 March 2020, bringing together cross-Government monitoring and analysis capabilities. DCMS are working at pace with Whitehall departments, the social media platforms, and disinformation specialists in academia and civil society to lead the fight against misinformation and disinformation. They are also working with strategic communications teams to ensure that we are prepared to respond to disinformation campaigns where necessary.

DCMS continually review the requirement and work flexibly across Government to ensure the Unit is sufficiently resourced, allowing us to surge capacity where it's needed. The priority for the Counter Disinformation Unit continues to be supporting the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. There are currently no plans to stand the capability down.

*You asked,*

*Dominic Raab*

**THE RT HON DOMINIC RAAB MP**