

Written evidence submitted by the Mercy Corps (INR0037)

Introduction & About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a global organisation working in more than 40 countries around the world responding to conflict, crisis and fragility. From Syria to South Sudan, Iraq, to Somalia, we work with some of the 1.5 billion people whose lives are currently riven by conflict and violence, addressing both the devastating impact and the root causes of conflict and fragility.

We welcome the continued efforts of the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) to scrutinise the priorities and effectiveness of UK foreign-policy and for this opportunity to provide written evidence in relation to the Integrated Review.

This submission responds to the first two areas of the Inquiry. It draws on Mercy Corps' programmatic experience, engagement with HMG in the UK and abroad, and as steering committee members of the BOND Conflict Policy Group. Mercy Corps is currently implementing four FCO administered CSSF programmes through the Conflict Stability and Security Fund.

Our key recommendations are:

Adopt a fourth national security objective to promote international peace and security - and a corresponding conflict strategy based on the Building Stability Framework to guide cross government policy decisions.

Renew UK Government commitment to multilateral action, global norms, and respect for international humanitarian law. This includes reaffirming a commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peaceful societies in all multilateral and bilateral engagement.

Ensure that 50% of UK support for climate adaptation is delivered in fragile and conflict affected states.

Encourage the FCO to work with other government departments so as to ensure The Review addresses the full spectrum of global security challenges and adopts a human security approach.

Area 1. The process of the Integrated Review

The efficacy of the Review's process

During the 2015 Strategic Defence and Strategy Review, we witnessed strong civil society engagement and dialogue with the government, and an open and transparent process that ensured it was informed by multiple and divergent perspectives.

Conversely, clarity on the scope, timeline, process and indication for external engagement around the Integrated Review has been lacking. We hope these issues will be addressed when the Review restarts in the autumn and that not only will external partners and experts be more highly valued, but that on a practical level they will be able to engage effectively. This will require a transparent and inclusive process with robust and regular external consultation. Relevant stakeholders include academics, think tanks, NGOs and wider civil society.

The relationship of this Review with other foreign-policy reviews

It is concerning that, unlike the reviews of [2010](#), and [2015](#) which made commitments to ‘support the rules-based international system’, this has been absent in UK Government language around this review. We urge the UK Government to renew commitment to multilateral action, global norms, and respect for international humanitarian law. The 2015 National Security Strategy/Strategic Defence and Security Review (NNS/SDSR), has been the key strategic guide to the UK’s approach to conflict, peace and stability overseas until now. The NSS/SDSR contains brief but valuable reference to conflict prevention and the need to deal with the root causes of conflict in its development and security policies. We ask that the UK recommits to longer-term efforts to address root causes of conflict and supporting peaceful and inclusive societies as part of its response to tackling conflict overseas. In early 2018, a [National Security Capability Review](#) (NSCR) was undertaken to assess the continued relevance of the threats and opportunities identified in the NSS/SDSR. The NSCR also introduced the ‘Fusion Doctrine’ in an effort to improve joined-up HMG thinking and decision making on national security issues. Cross government coordination has improved but more should be done (please see paragraphs 17 and 18).

Area 2. Strategy in UK foreign policy

The priorities for UK foreign-policy strategy

The current COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the value of multilateral action and the importance of cohesive policy across sectors. COVID-19’s spread is outpacing the global response and threatens health systems and economies worldwide, undermining development gains and progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. As always, the most devastating effects of the pandemic will be felt by those already most vulnerable, who are increasingly concentrated in fragile and conflict affected contexts.¹ These will also be the places

¹ Without action, more than 80% of the world’s poorest will be living in fragile contexts by 2030. OECD, States of Fragility, 2018.

where the virus will be most difficult to quell and must be prioritised by the UK for the sake of public health security.

There are multiple reasons why it is in our economic and security interest for UK foreign-policy to put fragile and conflict affected states front and centre. Violent conflict erodes global development, prevents progress towards gender equality and exacerbates humanitarian crises. It also drives violent extremism and mass displacement. We ask the UK to increase efforts towards alleviating the root causes of conflict, including poor governance, inequality and climate change, and to put fragile and conflict affected states front and centre of UK foreign-policy.

Stability overseas means stability at home. Inclusive societies that can resolve conflict peacefully and an international system that focuses on conflict prevention rather than crisis response is in our shared interest. So too is a secure, just and prosperous world and healthy populations - who will become future trading partners. Conversely, if the UK tailors foreign-policy efforts to achieve narrowly defined and short term 'commercial' or 'security' interests, it will weaken its ability to deliver the much larger development and security goals.

