



DEBATE PACK

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Protecting children in conflict areas

Westminster Hall
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Debate initiated by Chris Law MP

The proceedings of this debate can be viewed on Parliamentlive.tv

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1. Background

For centuries Children have been involved in, or have been affected by, armed conflict. Either through their recruitment, use in hostilities, or as innocent bystanders.

The UN's Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, which was established on the back of the Graça Machel Report in 1996, is the UN body responsible for monitoring the impact of the armed conflict on children.

In addition to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which came into force in 2002 and was intended to protect children from recruitment and use in hostilities, various UN Security Council resolutions over the last 10 years have established a monitoring and reporting mechanism on the recruitment and use of children and other violations against children in armed conflict. The Office of the Special Representative now has a framework of six 'grave violations' which are monitored and reported on, annually:

1. Recruitment and use of children;
2. Killing and maiming of children;
3. Sexual violence against children;
4. Attacks on schools and hospitals;
5. Abduction of children; (the most recent trigger to be added in 2015)
6. Denial of humanitarian access.

In the last few years an increasing attention has also been given to the recruitment and use of children by terrorist groups such as ISIS/Daesh.

The UK is often criticised for its recruitment of under 18s into the armed forces. However, the Government has stated that MOD policy is in strict adherence to the UK's international commitments, including the UN Conventions and protocols. While the minimum age of enlistment is 16, no one under 18 can enlist without parental consent, nor can they be deployed on operations outside of the UK, except where the operation does not involve personnel becoming engaged in, or exposed to, hostilities. In line with current UN policy, Service personnel under the age of 18 are also not deployed on UN peacekeeping operations. Age restrictions also apply to service in Northern Ireland.

2. Press Articles

The following is a selection of news and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

[**There are too many lost childhoods in Yemen**](#)

Middle East Monitor
Huwaida Al-Yousefi
16 April 2018

[**2017 was the deadliest year of Syrian war for children, says Unicef**](#)

The Guardian
Martin Chulov
12 March 2018

[**One in six children live in a war zone: Save the Children**](#)

The New Arab
Weam Abdulmalik
15 February 2018

[**For refugee children, war zone trauma proves lasting and toxic**](#)

Financial Times
Rebecca Collard
22 January 2018

[**When it comes to protecting children in war zones, the UK should set an example by ending arms sales to Saudi Arabia**](#)

The Independent
Kevin Watkins
1 January 2018

[**Rohingya Children Facing 'Massive Mental Health Crisis'**](#)

New York Times
Hannah Beech
31 December 2018

[**Unicef says scale of attacks on children in conflicts is shocking**](#)

BBC News
28 December 2017

[**Even humanitarian aid for sick children in Syria can make the conflict worse – that's the sad truth about war**](#)

The Independent
Mary Dejevsky
28 December 2017

[**Why Do War Crimes Against Children Bear No Repercussions?**](#)

News Week
Tirana Hassan
10 May 2017

3. Press releases

[UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Calls for Stronger Protection of the Most Vulnerable in War](#)

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
6 March 2018

In her first presentation to the Human Rights Council, Virginia Gamba, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, warned that the progress realized in 2017 was once again overshadowed by the extremely worrisome situation for boys and girls growing up in countries affected by conflict.

“The longevity, severity and complexity of many of today’s conflicts has led to a further decrease of traditional safe spaces and moved children even closer to the heart of war,” the Special Representative told members of the Human Rights Council.

Denial of humanitarian access

In her report introduced today, Special Representative Gamba highlighted that the denial of humanitarian access has become a growing concern. She added that in 2017, cases of humanitarian aid unable to reach children in need were documented in almost every country situations on her agenda.

Ms. Gamba pointed out instances in Myanmar’s Rakhine State and Yemen, where large numbers of civilians are affected by broad-based denials of humanitarian access. In Syria, the current escalation of violence and the besiegement of eastern Ghouta and rural Damascus is leaving children with no access to food, healthcare and other essential commodities.

She also warned the Council about a trend of politicization of humanitarian access for the delivery of aid, even when it is intended for children.

“Finding ways to reverse this trend is of the utmost importance,” declared Gamba. “All parties to conflict must allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of aid to the civilian population in need in areas subject to their control.”

The trafficking and sale of children

During her presentation, the Special Representative also stressed the importance of recognizing the close links between the trafficking and sale of children and the six grave violations, and to keep this linkage in mind when elaborating programmes to better protect children.

Looking forward

Direct engagement with Governments and non-State armed groups to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children has continued to produce tangible results.

“Building on the momentum achieved through the enhanced engagement with parties to conflict on recruitment and use of children, my Office is working on a new initiative to raise awareness and support for our work to end and prevent all six grave violations,” said the Special Representative.

Ms. Gamba called for the support of Member States to protect more children, by ensuring a renewed focus on all grave violations in the work of the Human Rights Council.

