

## Written evidence submitted by Save the Children (INR0014)

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Save the Children is the world's leading independent organisation for children, established more than 100 years ago and now operating in 120 countries around the world. We work closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Department for International Development (DFID) on the frontline in some of the world's most challenging conflict and humanitarian contexts.
- 1.2. As well as delivering programmes so that every child can survive, learn and be protected, we also contribute to training UK Armed Forces and NATO Rapid Reaction Forces on civilian protection, and help to shape and uphold the global rules and norms that put children off limits in war. This experience gives us a unique perspective on how the UK operates in fragile states, how it is perceived both on the ground and at a multilateral level, and how that interacts with the work of the FCO, the MoD and DFID. We provide insights based on evidence from our staff working on the frontlines of conflict.
- 1.3. With more children around the world living in areas affected by conflict than at any time in the last two decades, the protection of children in conflict is a core priority for our advocacy work at a UK and global level. As part of this work, in 2019 we produced a [report](#) with the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) on how the UK can create an effective and properly implemented Protection of Civilians Strategy that would help to create meaningful protections for children on the ground.

### 2. Summary of Recommendations:

- 2.1. The Review should position the UK as a champion of global norms and standards on civilian protection, including by strengthening and updating policies and practices to reflect the realities of modern conflict and increasing disregard for the rules-based international system.
- 2.2. The Review should result in a comprehensive, cross-government Strategy that treats the protection of children and civilians more broadly as a central pillar of UK foreign policy and military engagement, and a framework for implementation of the UK's foreign policy, security and aid objectives.
- 2.3. The Review should recognise conflict prevention and the protection of civilians as a strategic foreign and security policy priority, as well as a humanitarian imperative, recognising that the impact of conflict on civilian populations and infrastructure undermines global resilience to pandemics such as Covid-19.

2.4. The Review should protect an independent Department for International Development as the best way of projecting the UK's influence as a force for good in the world and safeguarding its global reputation as a 'development superpower'.

2.5. The Government should provide a clear and transparent updated timetable for the Review, as well as setting out a clear mechanism for meaningful engagement with a range of external stakeholders, including civil society and communities affected by conflict.

### 3. **The Integrated Review and priorities for UK foreign policy strategy:**

#### 4. **Protecting Children in Conflict**

4.1. Save the Children welcomes the Government's commitment to a comprehensive review of the UK's foreign policy, defence, security and international development priorities and objectives. The unprecedented global challenge of Covid-19 reinforces the importance of developing an updated, comprehensive overseas strategy that responds to what was already a changing global landscape with new threats, challenges and opportunities.

4.2. The Foreign Secretary's [commitment](#) that the Global Britain agenda will look to *"reinforce our national mission as a force for good in the world"* is encouraging. From Save the Children's perspective, the Review is an opportunity for the UK to rise to 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges and lead the way in protecting children and other civilians from the devastating impacts of conflict, leveraging its influence and expertise in diplomacy, development, trade and military affairs. This is not only about ensuring that the UK lives up to its values and projects itself as a force for good – as the Covid-19 pandemic is showing, building a more stable and resilient world is also crucial to the UK's ability to protect its own citizens.

4.3. As a senior member of NATO, permanent member of the UN Security Council, a member of the G7, the G20 and the Commonwealth, the UK has a seat at the most powerful tables in the world, and is therefore in an extremely strong position to champion a protection agenda. From the ban on landmines to the Arms Trade Treaty, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict initiative, UK leadership has helped to save lives and alleviate suffering.

4.4. With the UN Security Council increasingly gridlocked, US leadership increasingly unpredictable, and international institutions under increasing strain, there is a need and an opportunity for 'Global Britain' to once again step up and lead the way – delivering domestic and global change to protect children in conflict.

4.5. The nature of modern conflict is changing and is challenging the international rules-based system. As we have recently witnessed in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, conflicts are increasingly complex and protracted and often fought out in densely populated areas with a disregard for international law, and with impunity for attacks on civilians and infrastructure.

