

# **Xinjiang Detention Camps: Written evidence from The Jo Cox Foundation to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee (XIN0070)**

## **1. Introduction**

*"Every decade or so, the world is tested by a crisis so grave that it breaks the mould: one so horrific and inhumane that the response of politicians to it becomes emblematic of their generation — their moral leadership or cowardice, their resolution or incompetence. It is how history judges us. We have been tested by the Second World War, the genocide in Rwanda and the slaughter in Bosnia, and I believe that Syria is our generation's test."*

*- Jo Cox MP*

Internationally, The Jo Cox Foundation works to stand up for the most vulnerable people across the world and to champion humanitarian work around the globe in the memory of the late MP Jo Cox.

Jo Cox was a life-long humanitarian. She dedicated her career to helping those less fortunate than herself. She was a staunch advocate of an ethical foreign policy, and was committed to the protection of civilians in conflict and to the prevention of atrocities worldwide. On this basis, the Foundation continues to actively engage in issues that highlight the UK's approach to atrocity prevention worldwide.

## **2. The need for a comprehensive UK cross-departmental atrocity prevention strategy**

The UK government's response to the appalling persecution of the Uyghur people and atrocities in Xinjiang has once again exposed the fact that without a comprehensive and well-integrated atrocity prevention strategy, Government's ability to uphold its responsibilities to help protect persecuted minorities across the globe continues to be seriously hindered.

Policy responses to the systemic discrimination of the Uyghur people have been delayed, inconsistent, and piecemeal. This is of grave concern, given that the violence witnessed against the Uyghur people is likely to meet the threshold of genocide.<sup>1</sup> Future incidences in other areas of the world will similarly require a more comprehensive strategic governmental response. We have already seen incidences in the past - for example, the ethnic cleansing and genocide of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar (2017) - where the UK's ability to influence and mitigate the effects of human rights violations has been limited due to a lack of an integrated strategy. Indeed, the FASC itself reflected in 2018 on the UK's failures in Syria and Myanmar, calling on the government to "act urgently to produce a comprehensive atrocity prevention strategy' to ensure that it moved "beyond words and towards concrete actions." We are disappointed that no such integrated strategy has yet come into being. We call on government not just to commit to such a strategy, but to a co-ordinating mechanism (see next point) situated within government and a form of analysis unit to enable it to confront challenges and to be able to flexibly but expediently respond to the nuance of each individual atrocity scenario.

We respectfully call on the FASC to continue to urgently press the government for the great need for a strategic framework in which opportunities for meaningful UK intervention can be identified and delivered.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ecr2p.leeds.ac.uk/what-can-the-uk-do-to-help-protect-the-uyghurs-adopt-a-national-strategy-of-atrocity-prevention/> ; <https://metro.co.uk/2020/08/13/read-about-uyghur-people-13109442/>

### **3. The need for a functional mechanism to uphold an atrocity prevention strategy**

Despite the welcome publication of the UK's National Approach to Preventing Mass Atrocities (2019) and clarification of ministerial responsibility for UK atrocity prevention policy, the UK is still at risk of falling behind many like-minded states in its approach and contribution to the timely and effective prevention and prediction of, and protection from, mass atrocities. Mechanisms of mass atrocity prediction and prevention (underpinned by national policies) have already been successfully integrated in states across Europe, South America, Africa, and perhaps most comprehensively by the US. These mechanisms are vehicles through which governments discharge their international responsibilities to protect populations from mass atrocities, uphold their obligations set out under the UN Convention for the Prevention and Punishment for the Crime of Genocide, and other international treaty commitments. The US Atrocities Prevention Board (now the Atrocities Prevention Early Warning Taskforce) is credited with mitigating escalating identity-based violence in both Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>2</sup>

The only office in the UK that is currently tasked specifically with implementing these responsibilities is the Focal Point for the Responsibility to Protect, a role that in recent years has been occupied by the FCO's Multilateral Policy Director. It is unclear what this role will look like and who will fill it in the new FCDO (see below). The FCO/DFID merger brings an opportunity to reimagine the office of the R2P focal point, and to address any gaps of coordination and consistency. In recent years, lack of transparency and stretched resources have risked the role of focal point becoming unfit for purpose. It is unclear, for example, what role the focal point and their team have played regarding the detention of Uyghurs. For example, has the UK's focal point for R2P convened internal or external meetings on the Xinjiang crisis? What atrocity prevention architecture or expertise, whether within the UK Government, UK civil society, and/or internationally, has been activated or drawn upon with regards to the atrocities in Xinjiang? What scenario planning has been undertaken by office of the R2P focal point, the Multilateral Directorate, or others working to support the FCDO Minister responsible for the UK's atrocity prevention policy?

The Jo Cox Foundation believes in the power of partnership working, and would like to see the evolution of a mechanism that harnesses and integrates the phenomenal wealth and depth of expertise of government, our civil society partners, and internationally, to work together to build a world-leading system for the prediction and prevention of atrocities worldwide.

