

Introduction

1. Protection Approaches works to confront and prevent identity-based violence by developing and implementing innovative programmes that address all forms of hate. From Newham in East London to Bangui in the Central African Republic, we work with local communities, civil society organisations, policymakers, governments, academics and multilateral institutions to develop strategies that predict, prevent and protect people from all forms of identity-based violence. Protection Approaches convenes the UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group: a group of 25 NGOs based in the UK who collaborate on atrocity prevention policy and advocacy.
2. UNA-UK is Britain's only charity dedicated to building support for an effective United Nations. Over the past 75 years we have built a network of members, local branches, youth groups and partner organisations in all four nations of the UK. In 2015 UNA-UK was one of the most active civil society supporters of the National Security Strategy – Strategic Defence and Security Review (NSS/SDSR) process; around 10% of submissions received to the public consultation were a result of our outreach and communication with the public.
3. This submission has been prepared by Dr. Kate Ferguson, Co-Executive Director and Head of Research & Policy at Protection Approaches and Fred Carver – until recently Head of Policy at UNA-UK and a freelance consultant advising both UNA-UK and Protection Approaches. It is written in support of a public submission to the Integrated Review by the UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group¹ and submitted, for expedience, on behalf of two of its members: Protection Approaches and UNA-UK.
4. The submission will give an answer to your question on “*strategy in UK foreign policy, including: the priorities for UK foreign-policy strategy*” by making a case, as we have in submission the integrated review, that the UK should develop and implement an atrocity prevention strategy enabled by an analysis unit within the new Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).
5. This is a longstanding demand of both the UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group and of this committee² and builds in turn upon previous work by Jo Cox, Alison McGovern and Tom Tugendhat MPs.³

The case for an atrocity prevention strategy

6. Mass atrocities are gross, widespread and systemic violations of human rights, often linked to identity. They can happen in conflict situations, such as in Syria and the Central African Republic, outside them, such as in North Korea and Venezuela, or in hybrid contexts such as Myanmar or Iraq where atrocities occur as a distinct phenomenon from other manifestations of political violence. Therefore, preparing for and enhancing atrocity prevention approaches requires analysis both of countries such as Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo where many risk factors for conflict and atrocity are present, but also areas such as Brazil, Egypt and Nigeria where hate speech and compromised state institutions give rise to the risks of so-called peacetime atrocities.
7. The overlap between conflict prevention and atrocity prevention is substantial but not total. Mass atrocities are commonly grounded in a long history of grievances, discrimination, and tension but can be set off by events that change these dynamics for the worse. Conflict prevention can often help prevent atrocities but sometimes, as in Syria, Rakhine or Xinjiang,

¹ <https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/131c96cc-7e6f-4c06-ae37-6550dbd85dde/downloads/Submission%20to%20Integrated%20Review%20of%20Internation.pdf?ver=1598454618585>

² Foreign Affairs Select Committee Global Britain: The Responsibility to Protect and Humanitarian Intervention September 2018

³ <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/the-cost-of-doing-nothing-the-price-of-inaction-in-the-face-of-mass-atrocities/>

different tools are needed. Working to strengthen UK contributions towards the prevention of mass atrocities as a distinct – although overlapping – priority, need not displace conflict prevention efforts. Rather, we are asking the Government to address and clarify where gaps do exist, where conflict prevention is not sufficient, and where more could realistically be done to protect lives.

