

## Written evidence submitted by Oxfam (INR0052)

### Introduction

1. Oxfam welcomes this inquiry. The UK government's Integrated Review represents an opportunity to set out a coherent vision for foreign, defence, security and development policy during a time of global instability. The rapid spread of Covid-19 has created an unprecedented global health and economic emergency - precisely the kind of global challenge that a truly strategic approach to UK foreign policy would be designed to address.
2. Even before the spread of Covid-19, trends were emerging that required a re-think of the UK's role in the world. In order to meet complex challenges such as rising nationalism, growing distrust in global institutions, attacks on women and their defenders, record refugee flows and the climate emergency, global cooperation and coherence across government will be essential.
3. This submission argues that the Integrated Review is an opportunity for the UK to re-define its role in the world. The UK should show leadership by articulating a powerful ambition for 'Global Britain' defined by commitments to the rule of law, human rights, human and collective security, free and fair trade, and the reduction of poverty and inequality. A transactional approach that prioritises short-term, narrowly defined security, trade and other economic gains, on the other hand, would risk diminishing the UK's position on the world stage.
4. Having a clear approach to values in foreign policy is not just about doing what we think is right or supporting institutions, norms and rules that the UK often played a key role in creating, but also about actively helping to shape the systems the UK will have to work within for decades to come. The UK's standing going forward will depend more on its future contributions to global solutions, rather than relying on past glories. This requires facing up to the ways in which the current international order has entrenched unequal power relations and the UK's own privileged position.
5. This submission draws on a recent publication by Oxfam and Foreign Policy Centre, [\*Finding Britain's Role in a Changing World: Building a values-based foreign policy\*](#), a collection of essays from senior parliamentarians, academics and experts. In the collection, authors call for bold, collaborative action in UK foreign policy to advance democracy, human rights, free and fair trade and the international rule of law around the world.
6. Oxfam believes that, together, we can end the injustice of poverty forever. Last year, we helped 12.8 million people fight poverty, providing life-saving supplies to families and communities hit by the world's worst conflicts and natural disasters, helping people to access clean water, grow food, and campaign for change. UK foreign-policy

decisions will determine the degree to which these collective efforts to tackle poverty and injustice are effective.

7. This submission begins with priority recommendations before two substantive sections: section one outlines suggested priorities for UK foreign policy strategy, including commitments to multilateralism and a values-based foreign policy, gender justice and women's rights, the climate crisis, aid effectiveness and DFID independence, and human security and the UK peace offer. Section two explores the role of the FCO in the Integrated Review process.

### **Priority recommendations**

8. The UK government should agree a 'Global Britain' values statement of the principles underpinning its role in the world, and develop a 'Global Britain Test' that assesses the impact of policies against these principles.
9. The UK government should work with like-minded allies to re-affirm its commitment to multilateral action, including by ensuring respect for the international rule of law, democracy and human rights.
10. The UK government should use its standing and leverage in international spaces to strengthen protections for women's rights and their defenders and work to prevent further erosion of women's rights around the world including by ending impunity for all forms of violence against women.
11. The UK government should show climate leadership with effective diplomacy for COP26 including leading an initiative to ensure countries commit to align Covid-19 stimulus and recovery plans to the Paris Climate Agreement, announcing a strengthened UK Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), and ensuring a significant scale up of financial support to vulnerable communities on the frontline of the climate crisis.
12. The UK government should maintain the 0.7% GNI target for aid spending, with at least 75% spent through an independent Department for International Development (DFID). Expenditure of aid must remain focused on sustainable development and reducing poverty and inequality.
13. The UK government should articulate and strengthen its Human Security lens in foreign policy. In practice, this means the FCO leading Human Security conversations across Whitehall, in close collaboration with DFID, Ministry of Defence (MOD), Home Office and others; and stemming the trend of the increasing securitisation of foreign policy and aid.
14. Following its support for the UN's call for a global ceasefire, the UK should turn words into action, including by taking immediate steps to garner further international support for the ceasefire, suspending arms sales that are fuelling

conflicts, and increasing support to activists and organisations working for inclusive and sustainable peace, including refugee- and women-led organisations.