There is currently an imbalance between what conflict costs the global economy and investments in conflict prevention. Even though conflict mitigation and peacebuilding cost far less than other interventions, these programmes are seriously underfunded and too often driven by policies focused on short timelines, limited scopes and fast, easily-reported results. According to OECD-DAC, in 2018, the UK only disbursed 3.8% of the total official development assistance (ODA) budget towards "Civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution."² This includes ODA spent by the FCO. We encourage the FCO to double down on investments towards conflict prevention, both with diplomatic, non-ODA and ODA activities.

Climate change impacts hundreds of millions of people around the world, and disproportionately impacts least developed countries (LDC). Climate change is a threat multiplier which amplifies existing environmental, social, political, and economic challenges, increasing the risk of conflict. The solutions to these challenges are likely to combine conflict management interventions with long-term strategies to strengthen good governance, alleviate poverty and economic inequality and support climate change adaptation. This is work the FCO should encourage other governments and multilaterals like the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to prioritise.

Multilateral institutions are also a main vehicle for the UK to channel climate finance. We applaud the government's pledge to double its contribution to the GCF. However, the GCF does not currently prioritise adaptation financing in more fragile states, and we would urge the government to work within multilateral institutions like the GCF to increase their programming,

² OECD-DAC's wider definition of 'peacebuilding' has 16 codes, including 'Civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution'. Analysis of spending based on Query Wizard for International Development data.

including capacity building (“Readiness Funding”) in fragile states. This will leverage British climate change contributions to address the dual threat of climate change and conflict. We urge the UK to ensure that 50% of UK support for climate adaptation should be in fragile and conflict affected states and to encourage other governments and multilaterals to do the same.

The relationship of the FCO with the other UK Government Departments in foreign-policy strategy

The Integrated Review offers a golden opportunity to assess, review and ensure cross-government policy, practice and investments are in place to address the root causes of conflict, reduce violent conflict and violent extremism. We ask the FCO to work with other government departments to ensure the Review addresses the full spectrum of global security challenges and adopts a human security approach.

In line with calls from the World Bank and UNDP,³ we call on the UK government to make conflict prevention and peacebuilding central pillars of foreign-policy. Accordingly, the National Security Council should take the following steps:

Adopt a fourth national security objective to promote international peace and security.⁴

Align resources, mandates and investments as needed to make good on this commitment.

Introduce a consolidated peacebuilding and conflict prevention strategy based on the Building Stability Framework.⁵ All aspects and tools of the UK government, including trade, development, diplomacy, military deployments, stabilisation efforts and other security initiatives should contribute and have clarity on different roles and responsibilities. In addition, the National Security Council should produce a detailed plan and guidance for how a long-term approach to stability and conflict prevention will be maintained and mainstreamed in practice across departments.

Reaffirm a whole of government commitment to pursuing Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peaceful societies in all multilateral and bilateral engagement.

Case-studies, including from external perspectives, of FCO’s record as a strategy-led organisation

Mercy Corps colleagues in Jordan have commended the Jordan FCO CSSF team’s depth of understanding of conflict dynamics, as reflected in their country strategy, calls for proposals

³ World Bank & UNDP, Pathways for Peace, 2018

⁴ The three current National Security priorities are: Protect Our People; Project Our Global Influence; and Promote Our Prosperity, National Security Capability Review, 2018.

⁵ Building Stability Framework, DFID, 2015

and investment in research to understand the evolving context. In one particular project, the CSSF were supportive of shifting our programme design in year three based on the latest conflict analysis. The new Conflict Governance Hub, housed in the FCO, is another promising example of UK commitment to providing joined-up analysis to multiple internal and external stakeholders. We encourage the FCO and other government departments delivering ODA to continue or increase investments towards understanding conflict drivers and the political context.

We have a record of strong impact through CSSF-FCO funding, thanks in part to the multi-sectoral nature of the programmes the FCO has supported. For example, Mercy Corps has been implementing a successful stabilisation programme in Lebanon, working with local authorities, the private sector and host and refugee communities. The programme focuses on the solid waste management and recycling sector - which had consistently been identified as a source of tension between these groups. Complementary governance, social cohesion and market systems programming have brought notable successes including inter alia, strong female participation - 77 percent of volunteers were women; improved perceptions of local government; increased capacity to mediate disputes in the community; and 25,800 households having better access to waste management and recycling services.

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