8. The primary objective of British foreign policy is to make the nation secure. A secure United Kingdom requires a secure world. Atrocity crimes, even when they take place in small and remote locations, reverberate around the world with devastating consequences for global stability and security. The UK's standing in the world is also closely linked to its position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and the primary responsibility the UK thereby assumes for matters of global peace and security. Preventing atrocities is therefore a vital function for any British government.
9. Active management of potential atrocity crimes and wider dynamics of conflict and instability is also likely to save money. A recent study projects that a 25% increase in effectiveness of conflict prevention would result in 10 more countries at peace by 2030, 109,000 fewer fatalities over the next decade and savings of over \$3.1 trillion globally.⁴ A 75% improvement in prevention 'would result in 23 more countries at peace by 2030, resulting in 291,000 lives saved over the next decade and \$9.8 trillion in savings. For this UK, this could mean a lower risk of instability and its consequences such as extremism, illegal arms proliferation and mass displacement, and the protection of UK investments in development.
10. Commitment to prevention through programming must be supported by strengthening of the British diplomatic corps, recognising that without the diplomatic toolbox in all its forms on-the-ground activity will always have its limits. Prevention, whether of climate change or mass atrocities, requires a holistic approach that begins in the communities most affected but is capable of motivating systemic changes through to the highest level. The new FCDO must therefore reflect a commitment to resource expert and diverse diplomatic capacities.
11. An atrocity prevention strategy should also have the benefit of further encouraging more fluid policymaking better able to handle current and future global catastrophic risks – be they unexpected 'unknown unknowns' – as the coronavirus pandemic was – or expected challenges such as climate change. A warmer world will change every aspect of how we live our lives, but it is in the field of atrocity and conflict prevention that we will likely see the first and most explosive consequences. It is no coincidence that one of the largest and most dangerous regions of fragility at the moment is the Sahel area bordering upon the Sahara Desert. Multiple conflicts and atrocity risks in the region, including those such as Nigeria, Mali and Sudan where the UK has a significant investment, have a climate component.⁵
12. The Integrated Review and creation of the FCDO offer a rare moment in UK foreign policy development to finally and fully embed the lessons and promises of the past as a means of preparing to meet challenges of the future

Implementing an atrocity prevention strategy

13. An effective atrocity prevention strategy could be implemented in a number of ways, and so could be tailored to whatever structure emerges from the establishment of FCDO and the integrated review. In an annex to this submission we explore a number of possible models
14. We envisage an analysis unit sitting within FCDO and with ministerial oversight from the designated atrocity prevention minister (currently Lord Ahmad). This analysis unit could receive seconded staff from other departments, notably MOD, DIT and the NSA's office in the Cabinet Office to strengthen the interrelation between those key elements of the strategy – much as the current 'Joint Units' on peacekeeping, modern slavery and counter terrorism do.

⁴ Pathfinders, "Forecasting the dividends of conflict prevention from 2020 - 2030", July 2020, Available at: https://530cfd94-d934-468b-a1c7-c67a84734064.filesusr.com/ugd/6c192f_e252b926005c47c39a815cf6da0c3086.pdf

⁵ Fred Carver, "As the Sahel Becomes the Sahara", September 2017, Available at <https://www.climate2020.org.uk/sahel-becomes-sahara/>

It could work, as the Atrocities Prevention Board, with civil society fellows and partners as a means of rapidly bolstering current knowledge gaps in government. This analysis unit would champion the strategy, coordinate action, and perform the core of the work.

15. However, to be effective the strategy must not start and stop with creation of a such a unit, but influence the actions of and provide support to the entirety of government. We envisage that such a strategy would be set out in a similar way to the national Serious and Organised Crime Strategy launched by the Home Office. This built upon a framework developed as a means of connecting the UK's counterterrorism strategy. Serious and Organised Crime is overseen by the NSC, taking regular reports on its progress; considering emerging risks, and reviewing the collective impact of governmental work, and agreeing responses and resourcing accordingly. NSC oversight is supported by a cross-government decision-making body, the Serious and Organised Crime Inter Ministerial Group that ensures a whole-of-government response to tackling serious and organised crime.⁶
16. Below we outline how this could occur and set out three core strands of the strategy – *communication* between and across government, *analysis* to ensure an appropriate response and *institutionalisation* to ensure the integration of atrocity prevention across all government policies. These strands overlap and interweave, running in parallel to and mutually reinforcing each other to provide a more resilient whole.

Communication

17. Recent experiences in Myanmar⁷, DRC, and Central African Republic have illustrated the extent to which Government would benefit from establishing a clear internal communications protocol setting out how to monitor imminent warning signs, triggering moments, indicators and risk factors; when and how to raise the alarm – both across government and externally – and guidance on escalation.
18. A joint analysis unit could integrate overlapping but not currently coordinated approaches to preventing atrocities, increasing impact and reducing duplication, by increasing coherence of the UK's work across agendas such as Women Peace and Security (WPS), Protection of Civilians (POC), Human Rights (including Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, Freedom of Religious Belief, and Freedom of Media), conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and counter terrorism/counterinsurgency (COIN) and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE)
19. The communication strand would also improve the UK's early warning systems: incorporating local triggers for violence (with clear thresholds) and developing a more nuanced and localised list of atrocity risks and triggers, complemented by an engagement with civil society to collect and verify information on conditions on the ground, and to work jointly on their own security and protection. It will also help integrate with other early warning systems such as those of the UN, US Atrocity Prevention Board, EU's European External Action Service, and civil society, and so help the UK's atrocity prevention framework integrate with these frameworks.