15. The UK government should ensure parliamentary scrutiny of foreign policy decisions and priorities – for example by ensuring parliamentarians are consulted during the Integrated Review process, and that Parliament has a final vote on any new trade deals. Civil society and the public should also have opportunities to meaningfully input into the Integrated Review.

## **Section 1: The priorities for UK foreign-policy strategy**

### **Commitments to multilateralism and a values-based foreign policy**

16. The Integrated Review is coming at a time of deep insecurity and uncertainty. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the increasing trend toward authoritarianism and populism in countries across the world, attacks on the international rule of law, human rights and gender equality, and shrinking humanitarian and civic space were threatening the very basis of the post-war international system.
17. At the heart of questions about the future priorities for the UK's foreign-policy strategy lies a question about the role the UK sees for itself in the world - specifically whether it will work with others to build a more peaceful, secure, just and resilient world or retreat into transactional, inward-looking definitions of 'national interest' that prioritise short-term wins for some over a long-term vision that delivers economic and human security for all.
18. The UK has two choices: to follow others down the path of transactional, zero-sum foreign policy priorities or to re-double efforts, in coordination with others, to ensure a future for reformed liberal democracy at the nation state level and a more inclusive international system. This submission advocates for the latter.
19. The UK's foreign-policy priorities in our uncertain world have to include working with like-minded allies to reform the multilateral system, while defending the need for one. A starting point would be to re-affirm the UK's commitment to multilateral action, including ensuring respect for (and itself respecting) the international rule of law, human rights law, protection of civilians, international humanitarian law and refugee law. This is essential to re-assuring the international community that it is still a reliable partner. This should include sustained political and financial support for:
  - The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
  - Successive resolutions to UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security
  - The Paris Climate Agreement
  - The Youth, Peace and Security agenda, as articulated in UN Security Council Resolution 2250

- Commitment to human security and conflict prevention dialogue in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe and NATO.
20. The willingness to reform as well as work within multilateral spaces will also be crucial as the UK seeks to redefine its relationships with the Commonwealth and global south. To be taken seriously as a future partner, the UK must tread carefully and intentionally remedy historic power imbalances institutionalised in the UN and Bretton Woods institutions. Basing future relationships on narrow, self-interested trade or security priorities could be interpreted as an attempt to bring about ‘Empire 2.0’.
21. The UK has an opportunity through the Integrated Review to articulate a bold new vision for the UK’s role in the world. The Foreign Secretary has said that the ‘guiding lights’ for the Integrated Review will be ‘free trade, democracy, human rights and the international rule of law’.<sup>1</sup> These would be a strong foundation for a ‘Global Britain’ values statement and ‘Global Britain Test’ that assesses the impact of the government’s policies against these values.

### **Recommendations**

22. The UK government should agree a ‘Global Britain’ values statement of the principles underpinning its role in the world, and develop a ‘Global Britain Test’ that assesses the impact of policies against its principles.
23. The UK should work with like-minded allies to re-affirm its commitment to multilateral action, including by ensuring respect for the international rule of law, democracy and human rights.

### **Gender justice and women’s rights**

24. The Integrated Review is an opportunity to put women's rights at the centre of UK foreign policy, defence, security and international development, whether through the explicit adoption of a feminist foreign policy or by looking to improve performance across the pillars of rights, representation and resource allocation.
25. 2020 is a flagship year for women’s rights with the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and 20 years since the adoption of UNSCR 1325, the first of 10 resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. The Covid-19 pandemic has shifted attention, but also highlighted the high costs of continued gender inequality and lack of women’s empowerment.
26. Globally, attacks on women’s rights, women’s rights activists and women have been increasing as a consequence of rising authoritarianism, austerity and populism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> FCO and The Rt Hon Dominic Rabb MP, Foreign Secretary’s introduction to the Queen’s Speech debate, January 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-introduction-to-queens-speech-debate>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21809&LangID=E>;