- 4.6. Save the Children's 2020 [Stop the War on Children: Gender Matters report](#) found that children are more at risk in conflicts than they have ever been before. Since 2010, the number of children living in conflict zones has increased by 34% and verified reports of grave violations against children have gone up 170%. 149 million children are estimated to be living in high intensity conflicts, up 7 million from the previous year. These children are living in areas where they are vulnerable to being killed, maimed, denied humanitarian assistance, sexually abused, recruited, abducted or having their schools and hospitals attacked. These impacts are compounded when explosive weapons with wide area effects (EWIPA) are used in populated areas like towns and cities. From conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and Ukraine, the consequences are widespread and devastating. They disproportionately kill and injure civilians in ever-increasing numbers and the impact on children is particularly destructive both in the short and long term.
- 4.7. The infrastructure destruction and the impact on essential services, such as power, water and sanitation systems, roads, hospitals and schools, all serve to exacerbate the effects on children and civilians more broadly. Children are denied access to healthcare and the opportunity to go to school. Explosive weapons can also prevent life-saving humanitarian aid from reaching children and their families. This crisis in civilian protection is not only devastating civilians' lives and risking a lost generation of children, who are maimed and traumatised by war, it is threatening global stability - undermining our collective ability to hold perpetrators accountable and prevent these atrocities in the first place.
- 4.8. As part of the Review process, the UK Government should position itself as a champion of global norms and standards on civilian protection, including by strengthening and updating policies and practices to reflect the realities of modern conflict and increasing disregard for the rules based international system.** Save the Children welcomed the Government's commitment to updating its 2010 Protection of Civilians Strategy as an encouraging first step. However, we are still awaiting the outcome of that review and cannot yet have confidence that it will provide the cross-departmental strategy with clear accountabilities and implementation mechanisms that is required if it is to make a meaningful difference.
- 4.9. The Review should result in a comprehensive, cross-government strategy that treats the protection of children and civilians more broadly as a central pillar of UK foreign policy and military engagement, and a framework for implementation of the UK's foreign policy, security and aid objectives.** This should include:
- 4.9.1. Child-specific expertise in peace support and military operations which would consolidate child protection within the UN's peacekeeping and political missions.
- 4.9.2. Advocate for, and endorse, a political declaration to address the humanitarian harm caused by explosive weapons when used in populated areas with wide area effect that establishes a clear presumption against their use, given the foreseeability of indiscriminate harm. Evidence shows that explosive

weapons with wide-area effects have a disproportionate impact on children, who face a higher risk of death as well as injury and developmental or psychological damage.

- 4.9.3. Establish a policy to track civilian harm and record civilian casualties in conflicts the UK is involved in, to provide an evidence base that improves civilian protection in operations and broader policies.
- 4.9.4. Improving and championing accountability for violations of children's rights in conflict by consistently resourcing and supporting robust international mechanisms to prosecute cases of violations of children's rights in conflict, including through resourcing dedicated child specific expertise in international investigations and other ad hoc judicial mechanisms.
- 4.9.5. A commitment to share expertise by, for example, providing training to officials and troops on children and armed conflict as well as the development of standard operating procedures for reporting grave violations against children.
- 4.9.6. A new Protection of Civilians Strategy must be accompanied with a clear accountability framework for its implementation in order to ensure it can measure progress across government, report its findings transparently and conduct meaningful regular reviews.
- 4.9.7. An updated strategy would also help bring together several different FCO priorities, including preventing sexual violence in conflict, education in emergencies, conflict prevention, enhancing accountability for violations of human rights, supporting the international rules-based system and norms, and mainstreaming protection into the Conflict Stability and Security Fund programming that bridges the gap between foreign and national security policy and development.
- 4.9.8. Aside from strengthening domestic frameworks and policies around the world, a strong Protection of Civilians' Strategy would also strengthen the UK's voice on conflict and civilian protection issues at the United Nations, and in bilateral engagements. This would demonstrate how widely-shared British values continue to shape global norms to protect the most vulnerable. It would also play a role in preserving the integrity of the rules-based system and multilateral institutions that Britain helped to create.

## **5. Covid-19**

- 5.1. The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the extent to which the merciless warfare inflicted upon civilian populations in countries like Syria and Yemen has created a crisis of resilience that makes the whole world more vulnerable. It should be a turning point that not only encourages the international community to take its humanitarian responsibilities more seriously, but that changes how countries

including the UK think strategically about their own security. The International Development Secretary's [recognition](#) that *"no one is safe until we are all safe"* cannot only apply for the duration of the Covid-19 crisis, it must be a defining pillar of the UK's long-term foreign policy strategy.