Analysis

20. An atrocity prevention analysis mechanism would facilitate intelligence collection and collation, analysis, and sharing of appropriate information. It would receive early warning from the communication strand and assess risks and threats of identity-based violence, including mass atrocities, on that basis.
21. It would integrate and bolster the current approaches contained within the Cabinet Office's annual Countries at Risk of Instability (CRI) process; and the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS). While both are powerful analytical tools, neither are early warning mechanisms capable of capturing real-time threats and informing rapid responses. Neither

⁶ Home Office, Serious and Organised Crime Strategy, November 2018, p63

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/752850/SOC-2018-web.pdf

⁷ See Violence in Rakhine State and the UK's response", December 2017, Available at

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmfaif/435/43502.htm>;

explicitly incorporate indicators of identity-based violence or atrocity.⁸ They are instead both processes for analysing longer-term trends and establishing agreed understandings and approaches across government. As a result, they continue to miss mass atrocity risks, including omitting Central African Republic in its 2013 risk analysis – by December that year, ‘widespread and systematic mass atrocity crimes, including killings on the basis of religious identity, had become a feature of a crisis that was rapidly expanding in scale and scope.’⁹ Had the UK had applied a mass atrocity framework in its planning, CAR would most certainly have been identified as being at risk and UK policy could have been shaped appropriately. An analysis unit of the form we envisage would instead provide real time information on global risks in constantly updated living documents.

22. This analysis would also triage the nature of the risk, and thus task an appropriate body (depending on severity potentially the country team, the R2P focal point, the designated minister, or the National Security Council) with implementing appropriate steps.

Institutionalisation

23. ‘Establishing an atrocity prevention “seat” at the policy-making table’ will help maximise and coordinate contributions towards effective prediction and prevention across Government.¹⁰ But this must only be the beginning of the process. Atrocity prevention has to be consciously integrated into the job descriptions and job titles of all those responsible for UK atrocity prevention policy in order to ensure that this approach is fully institutionalised across government. A partial list of just some of the relevant areas of responsibility within government is included in an annex below.
24. Such an approach would allow for all relevant Whitehall decisionmakers to make an informed risk-assessment as to how their actions might lead to UK complicity in potential future atrocities – thus proactively managing UK liability and ensuring that all sectors of government amplify rather than hinder the UK’s approach.
25. This can avoid incidents such as occurred in Venezuela. An ongoing constitutional crisis reached a head in early 2017, with the consequence that there was significant bloodshed throughout the summer of 2017. A report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights found that ‘[t]housands of people, mainly young men, have been killed in alleged confrontations with state forces’.¹¹ The UK government was highly critical of the Venezuelan government for these actions, and applied significant pressure upon the President to stand down. However, this pressure was undermined by the fact that the UK did not revoke arms export licences until 29 November 2017 – nearly a year after the violence had begun and many months after UK policy towards Venezuela had hardened.¹² The licences covered equipment the export of for ‘crowd control’ purposes which likely increased President Maduro’s ability to maintain himself in power through oppression of dissent.¹³

⁸ Internal Protection Approaches analysis, supported by interviews with HMG staff (2019), and research by Alex Buskie, publication forthcoming (2020). On JACS: Jason Ralph, “Mainstreaming the responsibility to protect in UK strategy”, April 2014, available at <https://www.una.org.uk/sites/default/files/UNA-UK%20Policy%20briefing%20%20-%20Professor%20Jason%20Ralph%20-%20Mainstreaming%20R2P%20in%20UK%20strategy.pdf>

⁹ Evan Cinq-Mars, Too little, too late, Failing to prevent atrocities in the Central African Republic, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, September 2015, <https://www.globalr2p.org/publications/too-little-too-late-failing-to-prevent-atrocities-in-the-central-african-republic/>

¹⁰ Wilton Park, “Prevention of mass atrocities (WP1645)”, October 2018, Available at <https://protectionapproaches.org/wiltonparkreport>

¹¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Report on the situation of Human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela A/HRC/41/18”, July 2019

