



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

**The Rt Hon. Baroness Chapman of
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Sarah Champion MP
House of Commons
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Dear Sarah,

I was grateful for the opportunity to speak with you and your committee on 23 June about the FCDO's work on Atrocity Prevention, and the ongoing action we are taking to try and end the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Sudan, and ensure that those responsible for the atrocities in El Fasher and elsewhere are one day brought to justice.

The Government has carefully analysed the points made to your committee by Dr Kate Ferguson of Protection Approaches and Nathaniel Raymond from Humanitarian Research Lab, and I wanted to address each of their key allegations in turn. You will be aware that, in many cases, these allegations relate to the period when the previous government was in office, but with the assistance of the relevant officials, I have sought as far as possible to deal with these claims, as well as those relating to my own government's time in office.

1. The FCDO failed to act on early warnings of the threat to El Fasher.

The FCDO takes all warnings of atrocities in Sudan seriously and has repeatedly mobilised the international community both in private and in public, to urge all parties to de-escalate and comply with their obligations under international law. In this case, the specific claim is that, after a meeting on **16 May 2024**, when civil society groups discussed with FCDO officials the risk of atrocities in El Fasher, no action was taken. This is patently untrue. Below, I have reproduced in full the statement issued by the former Foreign Secretary, David Cameron, on **19 May 2024**, three days after the meeting in question:

"The violence in and around El Fasher in Sudan is appalling. Villages around El Fasher have been burnt down. Hospitals have been destroyed. Hundreds are dead and injured from the fighting in recent days, and over 800,000 civilians have no means of escape."

“I am deeply concerned by highly credible reports that some of the violence in Darfur is ethnically motivated. Attacks against Masalit, Fur, Zaghawa, and other non-Arab communities by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied militias are already taking place around El Fasher. The ongoing pattern of violence in Darfur, including apparent systematic attacks against civilians, may amount to crimes against humanity. I also condemn the indiscriminate shelling and aerial bombing in densely populated areas by the Sudanese Armed Forces, which has led to catastrophic losses of civilian life.

“It is within the power of the warring parties to stop this. The RSF must halt its siege of El Fasher and both sides must de-escalate immediately. Both sides must fully honour the commitments made in the Jeddah Declaration, including allowing unhindered and safe humanitarian access and complying with their obligations under international law. We must hold accountable those responsible for violence against civilians. Thanks to open-source reporting, including that funded by the UK, we have detail about who on the ground is responsible. And we will continue to explore all levers to disrupt the funding of those perpetrating the violence.”

The following month, amidst reports of the imminent fall of El Fasher, the UK galvanised action at the UN Security Council to secure Resolution 2736, which called on the RSF to lift their siege and protect civilians – while requesting the UN Secretary General to provide further options for civilian protection in Sudan. Multiple civil society actors, including both witnesses, have previously pointed to the impact that UNSCR2736 had on the ground in Sudan at the time, and welcomed the UK’s leadership on the issue.

That was just the start of a prolonged and intensive effort at official and ministerial level by the FCDO – both in public and in private – specifically to raise awareness of the risks facing El Fasher, over the whole eighteen-month period leading up to the final assault on the city, and the horrific atrocities that subsequently followed. In November 2024, the current Government sought to agree a further UN resolution which would have established a monitoring mechanism for the Jeddah Declaration. This was regrettably vetoed by Russia.

It remains of course the most appalling failure on the part of the international community that – despite the warnings that were received of what was going to happen in El Fasher, and the length of time that existed to prevent them – the eventual massacres and atrocities were still able to take place. However, it is simply not true that, having received those warnings back in May 2024, the FCDO chose not to do anything about them. Failure to succeed is not the same as a refusal to try, and it is plain wrong to suggest otherwise.

2. The FCDO has not prioritised Atrocity Prevention and Protection of Civilians

Again, there is no basis whatsoever for this allegation. Since the very beginning of the conflict in Sudan, atrocity prevention has been one of the three strategic pillars of the FCDO’s response, alongside humanitarian response and work towards a ceasefire – shaping all of our diplomatic engagement, multilateral efforts and programming activities.

The UK led efforts in 2023 to establish the UN Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), secured its mandate extension for two successive years, and supported the deployment of a specialist sexual and gender-based violence investigator to the mission. In November 2025, following the appalling atrocities in El Fasher, the UK secured a UN Human Rights Council Resolution mandating an urgent inquiry so that those responsible could be held to account. And on 19 February 2026, the Foreign Secretary brought the FFM's findings directly to the UN Security Council, ensuring that the voices of Sudan's women, who have borne an intolerable burden throughout this conflict, were heard.

The UK has, alongside the other members of the Human Rights Council Core Group, created the Coalition for Atrocity Prevention and Justice in Sudan to strengthen the international community's response to atrocities. We will use the Coalition to deliver real impact against atrocities and in support of Sudanese human rights defenders, both through coordinating our work on the ground and through stronger collective messaging.

Since the conflict began, the UK has also swiftly refocused its programming to prioritise atrocity prevention and the protection of civilians, with a substantial share of humanitarian funding dedicated to lifesaving protection work. We are also tackling the drivers of atrocities by supporting Sudanese journalists to counter misinformation and hate speech, and by backing specialist NGOs to deliver community-level de-escalation. UK funding enables open-source organisations to document human rights violations and share verified evidence with media, justice, and accountability bodies. Alongside this, we are strengthening the capacity of seven Sudanese human rights defender organisations and working with international partners to scale up support for this critical work.