According to the UN Human Rights Council Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and practice, ‘the corrosion of women’s rights is a litmus test for the human rights standards of the whole society.’<sup>3</sup>

27. Despite a global rollback on women’s rights, some countries like Sweden and Germany have declared a feminist foreign policy. While there are doubts about both the depth and effectiveness of these commitments, the idea of a feminist foreign policy, based around rights, representation and resources for women and girls offers a model for a values-based foreign policy.

## **Recommendations**

28. The UK should use its standing and leverage in international spaces to strengthen protections for women’s rights and their defenders and work to prevent further erosion of women’s rights around the world including by ending impunity for all forms of violence against women, including sexual violence in conflicts.
29. The UK should support the meaningful inclusion of women, women’s right organisations and women human rights defenders in both the Integrated Review process and in future foreign policy decisions.
30. The UK should ensure 15% of all international development spending meets the OECD criteria for gender equality marker (GEM) 2, where gender equality is the main or principle objective. This would be in addition to the requirements under the 2014 Gender Equality Act.

## **The climate crisis**

31. While global attention has understandably been on the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a risk that momentum is lost in the urgent fight to tackle the climate emergency. With only 10 years to turn the tide on climate change, bold climate action should be a priority for the government during the Integrated Review process.
32. As host of the next United Nations Climate Change conference in Glasgow - COP26 - the UK takes the helm of global climate diplomacy in a crucial year. While the conference is postponed until 2021, the UK has committed to maintain momentum. High-level outreach is needed by the FCO as the UK not only prepares for COP26 but leads the global conversation about what recovery from the Covid-19 crisis looks like in the context of the Paris Agreement.
33. The Foreign Secretary told countries at the Petersberg Climate Dialogue that a green recovery is “the duty of all responsible governments”. A concrete way of ensuring a green recovery is for the UK to lead an initiative - for example by organising a virtual

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<https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/06/1012892>; <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/02/1058021>;  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/04/us/domestic-violence-international.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/38/46>

summit this year - to ensure countries commit to align their Covid-19 stimulus and recovery plans to the Paris Agreement. Research from Oxford University<sup>4</sup> has shown that climate-friendly policies could deliver a better result both for economies and the environment.

34. A key outcome for COP26 will be whether countries can close the gap between existing Paris Agreement pledges for 2030 - NDCs - and those needed to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5°C. The UK should lead from the front by announcing a strengthened, ambitious UK NDC in order to inspire and motivate other countries to do the same.
35. The UK can also show leadership by ensuring there is an urgent and significant scale up of financial support to poor and vulnerable countries and communities who are already hit hardest by the climate crisis, and who are set to be left even more vulnerable by the Covid-19 crisis. This is not only a vital end in itself but is crucial to the success of the wider COP26 outcome - as failure to put forward adequate climate finance, in particular on adaptation and loss and damage, will erode trust and vital relationships with vulnerable countries. It may also constrain the level of ambition some developing countries bring to the table. To date, the UK's relationship with - and historic support for - vulnerable countries and their concerns has been a key factor in many of the successes under the UNFCCC process.
36. These outcomes are not within the UK's gift alone - they require international agreement. The French Presidency of COP21 was successful in large part because of its focused diplomatic mobilisation in the year leading up to the summit. A successful COP26 will take every ounce of the UK's influence and diplomatic muscle (strong international diplomacy, effective working relationships with allies, a commitment to putting the voices of those most impacted front and centre, progress at home to show the world we are 'getting our own house in order').