### **4. The importance of early prediction of atrocities and identity-based violence**

In March 2018, DFID launched the Jo Cox Memorial Grant Fund: a £10 million UK Aid Direct-administered fund to support organisations working on two themes close to Jo Cox's heart: women's social, economic and political empowerment, and strengthening civil society capacity for the early prediction of identity-based violence. On the latter theme, grants were made earlier in 2020 to organisations working across the world to strengthen the ability of local communities to predict and prevent identity-based violence, including mass atrocities. This includes the funding of projects to enable early warnings of increased tension leading to actions that prevent further escalation, and ultimately better protect communities from the threat of violence. Thus, the prediction of identity-based violence and of atrocities, is a core theme of focus at the Foundation.

Currently, the UK lacks crucial atrocity prevention risk assessment and analysis capabilities. Knowing what to look for, how to analyse relevant indicators, and how to 'raise the alarm' are crucial steps for successful early warning of atrocity risks and early preventative action. We call

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<sup>2</sup> Pursuing Institutionalisation of the Prevention Agenda; National Mechanisms for the Prevention of Genocide and other Atrocity Crimes, The Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, 2017; also [From promise to practice](#): Strengthening the UK's approach to atrocity prevention and R2P, A report based on UNA-UK's delegation visit to the United Nations and Washington DC, Alexandra Buskie, UNA-UK, 2015

upon government to acknowledge the need for much improved risk assessment tools in order for the UK to adequately identify and analyse atrocity risks.

Previously, the UK's early warning system has over-relied upon two core processes: the Cabinet Office's annual Countries at Risk of Instability (CRI); 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 incorporate indicators of identity-based violence or atrocity.<sup>3</sup> They are both processes for analysing longer-term trends and establishing agreed understandings and approaches across government. As a result, they continue to miss or underestimate mass atrocity risks, including omitting Central African Republic in its 2013 risk analysis – despite it being a state extremely prone to atrocity crimes.

Echoing the views of our respected partners Protection Approaches, we agree that this analysis gap requires human expertise and bureaucratic coordination - not big data, statistical modelling or large budgets.<sup>4</sup> Atrocity predication and policy analysis is low-cost but high-impact, and yet the Stabilisation Unit and its tools of analysis, the CRI, and the UK's National Security Strategy more broadly, omits common indicators of identity-based violence, lacks specialist expertise, and as such leaves HMG under-resourced in terms of intelligence, and vulnerable to ineffectual responses.

We would like to know whether the last CRI identified the ongoing crisis in Xinjiang. We would like to know if a JACS been initiated for the Xinjiang region. To quote our partners at UNA-UK: "Mass atrocities are commonly grounded in a long history of grievances, discrimination, and tension and 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, different tools are needed."<sup>5</sup> The detention camps in Xinjiang provide devastating proof that modern instances of mass atrocities can – and do – occur outside of what HMG understands as armed conflict. This fact necessitates a different, if at times complementary, strategy to predict and prevent mass atrocities.

## **5. A moment for the UK to lead the way on ethical foreign policy**

As the UK concludes the largest review of UK international policy since the Cold War, and in the context of the recent merger of the FCO and DFID, it is clear that we stand at a rare juncture in the development of our foreign policy. We believe this is the ideal opportunity to build and embed a national strategy for atrocity prevention, one that underscores the merged aims and objectives of the new FCDO to work to support the UK's aim to be a force for good in the world.

As the architecture of this new department is built, and the integrated review of international policy takes place, a new direction for UK global engagement is inevitable. We would like to see the UK government press for, and prioritise, bilateral and multilateral diplomacy efforts to prevent atrocities and genocide worldwide. If this is not the moment for the UK to integrate commitments to confront the gravest humanitarian crimes across the globe, when will it be?

We believe an ethical foreign policy, underpinning a clear atrocity prevention strategy, would enable to UK to better redress inconsistencies between its trade policies, and its stance on human rights. An ethical foreign policy would determine the application of its new human rights regime sanctions policy, and would enable it to condemn human rights abuses and take appropriate

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<sup>3</sup> 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%202%20-%20Professor%20Jason%20Ralph%20-%20Mainstreaming%20R2P%20in%20UK%20strategy.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> There are serious contentions regarding the efficacy and reliability of existing conflict and atrocity forecasting modelling. For more see Jens Stappenbeck, (2017): Frühwarnung weiter denken: Errichtung einer digitalen Vorhersageplattform, PeaceLab, <https://peacelab.blog/2017/03/fruehwarnung-weiter-denken-errichtung-einer-digitalen-vorhersageplattform>. Stappenbeck is currently reviewing efficacy of statistical data-based early warning systems, working closely with the Germany government and others. Contact Jens Stappenbeck [jens.stappenbeck@genocide-alert.de](mailto:jens.stappenbeck@genocide-alert.de)

<sup>5</sup> UNA-PA FAC inquiry

actions without fear of inciting ideological backlash - for example, Sinophobia in the case of China. To take this example further, the UK needs to be able to hold to account the Chinese state for its human rights abuses while also pursuing bold climate crisis solutions which necessarily must involve China.

In other words, the UK stands at a moment of opportunity to lead the way in establishing a thoughtful, modern approach to balancing the complexities of international diplomacy with the enduring need to protect civilians from atrocity and genocide and, in doing so, demonstrate the value of the UK as a global player on international forums. The Jo Cox Foundation firmly believes, as Jo Cox herself did, that atrocity prevention must be placed firmly at the heart of British foreign policy development in an increasingly turbulent world in which identity-based violence is on the rise.

*Authored by Catherine Anderson, CEO, The Jo Cox Foundation, 30th October 2020*

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