¹² All UK arms export licence information is available from the website of the department of international trade, however the database is difficult to search. The Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) provide a searchable copy of this database, the entries in the CAAT database for Venezuela are available here <https://www.caat.org.uk/resources/export-licences/licence-list?region=Venezuela>

¹³ Rowena Mason, “UK criticised over sales of military equipment to Venezuela”, Guardian, August 2017, Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/aug/11/uk-criticised-over-sales-of-military-equipment-to-venezuela>

Annex 1 – potential models for an atrocity prevention mechanism

We have outlined a suggestion for implementing the strategy in paragraphs 14 and 15 of this submission. However, we appreciate there are multiple mechanisms for achieving this objective, and therefore we have explored the following potential models for cross departmental workings with regards to how they could potentially implement an atrocity prevention strategy:

Model	Precedent	Details	Strengths	Weaknesses
Cabinet Office Unit	Stabilisation Unit, Gulf Strategy Unit,	A unit which sits within the Cabinet office and thus has a cross-Whitehall remit. Can take staff and expertise from other departments.	Ability to coordinate policy across all departments, sits in same department as the NSC	Sits in a different department to Foreign Policy and to core sources of intelligence such as embassies
Joint Unit	Peacekeeping (FCO, DfID, MOD), Modern Slavery (FCO, DfID, Home), Counter-Terror (FCO, Home)	A unit that sits within one (lead) department but with staff drawn from multiple departments, to facilitate interdepartmental working.	Ability to coordinate policy across relevant departments	Can lead to “focal point syndrome” whereby issue is not mainstreamed across other departments’ work
... with a minister	Stabilisation Unit, Loneliness Cross-Whitehall Group	Placing responsibility for a unit’s work explicitly within the portfolio of a minister	Parliamentary scrutiny, ability to take action at ministerial/cabinet level. Ability to raise public profile of issue. Greater resourcing and attention. Gives civil society an entry point and person to lobby	Requires additional resourcing, might lead to unit becoming a political and/or communications initiative rather than an operational one
Independent Reviewer	Terrorism Legislation	Someone outside government, usually non-party political or a member of a minor party, reviews legislation, regularly reports to Parliament and acts as a public watchdog	Makes the issue multi party and nonpartisan	Opinion is only advisory, not enforceable. Is a better fit for issues which are highly legislative. Act of Parliament required for statutory roles
PM’s special representative	Sexual Violence in Conflict, Internet Safety	Representative of the PM and directly reporting to them, staff usually drawn from a host department	Gives the issue a high profile and a lot of attention	Better suited for outward facing and communications roles rather than operational ones
National Action Plan	WPS, Open Government	A cross departmental annual report presented to Parliament detailing a joint plan of action	Makes it easier to hold departments to account on their promises. Drafting of plan requires government to think about the issue holistically	Can easily become a tick box exercise
Cross-Whitehall working group	WPS, Employment, Resource Security	A regular meeting between relevant officials of different departments, sometimes also including civil society	Enables civil society engagement and facilitates cross-Whitehall working	Can become a tick box exercise. Efficacy depends on how invested staff are

Annex 2 – mapping of atrocity prevention across government

The following diagram, likely not exhaustive, maps out some of the workstreams within some governmental departments which have an atrocity prevention element

Intelligence, expertise and early warning = *

Policy and analysis = #

Action and implementation = +, specifically sanctions = x

Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK missions to the UN in New York and Geneva+

The Responsibility to Protect Focal Point#+

The designated minister with responsibility for atrocity prevention (currently Lord Ahmad) +

Teams working on multilateral organisations#+, human rights#, conflict prevention#+ and development#+

Country teams*, researchers and analysts#, and embassy posts*+ within countries at risk of atrocities

The Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative#+

The United Kingdom Special Envoy for post-Holocaust issues#

The Sanctions Unit x

SIS*

Ministry of Defence

Cross-department+

Home Office

Immigration and asylum policy+

Terrorism and extremism#

Serious and Organised Crime#

Police+ especially City of London Police Economic Crime Directoratex and the war crimes team of the Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Command (SO15).+x*

MI5*

HM Treasury

Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI)x

Attorney General

Serious Fraud Office x

Ministry Of Justice

Cross-department+

Department for International Trade

Trade Policy+

Export Control Joint Unit+x

Department for Education

Cross-department+

Cabinet Office

Stabilization Unit#+

National Security Council*#+

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