The Special Representative also highlighted how her Office is strengthening its capacity to conduct research and analysis on lessons-learned and best practices the child protection community has garnered over the past 20 years.

In conclusion, as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict is turning 18, she renewed her call for the universal ratification of this important tool, which will allow the international community to speak with one voice against the recruitment and use of children in conflict.

[Launch of new inquiry on protecting children in conflict](#)

Save the Children

19 April 2017

An international inquiry tasked with strengthening the framework for the protection of children in conflict and holding perpetrators of abuses to account was announced today. Speaking at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, the UN Special Envoy for Global Education and former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown unveiled the Inquiry on Protecting Children in Conflict – which will aim to halt the widespread violation of children’s rights in conflict zones.

The last year has seen an escalation in the war on children – from the sexual enslavement of children to the deliberate bombing of their schools – subjecting a generation of children to targeted violence and indiscriminate attacks. Crimes against children which should send shockwaves around the world are coming to be accepted as commonplace. In Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, Nigeria, Yemen, Afghanistan and elsewhere, the international laws and human rights provisions developed in the 20th Century are being violated at an alarming rate and the institutions designed to defend these norms are failing to provide protection. This calls for a review of the existing laws and enforcement mechanisms that are supposed to protect children.

The new Inquiry on Protecting Children in Conflict will undertake this review with the aim of helping to stem the tide of violations of children’s rights. Building on the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Inquiry will consider the adequacy and effectiveness of existing laws and enforcement mechanisms – and consider whether there are new laws or procedures that may enhance the protection of children. The final report will be published and submitted to UN Secretary-General António Guterres in December 2017.

The Inquiry, which is supported by Save the Children UK and Theirworld – comprises two groups:

- A legal panel, led by Shaheed Fatima Q.C. of Blackstone Chambers, London, bringing together lawyers with a broad range of expertise, which will consider the adequacy and effectiveness of existing laws and enforcement mechanisms and possible reforms aimed at enhancing the protection of children. The legal panel is listed in full below.
- An advisory panel of globally influential policy-makers, thinkers and activists which will receive the report of the legal panel and consider its recommendations. In doing so, they will take into account the role of foreign policy and soft power in the protection of children and ways of building a large and diverse coalition of states and national leaders in support of this agenda.

Gordon Brown, who will act as Chair of the Inquiry, said:

“We must not allow ourselves to become inured to the senseless acts of violence befalling children in conflict zones, Syria being a prime example. Moral lines – such as the recent Idlib gas attack – have been crossed in Syria. Other less visible atrocities include the deliberate bombing of children in their schools, as happened in the same Syrian province on October 26th last year, the abuse and trafficking of children, the militarisation of schools and the use of child militias.

“Not since 1945 have so many children been subjected to such widespread violations of their human rights in conflict zones – in Yemen, where schools have become instruments of war and children used as human shields; in Iraq, where girls are being systematically raped; and across the Middle East, Africa and Asia where thousands of girls are being abducted and sold as slaves. The latest outrage is Boko Haram's use of children as suicide bombers.

“Eglantyne Jebb, the founder of Save the Children, once said that the only international language we understand is the cry of the child. But J.K. Rowling is probably nearer the truth when she said that children may be seen but are usually not heard. For it is questionable whether existing international legal norms and institutions provide adequate accountability for the widespread violations of children's rights.

“In 1996, Graça Machel's path-breaking report on the 'Impact of Armed Conflict on Children' led to the creation of a UN Special Representative and an annual report to the Security Council that names and shames states and non-state actors responsible for grave violations against children in war zones. But 20 years on, it is time to revisit and ask what more can be done – practically and effectively – when moral lines are crossed.

“The new Inquiry on Protecting Children in Conflict will consider what may be done to strengthen the current framework for the protection of children and to hold the perpetrators of atrocities to account. Only when international law is robust enough – substantively and procedurally – to secure accountability for children's rights, will we have

done all in our power to ensure that no child of God will ever again suffer the horrors of Syria.”

4. PQs

[Syria](#)

20 Mar 2018 | 790 cc179-180

Asked by: Lord Roberts of Llandudno

I thank the Minister. This is not, as Neville Chamberlain said of somewhere else,

“a faraway country of which we know very little”.

In the past week, 237 people have been killed in Syria, 37 of whom were children. Over 10,000 were killed last year and nearly 3,000 of those were children. At the same time, some of the national and international agencies have been forced to withdraw, having given so much help to alleviate this terrible catastrophe. I make special mention of the White Helmets, who have done great work. Is it not time that the Dubs amendment—originally covering 3,000 children, with the number reduced to 480—should be restored to its original total of 3,000? We cannot turn our backs. These are people in the worst humanitarian crisis since the war. I ask the Minister: will he press somehow to restore 3,000 as the aim for accommodating and welcoming these children?

Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

My Lords, I agree with the noble Lord about the situation in Syria, although I do not agree that it is something that we know little about. Tragically, we know a great deal about it because of the things that we see every day in the media—the unfolding crisis and the continuing suffering of the Syrian people. Over 400,000 people, including many children, have now died. As I am sure the noble Lord will be aware, we have established the vulnerable children’s resettlement scheme, which will settle up to 3,000 at-risk children and their families by 2020. In terms of overall resettlement, by December 2017 a total of 10,538 people had been resettled under the vulnerable persons resettlement scheme since it began in 2014 and a total of 570 people had been resettled through the vulnerable children’s resettlement scheme since it began in 2016.

[Israel: Palestinians](#)

20 Mar 2018 | HL6144

Asked by: Baroness Tonge

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel in regard to reports of the targeting of Palestinian children by Israeli forces.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Whilst we have not raised this specific issue with the Israeli authorities, the UK continues to have strong concerns about continued reports of ill-treatment of Palestinian minors in Israeli military detention. While we welcome progress made by Israel following the recommendations of the Children in Military Custody Report, we remain particularly concerned

by reports of the continued heavy use of painful restraints and the high number of Palestinian children who are not informed of their legal rights, in contravention of Israel's own regulations. We will continue to push for the implementation of the recommendations of the children in military Custody report in full, and we continue to offer to support to Israel through expert level talks.

Mohammed Tamimi

20 Mar 2018 | HL6142

Asked by: Baroness Tonge

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel concerning reports that a minor, Muhammed Tamimi, had a bullet removed from his skull and then signed a confession without legal or parental representation stating that his injuries were caused by falling off a bike.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We are following this case closely and our Embassy in Tel Aviv will raise this case with the relevant Israeli authorities.

Armed Forces: Children

19 Mar 2018 | 131836

Asked by: Stephen Gethins

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign And Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his counterparts in the (a) EU and (b) UN Security Council on stopping the practice of using child soldiers.

Answering member: Mark Field | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The UK is an active member of the United Nations Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which consists of Security Council members, and which leads the international response on the issues of child soldiers and child protection. We work particularly closely with allies and like-minded states on the Council, notably France, the Netherlands and Sweden, to advance common efforts and UK objectives in this area.

In November 2017, my colleague Lord Ahmad, the Minister for the Commonwealth and the United Nations, participated in an open debate of the UN Security Council on Children in Armed Conflict, focused on the findings of the UN Secretary-General's 2017 Annual Report. Lord Ahmad welcomed the work of the UN and of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, and reiterated our concern about the continuing grave violations committed against children in conflicts around the world.

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Engagements

07 Mar 2018 | 637 cc298-9

Asked by: Jeremy Corbyn

A year on, the Government are still suppressing a report on the funding of extremism, which allegedly found evidence of Saudi funding going to terrorist groups here in the UK, thus threatening our security. When will that report come out?

A humanitarian disaster is now taking place in Yemen. Millions face starvation and 600,000 children have cholera because of the Saudi-led bombing campaign and the blockade—600,000 children with cholera is something that everyone in this House should take seriously. Germany has suspended arms sales to Saudi Arabia, but British arms sales have increased sharply and British military advisers are directing the war. It cannot be right that the right hon. Lady's Government are colluding in what the United Nations says is evidence of war crimes. Will the Prime Minister use her meeting with the Crown Prince today to halt the arms supplies and demand an immediate ceasefire in Yemen?

Answered by: Theresa May | Prime Minister

The right hon. Gentleman raised two questions. On the first point about the Home Office's internal review, the Government are committed to stamping out extremism in all its forms. When I was Home Secretary, I launched the counter-extremism strategy. My right hon. Friend the current Home Secretary has appointed our counter-extremism

commissioner. The review gave us the best picture of how extremists operating in the UK sustain their activities and improved our understanding of that. Its most important finding was that, contrary to popular perception, Islamist extremists draw most of their financial support from domestic, rather than overseas, sources.

I understand that because of some of the personal content in the report, it has not been published. However, Privy Counsellors have been invited to go to the Home Office to read the report. That invitation was extended, I believe, to the shadow Home Secretary, so she and other Privy Council colleagues on the Labour Front Bench are free to go and read the report.

The second issue that the right hon. Gentleman raised was the humanitarian situation in Yemen. We are all concerned about the appalling humanitarian situation in Yemen and the effect that it is having on people, particularly women and children. That is why the Government have increased our funding for Yemen. For 2017-18, we increased it to over £200 million. We are the third largest humanitarian donor to Yemen. We are delivering life-saving aid that will provide nutrition support for 1.7 million people and clean water for 1.2 million people.

