

## Written evidence Submitted by the Mines Advisory Group (INR0038)

### Summary

1. One of the questions posed by this committee is how the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and other government departments should contribute to the UK's foreign policy strategy. UK aid, and the departments that provide it, can make such a contribution. Aid has the power to convince others rather than coerce, and to shape others' preferences by appeal and attraction – the hallmarks of any successful foreign policy. To harness that power ethically and effectively, the Mines Advisory Group (MAG) believes the UK government should use aid to improve the lives of the world's most vulnerable while also bolstering the laws, institutions, and rights that protect all people and nations. In this way, British aid will both serve others well and ensure that Britain, too, is well served. The UK's support for humanitarian mine action is a fine example of this.
2. It is commendable that in announcing the Integrated Review, the Prime Minister recommitted the UK to spending 0.7 percent of gross national income (GNI) on official development assistance (ODA). The June 2019 strategic priorities of the Department for International Development (DfID) provide a useful framework for delivering on this commitment. However, it is important that all activities funded by UK ODA across government departments (including the FCO) are aligned with this framework, and that the well-being of poor and conflict-affected people remains the constant aim. Dedicated civil service capacity, technical expertise, and political leadership for international development within government, coupled with strong oversight from parliament and the public, will be necessary to achieve this.

### Introduction to the Mines Advisory Group

3. MAG is a charitable, non-governmental organisation founded in 1989 and headquartered in Manchester. Our mission is to create safe futures for women, men, and children affected by violence, conflict, and insecurity. Our approximately 5,000 staff achieve this by removing and destroying landmines, unexploded ordnance, and surplus weapons in 26 countries around the world. In 2019, MAG personnel removed and/or destroyed more than 100,000 explosive items found in conflict-affected communities, each of which could have destroyed a life or limb. In the process, they made safe more than 93 million square meters of land and property, putting hundreds of communities on the path to post-conflict recovery and sustainable development. Our risk education teams delivered more than 46,000 sessions for vulnerable people, helping them avoid accidents until their land is made safe. And our arms management specialists worked with authorities in nearly 15 countries to destroy more than 640 metric tonnes of surplus small arms and ammunition.
4. Alongside our field operations, MAG is committed to advocacy that prevents future harm caused by conflict. Our work in support of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, for which we were co-recipients of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize, continues to this day with our campaign to achieve a world free of landmines by 2025.<sup>1</sup> We also support governments

around the world to meet their obligations under other instruments of international humanitarian law, such as the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

5. MAG's work has been generously supported by the UK government since its earliest field operations. In the 2018-19 fiscal year, this support amounted to more than £18.7 million, including £17.8 million from DfID, £460,000 from the FCO, and £440,000 disbursed by British high commissions abroad.

#### Aid and Diplomacy: Where National and Global Interests Meet

6. One of the questions posed by this committee is how the FCO and other government departments should contribute to the UK's foreign policy strategy. Each department will of course play a different role, according to its respective mission and capabilities. But one of the most important contributors will surely be DfID through its programming and oversight of ODA.
7. Maintaining the UK's allocation of 0.7 percent of GNI to ODA allows the UK government to improve the lives of millions of poor and conflict-affected people. That is ODA's primary and necessary purpose, but it generates other positive effects as well. Indeed, aid has the power to convince others rather than coerce, and to shape others' preferences by appeal and attraction – the hallmarks of any successful foreign policy. The question is how this power should be applied, and in the service of what foreign policy goals? MAG believes UK aid can be used to bolster the laws, rights, and institutions that make up the rules-based international system while also assisting the most vulnerable. In this way, British aid will both serve others and ensure that Britain, too, is well served.<sup>ii</sup>
8. The UK has benefitted greatly from the system of international laws and institutions created after the Second World War. That system now faces its most difficult test in decades, with great power competition rising, the UN Security Council nearly paralysed, and international humanitarian law being violated on a daily basis. The UK faces a stark choice: defend and strengthen the laws and institutions of today, or be forced to accept those which the great powers devise tomorrow. The prospect of normative collapse is also of great concern to civil society. Mine action organisations like MAG, for example, cannot realise their vision of a safe world for all if the laws of war fall away. Similarly, our peer organisations fighting for human rights, development, and environmental protection will also fail if international cooperation in those areas stagnates or diminishes.
9. Preserving the rules-based international order is too great a task for one government department, and in that sense the broad mandate of the Integrated Review is appropriate. FCO-led diplomacy and DfID-led aid will often accomplish more when applied jointly rather than separately. Consider one example from the mine action community: The UK routinely encourages other states to join the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) because it believes the use of these indiscriminate weapons anywhere in the world is unacceptable. When the UK also uses aid to help states meet their APMBC obligations, the UK further strengthens the convention and its norms, encouraging those countries that abide by them