- 5.2. For those already living with the devastating impacts of conflict, Covid-19 looks set to bring further death and suffering. Explosive weapons have destroyed critical civilian infrastructure, including vital health and sanitation services. After five years of war in Yemen there is one ventilator for every 56,500 people and only half of health facilities are functioning. In Mali, the scene of regular outbreaks of violence since 2012, there is one ventilator for every 339,000 people. Millions of internally displaced people driven from their homes now live in crowded and chaotic camps without access to clean water and with no possibility of social distancing. As the Defence Secretary [acknowledged](#) in his recent speech to the Atlantic Council, *"conflict provides the perfect conditions for pandemic diseases to emerge and thrive"*.
- 5.3. Until the pandemic is contained everywhere, including among the most vulnerable populations, the risk of it re-emerging in the UK will remain. **The Review should recognise conflict prevention and the protection of civilians as a strategic foreign and security policy priority, as well as a humanitarian imperative, recognising that the impact of conflict on civilian populations and infrastructure undermines global resilience to pandemics such as Covid-19.**
- 5.4. Furthermore, at a time when multilateralism and international institutions have been under sustained attack, the UK should use its influence, including our world-class diplomatic service, to ensure that the threat from Covid-19 galvanises the international community to recognise the importance of nations working together to respond to shared challenges. The international community needs to reflect on what those threats and challenges are, recognising, for example, that global health is not just a development issue but a global security issue.

## 6. The relationship of the FCO with other UK Government departments

- 6.1. Save the Children is concerned by the prospect that the Review may give serious consideration to DFID being merged with the FCO. In the [words](#) of the former International Development Secretary, the Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP, *"DFID is the most effective and respected engine of development anywhere in the world, and a huge soft power asset for Britain"*. Whilst the UK's status as a 'development superpower' complements the UK's wider foreign policy objectives, it is the UK's moral commitment to aid that underpins that soft power and makes other countries look to us as an example. Were DFID to be subsumed by the FCO, it would be a serious blow to the UK's global reputation and therefore a significant strategic misjudgement. **The Review should protect an independent Department for International Development as the best way of projecting the UK's influence as a force for good in the world and safeguarding its global reputation as a 'development superpower'.**

- 6.2. An independent DFID ensures that humanitarian and development concerns are heard in Cabinet, through its Secretary of State, but it ensures that policy and funding decisions are made on the basis of international development considerations. An independent DFID is also important to retaining a centre of excellence in the expertise required to administer the aid budget effectively. Research by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) notes that where other countries have moved from having an independent department to a merger with ministries of foreign affairs they have seen significant loss of expert staff to the private sector and civil society and an increased reliance on contractors, reducing value for money. The ODI also [finds](#) that *“there are real risks that mergers do not deliver on promised gains for global development”* and that *“efficiency, performance and greater policy coherence... may even be hampered by the process of structural integration itself”*.
- 6.3. We are cautious about efforts that the Government has made to improve cohesion between DFID and the FCO. While there are certainly benefits in the departments working more closely together, this is equally true of, for example, the FCO and the MoD, where a joint minister focused on conflict prevention and the protection of civilians could help to deliver the objectives set out in the first part of this submission. We are yet to see the full effects of the move to increase the number of joint ministerial roles between the departments, or to change in-country line management arrangements so that DFID country offices now report to Ambassadors. However, the direction of travel illustrated by both of these measures is to reduce the ability of the DFID to operate independently of the FCO, the likely outcome of which is for the objectives of the more ‘senior’ department - the FCO - to be prioritised over the more junior DFID.
- 6.4. With a formalisation of DFID’s role as the preeminent department in aid spending, there are moves that could improve cohesion between the departments without this risk, and bring better consistency across the aid budget. Single country plans that cover all aid spending by all departments and funds in each country, as well as coordination at regional level, could help to ensure that maximum value for money was being achieved in working to meet the Sustainable Development Goals in the given country.

## **7. The process of the Integrated Review**

- 7.1. Save the Children welcomes the Government’s decision to postpone the Integrated Review in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is vital that Government, Parliament and civil society have the capacity to properly engage with the Review, and that it can incorporate the foreign policy implications of the pandemic and lessons learned from the response.
- 7.2. We also welcome the Government’s commitment to consulting external stakeholders. It will be essential for the Review process to engage with organisations who have experience, including in fragile states and developing

countries where the UK has vital national interests, of the ways in which UK foreign, defence, security and international development policies interact. This consultation should be transparent and accessible not only to larger international NGOs like Save the Children, but to wider civil society including smaller, specialist organisations who typically have fewer resources and less access.

- 7.3. The Government should provide a clear and transparent updated timetable for the Review, as well as setting out a clear mechanism for meaningful engagement with a range of external stakeholders, including civil society and communities affected by conflict.**

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