I was pleased that when I went to Saudi Arabia in December I met the Crown Prince, and raised with him the need to open the port of Hodeidah to humanitarian and commercial supplies. I am pleased to say that Saudi Arabia then did just that. This vindicates the engagement that we have with Saudi Arabia and the ability to sit down with them. Their involvement in Yemen came at the request of the legitimate Government of Yemen. It is backed by the United Nations Security Council, and as such we support it. On the humanitarian issue, it is for all parties in the conflict to ensure that they allow humanitarian aid to get through to those who need it.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

05 Mar 2018 | HL5642

Asked by: Lord Loomba

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 25 January (HL4791), what steps they are taking to ensure any discussions on preventing sexual violence in conflict at the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting will also address the specific issues that affect widows and their children.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

We are working with member states and the Commonwealth Secretariat to develop an ambitious agenda for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The ministerial discussions will be preceded by four official Commonwealth Forums at the start of summit week.

The Women's Forum is being organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat and will discuss issues around barriers to female empowerment and gender equality. We are working with them to develop a programme that will address violence against women and girls, as well as the unique impact of conflict on women and girls and their key role in peace and security.

We anticipate that sessions will also address the unique needs of marginalised groups of women, such as those with disabilities, widows and others. Participants are likely to include individuals and organisations with a particular focus on the rights of all women, including widow's rights.

Armed Conflict: Children
26 Feb 2018 | 128937

Asked by: Stephen Gethins

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment her Department has made of the implications for its policies on the protection of children in armed conflicts of the findings of the Save the Children report entitled War on Children, published in February 2018.

Answering member: Harriett Baldwin | Department for International Development

The UK is firmly committed to ensuring that the needs of children affected by conflict are addressed. 50% of DFID's spending is directed towards fragile states and regions, including the many countries which Save the Children highlights are the most dangerous for children.

Our investment in protecting children in conflict zones is emphasised through our many multilateral and bilateral programmes around the world. Some of the examples of how we achieve this are as follows. We are the largest contributor to Education Cannot Wait, the first global movement aid fund dedicated to education in emergencies and protracted crises. Through this, we target some of the world's most vulnerable children, aiming to reach 3.4 million children through its first set of investments. We contribute funds to the No Lost Generation Initiative, a commitment by the international community to support children and youth affected by the Syria and Iraq crises, mainly in education and protection. In Somalia, we work with the UN and international NGOs to ensure the rights of children affected by conflict are addressed through family reunification, support to their nutrition needs and reducing the risks faced by displaced children. In Yemen and Iraq we fund UN agencies to undertake critical child protection work. In Afghanistan we seek to change the way the conflict is fought to reduce child casualties and ensure that vulnerable children have access to supportive services.

[Armed Conflict: Children](#)**26 Feb 2018 | 128405****Asked by: Tulip Siddiq**

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if her Department will publish a response to the report of Save The Children entitled War on Children, published in February 2018; and what steps her Department is taking better to protect children in those conflict zones referred to in the report.

Answering member: Harriett Baldwin | Department for International Development

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We do not have plans to publish a response to Save the Children's report, **The War on Children** - DFID officials are in regular contact with Save the Children on this agenda. We recently partnered to co-host a high level Wilton Park dialogue to address the mental health and psychosocial support needs of children affected by conflict in the Middle East.

[Syria: Armed Conflict](#)**23 Feb 2018 | 128717****Asked by: Richard Burden**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of the civil war in Syria on civilians in Idlib and Ghouta.

Answering member: Alistair Burt | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

An estimated 400,000 people (including 200,000 children) trapped in Eastern Ghouta are suffering from indiscriminate airstrikes and artillery shelling which, as well as destroying many homes, have struck schools and medical facilities. Over 700 people are reported to remain in need of urgent medical treatment. Over 2.5 million people live in the Idlib area, including over 1.1 million Internally Displaced People.

Intensification of hostilities has displaced approximately 270,000 people within Idlib since 15 December 2017. Already this year the UN report at least nine attacks on medical facilities, in some cases hospitals which were treating casualties wounded in attacks on other medical facilities were then struck. We call on the regime to end these attacks and allow full humanitarian access.

Engagements

21 Feb 2018 | 636 c153

Asked by: Ian Blackford

I thank the Prime Minister for that answer. The bombing is relentless. Doctors on the ground are treating pregnant women and babies who have lost limbs. It is estimated that well over 100 children have been killed since Sunday. The UN has issued desperate pleas calling for political intervention. It has stated:

“No words will do justice to the children killed, their mothers, their fathers and their loved ones”.

Will the Prime Minister show leadership and join me in calling for an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council to address the horrific genocide that is unfolding in Syria?

Answered by: The Prime Minister | Prime Minister

The United Nations has called on Governments around the world to call out the action that has been taken and to be ready to stand up against that action. That is exactly what this Government are doing. We will talk to our UN colleagues to ensure that the best possible approach can be taken in relation to these issues, but it is not just about the Syrian Government; it is about the backers of the Syrian Government as well. We call on all their backers, including Russia, to ensure that the violence stops, and that those people who are need of help are given that help.