and stigmatising those that do not. We can see evidence of this in countries such as Sri Lanka, where a combination of UK aid and diplomacy has brought a mine-free future into view – and in so doing, illuminated a path that other mine-affected states can follow. UK aid that is deployed in support of other international instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the Paris Agreement on climate change, would likely have similar norm-reinforcing effects.

### Ensuring UK Aid Remains Effective, Principled, and Accountable

10. Delivering UK aid in the manner outlined above does not require a substantial change in the government’s current approach. But some safeguards will be needed to ensure UK aid and diplomacy are joined-up for the benefit of all people and nations, rather than for zero-sum political aims.
11. The priorities listed in DfID’s June 2019 Single Departmental Plan allow UK aid to support many pillars of the rules-based international system while also assisting the most vulnerable.<sup>iii</sup> We therefore believe all activities funded by UK ODA across departments should be aligned with those priorities. This would help ensure that all UK ODA spending meets the standards agreed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. It would also help government avoid the “value for money risks and dangers of noncompliance...with the UK’s International Development Act” that the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) warned of in its 2019 publication, “The current state of UK aid.”<sup>iv</sup> Put another way, we agree with the ICAI that departments such as the FCO should not view the ODA definition as a “compliance hurdle” to be cleared in pursuit of other goals;<sup>v</sup> instead, they should cooperate with DfID so that the well-being of poor and conflict-affected people remains the ultimate aim of each ODA programme.
12. We believe that for UK aid to remain effective and accountable, the government must have dedicated civil service capacity, technical expertise, and political leadership for international development, coupled with strong oversight from parliament and the public. A multi-country study by the Overseas Development Institute showed that ODA is most effective when it is overseen by dedicated, senior political leaders.<sup>vi</sup> By contrast, attempting to make development “everyone’s responsibility” by integrating it across multiple government agencies is more likely to dilute expertise and reduce accountability. This is important to bear in mind when considering the future responsibilities of DfID, the FCO, and other departments covered by the Integrated Review.
13. The Mines Advisory Group thanks the Committee for considering this evidence and welcomes further questions.

---

<sup>i</sup> For more information, please visit <https://www.landminefree2025.org/>.

<sup>ii</sup> MAG has provided more detailed suggestions about UK aid policy in recent evidence to the International Development Committee. Members of the present Committee may access that evidence at <https://www.maginternational.org/international-development-committee-effectiveness-uk-aid-inquiry/>.

---

iii Department for International Development, “Single Departmental Plan,” 27 June 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-international-development-single-departmental-plan/department-for-international-development-single-departmental-plan--2>, accessed 8 May 2020.

iv Independent Commission for Aid Impact, “The current state of UK aid: A synthesis of ICAI findings from 2015 to 2019,” 20 June 2019, p. 22.

v Ibid.

vi Raphaëlle Faure, Cathal Long, and Annalisa Prizzon, “Do organisational and political models for development cooperation matter for development effectiveness?” Overseas Development Institute, April 2015.

**May 2020**