



Foreign, Commonwealth  
& Development Office

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The Rt Hon. the Baroness Anelay of St Johns DBE,  
*Chair, International Relations and Defence  
Committee*

Tom Tugendhat MP,  
*Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee*

Sarah Champion MP,  
*Chair, International Development Committee*

9 February 2022

*Dear Joyce, Tom + Sarah*

I am writing to update you on the Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM). This new conflict directorate delivers on the Integrated Review commitment to establish a new conflict centre within the FCDO, with the aim of developing and leading a strategic conflict agenda, harnessing the breadth of conflict and stability capabilities, and working with partners to increase our impact in preventing, managing and resolving conflict in priority regions.

We know that the nature of conflict is changing. Conflicts are more complex than ever, engaging increasing numbers of international actors that then makes political settlements harder to achieve. A growing number of conflicts last more than 10 years – so called “forever wars”. Threats are increasingly connected: ideological narratives, financial flows and capabilities move across borders. Some states are vulnerable to exploitation and coercion by external powers. The increased use of tactics such as disinformation, illicit finance and cyber-attacks undermines our traditional conflict resolution approaches and international peace and security.

To respond to this evolving conflict agenda, I have tasked OCSM with developing a new cross-HMG strategic conflict framework that places greater emphasis on addressing the drivers of conflict, atrocity prevention, strengthening fragile countries’ resilience to external interference and delivering greater support to peace process. This strategy will drive forward OCSM’s mandate and articulate a new approach to preventing, reducing and managing conflict for the FCDO and HMG.

To be effective, I am clear that the FCDO’s conflict strategy must be directed to areas where the UK has a comparative advantage and where, working bilaterally and with our international partners, the UK can increase its impact.

Our objective must be to reduce the frequency and intensity of conflict and instability, to alleviate suffering, and minimise the opportunities for state and non-state actors to undermine international security. This is in line with the Foreign Secretary's December 2021 Chatham House speech on the UK's intention to build and strengthen new security and defence partnerships to protect our people, our partners and our freedoms.

I have asked OCSM to lead FCDO's work in all stages of the conflict cycle: it is not enough to accept that there will always be conflicts on the global stage, we must also build our capabilities to prevent conflicts from escalating and to position the UK to be a leading figure in mediation and conflict resolution. For example, a greater emphasis on conflict prevention would be transformative: we know that preventing conflict is less costly than responding to its fallout and is more effective than intervention once violence and reprisal enter a vicious cycle. OCSM's work in preventing conflict and sustaining peace will generate and apply evidence for what works in getting ahead of conflicts before they escalate to crisis. We will pilot and measure activity in priority countries through a new platform that will also build in mass atrocity prevention and early warning capability to better predict and react to warning signs before violence escalates.

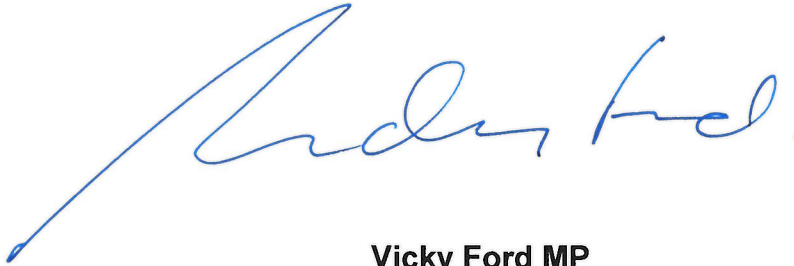
At the other end of the conflict cycle, OCSM leads for HMG in increasing capabilities for mediation and peace processes, which we know are so crucial for ending conflict and bridging to sustainable peace. The Office provides policy and technical expertise for countries affected by conflict – including on mediation, negotiations and dialogue, peace processes, ceasefires, and on engaging with non-state armed groups. Integral to its approach is the promotion of meaningful participation of women within peace and dialogue processes.

Responding to the Foreign Secretary's call to action, OCSM is also driving an ambitious agenda to secure protection and justice for the women, men, girls and boys affected by sexual violence in conflict. This includes exploring all options to condemn conflict-related sexual violence, including marking out UK leadership through a new international convention and an international conference to mark 10 years since the launch of our Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI).

Finally, at the core of OCSM is the ability to provide specialist conflict expertise. OCSM will harness expertise from across HMG and beyond to increase our capability and effectiveness in conflict prevention, management and resolution in priority countries. As part of an approach to conflict which looks to use the full range of UK levers, OCSM will also contribute to defence thinking in conflict and stability operations, supporting the FCDO to play a role in supporting Ministry of Defence planning, and complement our diplomatic and development tools. A roster of Deployable Civilian Experts is also managed by OCSM and allows HMG to deploy specialist skills in pursuit of the ambitions set out in the Integrated Review.

If you would like further information, the Director for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation, Jonny Hall would be pleased to brief you further. You can contact his office through Sarah Last (Sarah.Last1@fcdo.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Vicky Ford', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

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