Asylum: Children

05 Feb 2018 | 125384

Asked by: Alex Norris

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department will commit to maintaining in law, the right of children fleeing conflict to seek sanctuary in the UK if they have family members currently living in our country, after the UK leaves the EU.

Answering member: Caroline Nokes

The UK is fully committed to transferring the specified number of 480 unaccompanied children under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 as soon as possible. Whilst the Government is clear that we will not be amending the current legislation, after extensive discussion with France, Greece and Italy, we have updated the eligibility date on an exceptional basis to ensure we can transfer the circa. 260 remaining unaccompanied children and meet our obligation under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016. We are working closely with Member States and with relevant partners such as the UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and NGOs to ensure the safe transfer of children referred by each Member State to the UK. Over 220 children are already here and transfers are ongoing.

Our Family Reunion policy allow children to join their refugee parents, and there are also specific provisions that allow extended family members lawfully resident in the UK to sponsor unaccompanied children where there are serious and compelling circumstances. This policy is reflected in domestic legislation and will be unaffected by our exit from the EU. We have reunited over 24,000 partners and children with their families under our family reunion policy in the last five years.

Until we leave the EU, the UK remains bound by EU asylum legislation, where we have opted in, including the Dublin Regulation. The Dublin III Regulation is the mechanism to determine the Member State responsible for the consideration of an asylum claim. We are considering the options to ensure effective cooperation on the country responsible for processing asylum claims when we leave the EU. This will be a key consideration as part of the process of establishing a new relationship with our European partners.

The Home Office publishes data on asylum applications and their outcomes from unaccompanied asylum seeking children who enter the UK. The data are published in volume 3 of the asylum tables in the quarterly Immigration Statistics release. The latest release includes data up to September 2017, is published here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-july-to-september-2017-data-tables>.

In addition, the Home Office published a one-off data publication on the number of children transferred from France as part of the UK's comprehensive support for the Calais camp clearance in autumn 2016. The data is published here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transfers-of-children-to-the-uk-from-the-calais-operation-november-2017>

The Home Office only returns an unaccompanied child with no lawful basis to remain in the UK if it is satisfied that safe and adequate reception arrangements are in place in the country to which they are to be removed.

Yemen: Humanitarian Aid

17 Jan 2018 | 634 c868

Asked by: Stephen Twigg

UNICEF's report this week highlights the appalling impact on children of the conflict in Yemen. Will the Minister examine the proposal from War Child that at least 1% of humanitarian funding should be devoted to mental health and psycho-social support?

Answered by: Alistair Burt | International Development

I will be very happy to see that proposal; I have not seen it yet. Looking after psychological and mental health used to be seen as some kind of benevolent add-on in terms of aid and support. Bearing in mind the crisis and trauma that so many youngsters go through, it is very important that it is brought right up front and the UK is a firm advocate of that. I will certainly look at the report.

Topical Questions

09 Jan 2018 | 634 c170

Asked by: Ian Murray

UK humanitarian workers have told us that 10 hospitals in Syria have been directly targeted by Russian and Syrian forces over the past few weeks. These attacks go against the Geneva convention, but they have also left hundreds of children starving and in need of urgent humanitarian help. Will the Foreign Secretary indicate whether he intends to follow through on his previous pledge to donate British troops to UN peacekeeping forces? Will he ask President Putin to desist from doing such things? Will the Minister also ensure that the Geneva process is re-energised?

Answered by: Alistair Burt | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The attacks over the Christmas period were deeply distressing. I spoke to some of the medical agencies involved in getting those with medical issues out of eastern Ghouta to seek treatment, and the overwhelming need is for proper humanitarian access to the area. However, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, the Geneva process, which is being driven forward by Staffan de Mistura and reaches its next part later this month, must keep going to try to see an end to this conflict, which is the only thing that will relieve the suffering. The United Kingdom is right behind that process.

Bangladesh: Rohingya

11 Dec 2017 | 117074

Asked by: Lyn Brown

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with the Government of Bangladesh about the effect of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 on the rights, equality, and welfare of Rohingya child refugees in Bangladesh and the extent to which that law is enforced in refugee camps.

Answering member: Mark Field | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

To date, the UK has not held discussions with the Government of Bangladesh specifically on the effect of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 with regard to Rohingya child refugees.

The UK Government is clear that the protection of Rohingya child refugees is a critical aspect of the humanitarian response. We remain concerned by the potential for exploitation of women and girls in Cox's Bazar in addition to the appalling violence suffered by the Rohingya community in Burma. The International Development Secretary raised this concern with Government of Bangladesh Ministers during her recent November 2017 visit to Bangladesh. The UK is funding child protection support to displaced Rohingya communities, including the establishment of 30 child friendly spaces and support for children to learn and adopt safe behaviours in settlements. UK aid is also funding trauma counselling services, including psychosocial and psychological support for 7,500 children.