## **Recommendations**

37. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK should lead an initiative to ensure countries commit to align their stimulus and recovery plans to the Paris Climate Agreement.
38. As President of COP26, the UK should announce a strengthened, ambitious UK NDC and rally other countries to do the same, in order to close the gap to 1.5°C of global warming.
39. Work with the international community to ensure there is a significant increase in financial support for vulnerable communities to adapt to the impacts of the climate crisis and cope with unavoidable loss and damage, including by supporting a new global goal for public adaptation finance.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2020-05-05-building-back-better-green-covid-19-recovery-packages-will-boost-economic-growth-and#>

## Aid effectiveness and DFID independence

40. The Integrated Review will be an opportunity to re-state the importance of UK Aid in delivering the UK's diplomatic, security, defence and international development goals. The UK is already a world leader in providing aid and support to millions enduring poverty and injustice. UK Aid has supported six million girls into education, vaccinated 76 million children, and been central to efforts to combat Ebola in West Africa, as well as making one of the largest contributions to a dedicated fund for research and development to find a vaccine for Covid-19. As the Covid-19 crisis threatens to push half a billion more people into poverty, UK Aid will be more vital than ever if we are to avert humanitarian disaster and prolonged economic collapse.
41. DFID manages the majority of the government's Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget, however, the proportion of ODA managed by DFID has been reducing year on year - from 89% in 2013 to 81% in 2015 to 75% in 2018. While overall UK ODA has increased in recent years (in line with rising GNI), DFID's ODA expenditure remained at broadly the same level in 2018 as in 2013 –just over £10 billion. In 2018, FCO ODA spend increased to £633m, up £264m since 2014. This accounts for 32.4% of the FCOs budget and 4.4% of all UK ODA.
42. The FCO allocates ODA funding to support activities such as in-country diplomatic activities, the Chevening Scholarship Programme, the British Council, BBC World Service and International subscriptions, such as the UN Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The FCO also spends significant amounts of ODA from cross-government funds, including the Prosperity Fund and the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), both of which have faced criticism from the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) for a lack of transparency of ODA spending.
43. DFID consistently delivers the most poverty-focussed, effective and transparent aid across the UK government and a range of oversight bodies have highlighted concerns about the weak transparency and questionable poverty focus of much of UK Aid spent outside of DFID. In 2019, Publish What You Fund assessed the progress of each major aid spending government department and found commitment to transparency inconsistent across departments. DFID maintained its 'very good' score, ranking first among the departments. The FCO improved its transparency rankings from 'poor' to 'fair', remaining below the government's target level of transparency set out in the 2015 UK Aid Strategy. Publish What You Fund were unable to assess the performance of FCO ODA as full versions of project documents are not publicly available.
44. The Cross-Government Prosperity Fund provides a key example of the need for greater transparency in all UK ODA spent outside of DFID. The Fund has two overarching objectives: to promote UK prosperity and to promote global prosperity. It has an allocated budget of £1.2bn up to 2023, including £33m non-ODA. Its programmes are framed within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and operate mainly in middle-income countries. In doing so the Fund aims to generate

opportunities for the private sector, including UK businesses, as a secondary objective. A 2017 ICAI review found that transparency of the Fund was significantly lacking, stating that “at present there is very little information on the Fund in the public domain”. The International Development Committee also raised concerns about the Fund’s trade focus, stating that “the heavy emphasis of the Prosperity Fund upon promoting UK trade risks losing the rightful emphasis of the Fund upon the primacy of poverty reduction, and is a step towards the return of tied aid”. With two overarching objectives that can be mutually exclusive in many instances, it remains unclear how and if the Prosperity Fund prioritises human development over business interests, or how it ensures people in poverty are not adversely affected from its business activities.