Even during a time of constrained budgets, we have also consistently made Sudan a priority for our allocation of additional funds. Following the capture of El Fasher, the Foreign Secretary announced a further £5 million in UK support to Sudan, adding to the £23 million of existing UK funding re-allocated to support the humanitarian response to the crisis in Northern Darfur. The UK has pledged £146 million in support to Sudan this year and has committed to protecting this funding over the spending review period.

3. The FCDO ignored the recommendations of its own 'Protection of Civilians' paper

Claims made in the past – and repeated at your committee – that the FCDO chose "the least ambitious option" for further activity to protect civilians in Sudan are also factually incorrect. The FCDO paper referenced and included in the Independent Commission for Aid Impact review of UK aid to Sudan, was designed as a basis for internal discussion, not a basis for decisions, and it did not go to Ministers for that reason.

Contrary to what has been claimed, the paper did not set out four options for action nor make an assessment on which to choose. Instead, it mapped out HMG activity to date and set out the full spectrum of potential further activity, solely so each option could be analysed for its feasibility and impact. This is standard practice in humanitarian policy-making so that those

responsible can genuinely say they have explored every possible option, no matter how unrealistic or undeliverable those options might be.

As part of that exercise, the paper specifically assessed external calls for the deployment of a 'protection of civilians force' in Sudan and concluded that – due to the conflict dynamics at the time, and other factors – the deployment of a force was simply not feasible. The UN Secretary General agreed with this assessment in his report to the UN Security Council in October 2024, stating that the conditions did not exist for the deployment of any such peacekeeping force, on the basis that there was no peace to keep.

In discussions about public disclosure of internal policy-making processes, the Information Commissioner has often discussed the concept of a 'chilling effect', whereby civil servants would be less likely to consider the full range of potential policy options in any given situation if they knew they would face public criticism for having done so.

It would be deeply disappointing and counter-productive if the result of the inaccurate claims around this 'options paper' meant that – in future – civil servants felt that they could not engage in such exercises, due to fear of how the outcome of their deliberations would be misrepresented, as has happened already in this case.

4. The UK has failed to make adequate representations to the UAE over Sudan.

This claim again is totally unfounded. Ministers and senior officials have regularly and consistently discussed the situation in Sudan with the UAE, and continue to do so, as part of our international effort to secure a pathway to peace for the Sudanese people. For example, I would refer the committee to the joint statement issued in April following the Foreign Secretary's meeting with her UAE counterpart, which covered Sudan in detail.

The UAE, alongside the United States, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, are members of the Quad and are leading efforts to secure a humanitarian truce. We are doing all we can to support these efforts, including through regular bilateral engagement with the Quad members and other key international partners, working the UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy to Sudan, and directly lobbying the warring parties via the UK Special Representative to Sudan. It is simply untrue that we are reluctant to raise these issues with our counterparts in the UAE, or that we have ever failed to do so.

5. The FCDO sought to downplay the scale of casualties in El Fasher.

Amid all the inaccurate claims that have been made about the FCDO's mindset and activities in relation to the Sudan conflict, the most grievously offensive is the suggestion that officials sought to downplay the scale of civilian casualties in El Fasher, and while I should not have to do so, let me explain why this claim is wrong.

Following the fall of El Fasher, as you will recall, MPs were privately briefed by Mr Raymond that at least 60,000 people had been killed in the city during a three-week period and that this

figure was a low estimate. This figure was then quoted widely in Parliament and the media, at a time when – separately, and as mentioned earlier – the UK was leading efforts at the UN to ensure that what had happened in El Fasher was a catalyst for international action on the conflict, and that those responsible could be held to account.

FCDO officials therefore reached out to Mr Raymond in entirely good faith to understand how he had arrived at the 60,000 figure, so as to ensure that – when the UK was making its own statements about the scale of the atrocities in El Fasher – we would have the most reliable, credible and up-to-date evidence on which to base those statements. That requires a clear understanding of data sources and methodology, and confidence that any figures cited by Ministers would be robust and verifiable enough to be used in Parliament, at the UN Security Council, and in other official government communications.

This type of outreach to UN agencies, NGOs and academic analysts is common practice for the FCDO, and something that is routinely done by officials when – for example – the Government is preparing to make statements on the number of individuals affected by a natural disaster, or the number at risk of food insecurity in a region. To claim that, in the instance of El Fasher, FCDO officials reached out to Mr Raymond because his casualty estimates had created “political concerns” for the Government is entirely false and utterly without logic, given the consensus for action we were simultaneously building at the UN.

I would strongly urge the Committee to dismiss that claim and remove the disgraceful slur from the officials at whom it has been aimed.

Future action on atrocity prevention in Sudan

The massacres in El Fasher, and Sudan’s wider humanitarian crisis, represent one of the most appalling horrors of my lifetime. It is a source of profound regret that the UK, along with our international partners, were unable to prevent those massacres, and that we collectively failed the people of El Fasher. However, it is simply wrong to say that the UK did nothing to try and prevent those atrocities, let alone that we were in any way complicit.

Now, we face another risk of mass civilian casualties in El Obeid and again, we must do everything in our power to prevent that. Since initial warnings in mid-June of a potential RSF offensive, the UK has issued four statements – bilaterally, through the Coalition for Atrocity Prevention, and at the UN Security Council. We are now working to bring this issue formally before the UN Human Rights Council on 3 July in a UK-called Urgent Debate.

As I said before the Committee, I am grateful for the dedication of civil servants in both the FCDO Sudan and Atrocity Prevention teams. Sudan is, and will remain, one of the most important foreign policy priorities for this Government, and we are continuing to do all that we can to protect the lives of those civilians caught in the middle of this conflict.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Corbyn', written in a cursive style.

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