We have consistently called on the Government of Bangladesh to do more to prevent child marriage in Bangladesh. At the UK hosted Girl Summit in 2014, Bangladesh committed to ending the marriages of girls and boys under the age of 15, reduce the number of girls marrying between the ages of 15 and 18 by one third by 2021, and to end all child marriages by 2041.

The Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 was an important step in legally defining and attempting to prevent child marriage in Bangladesh. However, we remain concerned by a number of special provisions that can lead to child marriage, including in the event of pregnancy. The High Commission in Dhaka raised this with Government of Bangladesh during the legislation's passage through Bangladesh's parliament.

Engagements**29 Nov 2017 | 632 c317****Asked by: Ian Blackford**

That was a long time to be unable to answer the question. I can tell the First Secretary that the UK Government have received £4.6 billion from selling arms to Saudi Arabia since the war in Yemen began—a war that has created a devastating humanitarian crisis. Yemen is now on the brink of famine, and UNICEF has said that 150,000 children will die by the end of the year. Does the First Secretary not agree that the best thing the Prime Minister can do in her meetings today is follow the example of the Netherlands and suspend licences for arms sales to Saudi Arabia to stop killing children?

Answered by: Damian Green | Prime Minister

I should correct something the right hon. Gentleman said: that the Government receive the money. It will be the companies that receive the money, and therefore their workers. He can take that position if he wants, and it was the Labour party's position as well, but that would certainly entail significant job losses.

It is very important not only that we have the robust regime I talked about, but that we continue the humanitarian efforts that we make to try to alleviate the terrible conditions in Yemen. We are the fourth largest humanitarian donor to Yemen, and the second largest to the UN appeal. I also remind the right hon. Gentleman that the involvement of the Saudis in this conflict came at the request of the legitimate Government of Yemen and has UN Security Council backing. That is why we support it. This is a conflict supported by the UN Security Council, and I would hope that the right hon. Gentleman will have some respect for the Security Council.

5. Department for International Development

[Emergency humanitarian UK aid package to DRC as violence escalates](#)

Department for International Development
13 April 2018

During a visit to a camp for displaced families in Kalemie in the DRC, Africa minister Harriett Baldwin denounced recent escalations in violence across the east of the country and announced an emergency package of UK aid support which will provide additional lifesaving food, water and medical care to hundreds of thousands more people in desperate need.

This includes:

- giving over 390,000 more people access to clean drinking water
- providing over 85,000 more people with food or assistance to meet urgent food and other basic needs
- reaching over 38,000 more children suffering from malnutrition with vital nutrition support
- providing essential medical care to over 240,000 more people, including drugs for pregnant mothers

The UK recognised the crisis early and the Department for International Development (DFID) was one of the first donors to step up support. The minister also called on the international community to increase support urgently for the country, announcing this humanitarian package as leaders from the international community are set to gather in Geneva today (Friday 13 April) for a UN pledging conference for the DRC.

Minister for Africa Harriett Baldwin said:

I have seen for myself the devastating impact of this terrible crisis - but UK aid is already on the ground and with today's emergency package, we are providing a vital lifeline for more desperate mothers and their starving children who have been forced to flee their homes.

This is a major humanitarian crisis and I have pressed for the DRC to fully recognise the scale of suffering, and cooperate with international efforts to help the millions of Congolese people affected. It is important that international partners also urgently step up their support.

The DRC has huge potential to be a prosperous nation, but it's vital we work now to establish the political stability which will create the foundations for future growth and a safer and brighter future for all Congolese people. Key to this will be credible, constitutional and inclusive elections in December 2018.

DFID's humanitarian response is already reaching over three million people across the country with lifesaving aid.

During her visit minister Baldwin asked to meet with President Kabila. She met with representatives from across government, including opposition candidates and the DRC's electoral commission (CENI), to stress the vital importance of the DRC holding credible, constitutional and inclusive elections by the end of this year, to help tackle some of the root causes of violence and suffering in DRC.

UK funded vaccines save Rohingya children from deadly diphtheria outbreak

Department for International Development
15 January 2018

The UK has once again led the response to the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh, by contributing to a vaccination programme which will protect more than 350,000 vulnerable Rohingya children from a deadly outbreak of diphtheria.

The vaccination campaign, which began in December, is due to run until February, has already ensured more than 315,000 children aged between six-weeks and 15-years-old, living in or near the world's biggest camp in Cox's Bazar, are protected.

Overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar are a breeding ground for contagious diphtheria, with 100 new cases every day.

Since late 2017, there have been nearly 4,000 suspected cases and at least 31 deaths. More than half the deaths relate to children under the age of five.

Diphtheria is especially dangerous for children. It is fast spreading and fatal, causing extreme breathing difficulties, inflammation of the heart which can lead to heart failure, problems with the nervous system and fatal paralysis.

