

Written evidence submitted by UN Women UK (INR0088)

UN Women is the global United Nations entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. UN Women leads and coordinates the UN system's work on gender equality supporting the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and contributing to the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the UK, UN Women UK works to deliver UN Women's goals domestically, as well as support the work of UN Women in its mission for gender equality and the empowerment of women at every level from grassroots to Government. UN Women works to embed gender equality and equal rights across all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), because we can only achieve the SDGs if no one is left behind. We believe that empowering women will benefit economies, human rights and peace and security across our globe.

We welcome this timely inquiry on the UK Government's Integrated Review particularly in view of the imminent amalgamation of the FCO with DFID and the anticipated impact on departmental budgets following on from the global COVID crisis.

The UK has played a pivotal role over many years in the global advancement of the rights of women and girls including as a leading advocate for the formation of UN Women a decade ago. Successive UK governments have made strong commitments to advance gender equality and women's rights as a core part of their mission for a safer and more sustainable world and as a specific focus of ODA expenditure. The Committee will be aware that the UK International Development Act (Gender Equality) 2014 also makes it a legal requirement that all UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) includes consideration of gender equality, ensuring that it remains at the heart of the UK's development work. Over recent years financial and political support from the UK has enabled UN Women to create high-impact, scalable initiatives focused on strengthening the voice of women and girls which seek to remove structural barriers to gender equality and women's empowerment.

However the COVID crisis has resulted in substantial additional challenges to the core mission of UN Women to achieve gender equality for all. During lockdown we have witnessed a dramatic increase in violence worldwide against women and girls and women, who disproportionately are in low income, informal and insecure work, are less protected from the economic shocks now occurring globally as a result of the pandemic. In addition the potential leadership of women in pandemic preparedness and response is not being sufficiently

leveraged and many of the fragile gains made in women's economic and political empowerment are at risk -

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[/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/brief-un-womens-response-to-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4846](https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/brief-un-womens-response-to-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4846). It is accordingly vitally important in both the short and medium term that the UK government continues to invest substantial resources in gender equality and that it uses the opportunity of the Integrated Review to strengthen its commitment to a human rights valued based approach across all aspects of its international policy.

Given the scale of the economic crisis, with global GDP predicted to shrink by 5-8% as a result of COVID-19 and push anywhere between 70- 100 million people into extreme poverty; women most affected it is vitally important for the UK Government in its international strategy supports where possible a multilateral and coordinated response to economic recovery that provides the best prospect of assisting those most in need particularly those in fragile states.

As the recent report by the UN Women's Expert Group highlighted, two central trends and challenges to gender equality are at play in the current international context. First, the continuing ascent of financial globalization and consolidation of corporate and investor power. Second, anti-democratic political parties and leaders who seek to weaken human rights -

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[/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/egm/un%20women%20expert%20group%20meeting%20csw%2064%20report%202019.pdf?la=en&vs=3153](https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/egm/un%20women%20expert%20group%20meeting%20csw%2064%20report%202019.pdf?la=en&vs=3153).

We would recommend that the Integrated Review supports a specific commitment to Human rights that specifically encompasses the social and economic rights of women, and which openly supports gender equality advocates who face opposition from illiberal states and actors.

UN Women UK makes the following specific recommendations to the Integrated Review:

1. Strategy & Policy – Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women

- **Enable women to be at the centre of policy change, solutions and recovery** – gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls should be a specific policy priority in the Integrated Review to ensure that it is integrated into all other areas of the Review and resulting policies, programmes and plans, as well as their monitoring and measurement. Protecting women and girls during conflict, protracted crises and humanitarian emergencies is critical to the recovery of societies and communities. Human rights, including social and economic rights of women, must be centered and integrated into the call for structural reforms in the global political economy to promote

peace in communities, prevent conflict and ensure no one is left behind: women and girls, ethnic minorities, and other marginalised groups.

- **Leverage disaggregated data and gender analysis to take an evidence-based intersectional approach** – disaggregated data and gender analysis should be collected and developed to provide an evidence-base for policymakers and decision-makers and integrate gender perspectives into policies, plans and budgets.
- **Develop gender-responsive national and local plans, strategies, policies and budgets** – develop context-specific gender plans, strategies, policies and budgets for all countries where the UK has foreign affairs and development priorities to set the strategic direction and reinforce the importance of gender equality commitments across all contexts to support global Britain and maintain the UK's position as a world leader in poverty reduction and gender-equality. The UK Government should use the Sustainable Development Goals as an integrated framework to ensure gender equality is mainstreamed into all priorities and continue its position as a global leader in achieving them.
- **Ensure women's equal representation, civil and political rights, and promote women's and girls' participation at all levels** – evidence across sectors, including economic planning and emergency response, demonstrates unquestioningly that policies that do not consult women or include them in decision-making are simply less effective, and can even do harm. Beyond individual women, cross-sector women's and girls' organisations who are often on the front line of response in communities should also be represented and supported.

2. Funding

- **Prioritise funding for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls** - review how FCO funds are currently used and engage an external, recognised body with experience in supporting gender equality to assess how much of that funding goes towards advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Determine a path by which a greater portion of FCO funds could be allocated to organisations which advance gender equality, based upon data that shows investing in women elicits strong returns and positive outcomes across communities.
- **Allocate ring-fenced budget for women and girl human rights defenders, and specialist women's and girls' rights organisations** - publish the value of this budget and clearly specify the way in which it can be used and the types of organisations, projects and activities that it can be allocated to.
- **Recognise women and girl human rights defenders and women's and girls' rights organisations as experts and partners** – in line with the United Nations Security Council 1325 Resolution, guarantee funding for gender equality and rights of women and girls

by increasing the provision of accessible, flexible long-term funding and other forms of support to and protection of women's and girls' rights organisations

3. Capability and Capacity

The UK should ensure the capabilities section of the Integrated Review is an opportunity to build its own capabilities in order to deliver on its commitments to gender equality and ensure departmental continuity and policy coherence. It is essential that expertise is maintained and expanded so that the new department is able to build upon good work in the future. Australia has demonstrated the benefits of retaining this institutional knowledge throughout this process. The UK Government should:

- **Strengthen efficient capability** – The UK Government should continue to support and strengthen its efficient partnerships to continue the development of its impact-reporting and increase the effectiveness of UK aid through global partnership networks
- **Increase capacity** – that generates relevant skills and strengthens to support the integration of gender into national planning, budgeting and systems
- **Supportive inclusive processes** – merging government departments can take two years to fully complete, part of this process will involve a personnel and potentially compensation review. We recommend that those engaged in this process make an active commitment to avoid language, practices and norms (e.g., asking for historic salary information) that may put women or those from underrepresented groups at an unjust disadvantage.
- **Reflect and seek guidance on how its global response to the Covid-19 pandemic can respond to the needs of women and marginalised people** - e.g., by supporting programmes that prevent women and vulnerable groups from becoming economically marginalised by the crisis.

August 2020