45. While shifts in UK government aid spending can take advantage of specialisms of other government departments, it is essential this is done alongside more rigorous requirements for spending and reporting on ODA spending. All FCO ODA spending should be focused on poverty reduction and be fully transparent. A lack of transparency in aid expenditure could be detrimental to the UK in many ways, including reducing programme quality, and undermining the UK’s proud record on aid accountability and therefore damaging public trust in aid.
46. There have been reports in the media that the FCO and DFID may be merged as part of the Integrated Review process. Experience from previous countries that have undergone similar mergers show that it does not guarantee efficiency or effectiveness in delivering impact and value for money and can result in development interests becoming side-lined in favour of commercial and foreign policy objectives. In 2013, both Canada and Australia merged their development bodies into larger departments led by foreign affairs and trade. Taking overall scores on the Commitment to Development Index, as a measure of both aid and non-aid development effort, Australia and Canada improved their overall scores immediately after their mergers. However, Canada’s dropped from 11 before the merger in 2012, to 17 in 2018, and Australia’s dropped from 13 in 2012 down to 18 in 2016 and 2017, before ranking at 14 in 2018.
47. The Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated that global cooperation and a joined-up approach to foreign policy decisions are more vital than ever. However, this must not come at the expense of effective, transparent aid spending for the most in need. The decision to appoint joint-ministers across DFID and the FCO has the potential to provide greater alignment, and there remains more to be done to ensure the UK’s foreign policy does not operate in competition with its aid objectives. However, a standalone DFID led by a Secretary of State remains critical to the UK achieving its poverty-reduction goals and for its leadership in global development more broadly, and must remain.

## **Recommendations**

48. The UK should maintain the 0.7% GNI target for aid spending, with at least 75% spent through the Department for International Development. Expenditure of aid



must remain focused on sustainable development and reducing poverty and inequality.

49. The UK should maintain an independent Department for International Development with an independent Secretary of State represented in Cabinet and National Security Council.
50. The UK should ensure decisions about how much aid can be delivered by other government departments or cross-government funds are determined by evidence that ensures aid will be spent with the application of sound development principles including conflict sensitivity, gender equality, aid effectiveness, transparency and accountability - especially to developing-country stakeholders.

### **Human Security and the UK peace offer**

51. Human Security puts an emphasis on the security of individuals and communities - and their social and economic environment - rather than a focus (primarily) on the security of the state. The [objective of Human Security](#) is to safeguard the vital core of all human lives from critical pervasive threats, in a way that is consistent with long-term human fulfilment. The [UN](#) and others have championed this approach as a framework that lends itself well to values-based policy: democratic values, open societies, environmental protection, inclusive peace, and conflict prevention. It also presents clear opportunities to address inequalities, including gender, and other pervasive [human development](#) challenges.
52. The MOD has established a [Centre of Excellence in Human Security](#), and the UK has often led a human security approach across multilateral organisations from the UN Security Council to the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#) (OSCE) and NATO including with regard to the new realities presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. Last December, London hosted a NATO 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary Summit, which saw a resurging Human Security lens – with a rights-based, accountable approach, presenting the UK with an opportunity for a renewed protection of civilians focus in its foreign policy.
53. Inequalities are important grievances that drive violence, including often ‘violent extremism’ and ‘terrorism.’ A 2019 [British Council](#)-facilitated dialogue on Preventing Violent Extremism found that prevention and human security should be at the heart of stabilisation approaches in order to be effective. This assigns an important role to the FCO. The UK’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic throws new light on the value of security civic space (as a key enabling factor) to open and democratic societies. Simply put, a human security approach is needed. Next year will be the 20-year anniversary of 9/11 and the UK will have to help answer difficult global questions: are global counter-terrorism campaigns effective? Have they made us safer? Have they enabled development and lasting peace on the ground?
54. The [UN and World Bank](#) have called for a strategic conflict prevention focus in aid, and the 2020 [UN Call to Action for Human Rights](#) and the [UN Secretary General’s call](#)

[for a global ceasefire](#) at the time of Covid-19, echoed by civil society movements, gives the UK's Human Security conceptual frameworks a new sense of urgency – in policy and practice.