In tandem with the vaccination campaign, which is being carried out by UNICEF, the UK has also provided specialist expertise in the form of British doctors, nurses, paramedics and midwives, who are treating diphtheria patients.

Only three weeks after arriving in the camps, the skills of the 40-strong UK aid-funded Emergency Medical Team have made a significant difference and saved countless lives, including that of four-year-old Anowar.

He was referred to the treatment centre at 9am last Monday (January 8), in a weak and lethargic condition and displaying symptoms of diphtheria.

Anowar's symptoms were so severe; the clinicians decided that he needed diphtheria anti-toxin immediately in addition to a course of antibiotics. By 4pm that afternoon his health had improved significantly, and he was soon released to complete his treatment in the care of his

relieved family. He is now doing well and looked healthier when he visited the treatment centre on Thursday 11 January for a check-up.

The intervention of the UK medics undoubtedly saved Anowar's life but it has also had a wider impact as clinicians were also able to treat his entire family with precautionary antibiotics, preventing them from going through the same suffering as Anowar.

The Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh from neighbouring Burma following persecution by its military. In November 2017, the International Development Secretary visited Cox's Bazar where she announced extra UK aid for the humanitarian crisis, ensuring more lives are not put at risk when international funding starts to run out in February 2018.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

"It is difficult to comprehend the depth of human suffering among the hundreds and thousands of Rohingya who have fled persecution in Burma. Many have sought refuge in Bangladesh, but their plight is far from over as diphtheria, an entirely preventable disease, is claiming the lives of those who thought they had finally reached safety.

"British expertise and aid is saving lives in Cox's Bazar, preventing and treating this deadly infection, helping children like Anowar.

"In today's world, no child should die from a preventable disease. The UK is giving hope and a chance to Rohingya families."

[UK aid stops 'untold horror' of child pneumonia deaths in Syria this winter](#)

Department for International Development
4 November 2017

International Development Secretary Priti Patel has announced a new package of UK aid support to help end the "untold horror" that means thousands of helpless Syrian children fall victim to the "brutal assault of winter" every year.

From November, temperatures typically plummet in Syria and as many as 1 in 3 child deaths could be caused by respiratory illnesses such as pneumonia – up from 1 in 10 before the crisis began.

Chest infections are now the number one reason for children in Syria seeking medical attention. UK aid will provide immunisations and give early treatment for coughs and colds, preventing children from suffering life-threatening illnesses and giving them hope for the future.

People living in tents and make-shift shelters in Syria do all they can to survive sub-zero temperatures but they are struggling to afford daily essentials, food and medical care. Dirty conditions increase the chances of chest infections and malnourishment makes children up to 15 times more likely to die from pneumonia.

As well as delivering life-saving medical support, UK aid is restoring large buildings so that people have a safe and clean place to stay for as long as they need, helping them now and in the winters to come. It is also providing more than 100,000 people with hot meals, warm clothes and blankets to stop children falling ill in the first place.

UK aid will:

- provide more than 1.3 million health care consultations, including 700,000 reproductive, maternal and child health care consultations to give children early treatment and prevent illnesses such as pneumonia.
- provide vaccinations for more than 100,000 people to help prevent infections and boost immune systems.
- support 102,500 people, including families living in besieged and hard to reach areas, with winter kits that include blankets, warm clothing and kitchen utensils to help cook hot meals.
- accommodate 3,000 people in secure shelters by restoring 600 housing units that are fitted with heaters, new doors and windows, and working amenities.

International Development Secretary Priti Patel said:

The barbaric conflict in Syria means that hundreds of thousands of vulnerable men, women and children face another deadly winter ahead.

Pneumonia is an untold horror of the Syria crisis and helpless children are falling victim to the brutal assault of winter before their lives have properly begun. No child should die from the cold. As well as providing lifesaving vaccines and medical treatment, we're taking action to fortify buildings against sub-zero temperatures and prevent these needless deaths for winters to come.

I urge the international community to step up and provide support that will not only keep people alive but also give them a fighting chance of rebuilding their lives.

The brutal Syrian civil war has already cost an estimated 400,000 lives, with over 11 million people displaced by conflict and causing a severe shortage of food, clean water and healthcare.

Over half of Syria's population has been displaced by the violence, with nearly 3 million people in hard to reach locations. Today's UK aid package includes critical support delivered across international borders to people trapped in besieged areas in Syria.

Britain has been at the forefront of the response to the Syria crisis and already we have delivered 26.2 million food rations, 9.8 million relief packages, 8.3 million vaccines against deadly diseases and 10.4 million medical consultations for those in need.