## **Recommendations**

55. The UK government should articulate and strengthen its Human Security lens in foreign policy, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic – where a state-centric response needs community engagement (civic space), public trust (not least – free and independent media) and public confidence (political legitimacy) to be effective.
56. The FCO should be resourced to lead Human Security conversations across Whitehall, in close collaboration with DFID, MOD, Home Office and others, to maximise British soft power in non-violent conflict resolution in multilateral and bilateral spaces.
57. In order to stem the trend of the increasing securitisation of foreign policy and aid, where the FCO is involved in decisions on aid allocation it should maximise the reduction of poverty or humanitarian need, not purely the UK's military or national security objectives. In close collaboration with DFID, the FCO must be resourced to ensure a conflict sensitive foreign policy approach is applied and aid is not inadvertently contributing to or resourcing violations of international human rights and humanitarian law and that aid is not inadvertently criminalised.
58. UK support for the UN's call for a global ceasefire, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, is very welcome. The UK must now turn words into action, including by taking immediate steps to garner further international support for the ceasefire, suspending arms sales that are fuelling conflicts, and increasing support to activists and organisations working for inclusive and sustainable peace, including refugee- and women-led organisations. In doing this, it will be important to strike the right balance between investing political (including aid) capital into [a top-down approach](#) that looks to elite bargains and the more Human Security focus on peace and stability.

## **Section 2: The role of the FCO in the Review process**

59. Building on its role in agenda setting, the FCO should champion a joined-up approach to foreign policy that values all elements covered by the Integrated Review equally. Focusing on narrow commercial considerations (in a rush to secure trade deals) or even privileging hard security over soft power will undermine the UK's standing globally. The FCO is in a unique position to coordinate and shape a holistic strategy for the UK's engagement in the world.
60. As well as championing a joined-up approach across government departments, to maximise the effectiveness of the review and its own role in the process, the FCO should seek, both through example and standard setting, to ensure wide and inclusive consultation, meaningful oversight by Parliament and open and transparent

communication with the public.

61. There should be greater representation of women, people of colour, young people, and the economically marginalised in discussions about foreign policy, particularly those defining the national interest. The FCO should encourage a strategy development process that recognises, values and incorporates diverse perspectives. This should include a multi-sectoral consultation to identify national priorities.
62. The Integrated Review offers the FCO an opportunity to champion the meaningful inclusion of women and women's rights organisations in the UK and abroad as part of the process. In 2019, the FCO commissioned Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) to run a series of consultations in the UK and in eight countries in the global south (focus countries in the UK's National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security).<sup>5</sup> The purpose of these consultations was to help shape the planned International Conference on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and the UK's priorities for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSC Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace, and Security). As part of its contribution to the Integrated Review process, the FCO should build on these consultations to ensure that women and women's rights organisations in the UK and globally are meaningfully included in the Integrated Review process. Women's participation<sup>6</sup> should be:
  - Rooted in the right of all women to participate in decisions that affect their lives
  - Representative of women in all their diversity
  - Accessible
  - Safe, empowering, respectful and not extractive
63. Parliament should have meaningful oversight of government strategies and programmes, including trade deals. For example, Parliament could check UK foreign-policy decisions against an agreed 'Global Britain Test'.

## Recommendations

64. The FCO should encourage parliamentary and public scrutiny of foreign policy decisions and priorities – for example by ensuring parliamentarians are consulted during the Integrated Review process and foreign policy decisions are checked against a 'Global Britain Test'.
65. The FCO should ensure civil society has meaningful input into foreign policy priorities and the Integrated Review and should conduct a multi-sectoral consultation to identify national priorities.
66. The UK government should ensure that women and women's rights organisations in the UK and globally are meaningfully included in the Integrated Review process.

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<sup>5</sup> The outcomes of the consultations were published here: <https://gaps-uk.org/wps-10-steps-2020/>

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from [https://beyondconsultations.org/images/Beyond\\_Consultations\\_Tool.pdf](https://beyondconsultations.org/images/Beyond_Consultations_Tool.pdf)

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