Protecting Children in Armed Conflict: access to education and ending sexual exploitation and abuse impunity [Transcript]

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
31 October 2017

Thank you Mr President for convening today's important debate. I would also want to thank the Secretary-General for his report on Children and Armed Conflict, and also the contribution of the special representative Ms Gamba, for her insights on children in armed conflict and her important work in this area, and in doing so to recognise the hard work done by the UN country task forces and Peace Operations – often in difficult circumstances – to provide reliable, evidence-based information on violations against children. I would also at this juncture like to acknowledge the contribution of Mubin Shaikh and his personal insight into this important area.

When it comes to children's lives, no effort can be spared. Children are innocent bystanders in times of conflict, caught up in the atrocities taking place around them.

That is why the evidence in the annual report is so alarming. It shows that grave violations continue to be committed on an increasing scale. In the many conflicts taking place around the world, children are being maimed and killed, recruited and used as child soldiers, and denied basic humanitarian access.

In some conflicts, there has been a growing trend to detain children on security charges. This is deeply concerning. No child should be detained unless they are charged with a recognisable criminal offence, and only in accordance with international law and juvenile justice standards. Authorities should seek alternatives to detention and if they do detain juveniles, they should prioritise their rehabilitation and reintegration, and fully protect their human rights.

The United Kingdom considers the agreement and implementation of the UN Action Plans to be a vital step in improving the protection of children. We therefore call on all parties listed within the annex of the Secretary-General's report that have not put these measures in place to do so as a matter of priority. And we call on all other parties who have put measures in place to honour their commitments in full.

Mr President, I would like to highlight two aspects of this issue that are of particular concern to the Government of the United Kingdom.

The first is to ensure that children continue to have access to education in times of crisis. This is vital, first, in order to provide young people with at least a degree of normality and stability; and secondly to give them the skills they need to advocate for a better, more peaceful future for themselves, for their families, and their communities.

The UK continues to provide educational support to the millions of children around the world in need of education in emergencies and protracted crises. Following on from UNICEF's 'No Lost Generation' initiative, where £82 million of UK International Development funding was allocated to provide protection, trauma care, and education for

children affected by the crisis in Syria and the wider region, the UK is committing £30 million this year in support to 'Education Cannot Wait'.

I urge all Member States to support such initiatives, which help provide education to those children most in need.

The second issue of particular concern to the UK is the sexual exploitation and abuse of children by UN peacekeepers and other personnel operating in the name of the United Nations.

The annual report shows that this abuse remained a major issue in the Central African Republic in 2016. It is abhorrent and absolutely unacceptable. UN peacekeepers must respect and protect the rights of children.

Children expect and trust peacekeepers to protect them – every time a peacekeeper fails to do so, that trust and the integrity of the UN are gravely undermined. However, it is not only peacekeepers who commit offences against children. Reports continue to indicate that some personnel in the development and humanitarian agencies are also guilty of abusing their position. In the past, our collective failure to prosecute allegations of child rape and sexual exploitation and abuse has sent a signal to predators that working under the UN banner protects them from being held accountable for their actions and facing justice. There must be no more impunity for perpetrators of such heinous offences against innocent and vulnerable children.

The United Kingdom will insist on a zero-tolerance approach to sexual exploitation and abuse and we expect the UN to demonstrate the highest possible standards of protection for children, including actions to prevent abuse, investigate all allegations, and report annually on progress. The United Kingdom's International Development Secretary's comments on child rape in her UN reform speech resonated strongly at the UN General Assembly. And we will continue to work closely with the UN and bring together other Member States to explore how to improve accountability of any of our citizens who face substantiated allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. We want to end the culture of impunity, so all children are protected, and all those charged with abuse are brought to justice.

Finally, Mr President, I want to acknowledge the progress that has been made and look to the future.

In 2016, Colombia's peace agreement with the FARC-EP brought an end to over 50 years of conflict. Reincorporation of FARC-EP minors is now a major focus for implementation of the peace accords. We have also witnessed a temporary ceasefire with the National Liberation Army, including a commitment to stop recruiting children into their ranks. These are encouraging early steps, in what will hopefully become a more substantive peace process.

Elsewhere, UN engagement with non-state armed groups in Mali and Sudan has led to the signing of two new action plans, whilst in the Philippines more than 1,850 children were freed from the military wing of the Mono Islamic Liberation Front.

These are important milestones; perhaps unthinkable over 20 years ago when Graca Machel's report was released. Such achievements would not have been possible without the mandate and the work of the Special Representative, which the UK continues to fully support.

Children, Mr President, are the innocent victims of conflict. Let us today renew our determination to work together to protect the many children caught up in the conflict, to get them back to school and give them hope of a brighter future free from fear, free from conflict.

6. Further reading

[The war on Children](#) (Web page of Save the Children)

[Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict](#) (Web page)

[Unicef: War and Conflict](#) (Web page)

[War Child](#) (Web page)

[The War on Children: time to end the grave violations against children in conflict](#), Save the Children, 2018

[Children and Armed Conflict](#), Report of the Secretary-General, United Nations, 24 August 2017

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