

UK approach to the prevention of mass atrocities

This note sets out the UK Government's approach to the prevention of mass atrocities, primarily in conflict situations around the world. The Government's approach is regularly reviewed and updated as new information on geographical situations and research on best practice in the field of atrocity prevention comes to light.

Who leads in government on atrocity prevention?

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) leads on mass atrocity prevention policy within the UK Government, with other parts of Whitehall in support. Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, the FCO's Minister of State responsible for the United Nations and the Commonwealth, also has oversight of policy on Human Rights and our work on atrocity prevention. The FCO's Director of Multilateral Policy is the senior official responsible for these policy areas, and serves as the UK's "Focal Point" for the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

What is the British Government doing to prevent mass atrocities?

Given that the majority of atrocities occur in and around conflict, the UK has dedicated significant resources to addressing crises and conflict by means of a comprehensive cross-government response. The FCO's Geographical Departments work closely with the Department for International Development (DFID), Ministry of Defence (MoD) and others, to assess the risk of potential atrocities and conflict and decide how best to respond.

Tools available to the UK Government include:

- Early warning mechanisms to identify countries at risk of instability, conflict and atrocities;
- Diplomacy to help de-escalate tensions and resolve disputes;
- Development/programmatic support to address the root causes of conflict;
- Defence and policing tools, which may include deployments of UK armed forces, to assist with training and capacity building in the security sector.

Early warning tools help the UK Government to identify and understand the emerging risk of mass atrocity. This includes the Countries at Risk of Instability process, an internal annual exercise, which helps policy-makers to prioritise countries and regions for potential Government engagement. Other sources of information include reporting from our diplomatic missions overseas, in-depth internal analyses, as well as reporting from international partners, multilateral and non-governmental organisations and wider open-source reporting. The Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability is a

particularly useful tool: all source cross-government analyses that are used to underpin National Security Council Strategies. All these instruments help the Government to identify situation-specific interventions that are most likely to prevent conflict, build stability and prevent atrocities.

Diplomatic engagement plays a crucial role in helping to prevent atrocities and conflict through, for example, visits to risk-prone areas, active support for mediation initiatives either directly or through third parties, and the use of international fora to cast a spotlight on potential flashpoints. Where we see a risk of atrocities, we use diplomacy to highlight our concerns: bilaterally with the countries concerned and with regional neighbours, and multilaterally through international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), European Union and the Commonwealth, and with smaller likeminded groups and others.

The UK supports the deployment of all appropriate tools available to the UN in dealing with potential atrocities and conflict such as sanctions (diplomatic, travel bans, asset freezes, arms embargoes, and commodity interdiction), and is a strong advocate for securing accountability and justice for atrocities committed. In the UN context, UK diplomatic activity includes engaging with the Security Council, the General Assembly, and the Human Rights Council. The UK is mindful that left unchecked, human rights abuses and violations can be a first step towards mass atrocities. Freedom of the media is also important in an open society, to hold the powerful to account without fear of retribution.

Development/programmatic support aims to foster environments where atrocities are less likely to take place – by addressing the root causes of conflict and drivers of instability through tackling corruption, promoting good governance, improving access to security and justice, and inclusive economic development.

The UK's substantial development budget is a key component of the Government's effort to reduce conflict and build stability overseas. The UK spends 0.7% of its Gross National Income on Official Development Assistance, a figure that we have enshrined in law. With more than 50% of DFID's budget spent in fragile and conflict affected states, effective development initiatives can help to reduce the risk of atrocities.

The cross-Whitehall Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) brings together resources and expertise from across government to deliver security, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and stabilisation activity to help countries become safer and more secure. The CSSF's £1.2 billion supports and delivers programmes bilaterally in over 70 countries, and multilaterally through organisations such as the UN. This work is co-ordinated through the National Security Council and the Cabinet Office.

As the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review sets out, the UK uses defence tools, including the armed forces, to strengthen the rules-based international order including through conflict prevention and capacity building, training, support to humanitarian assistance and disaster response, and conducting operations to restore peace and stability. Each of these can

have a positive impact in preventing atrocities, as does the deployment of policing and justice sector expertise, funded through the CSSF.

A strong commitment to do more

The UK remains committed to early and effective international action to prevent conflict and mass atrocities using a range of tools. As a strong defender of the rules-based international order, committed to preventing conflict and atrocities before they occur, we support the vision of UN Secretary-General António Guterres for “Sustaining Peace”: using the full range of UN instruments flexibly in order to address situations upstream, through early warning, prevention and peacebuilding.

The UK remains an active supporter of the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), working with international partners – both states and civil society – to identify situations where the risk of atrocities is growing and find ways to forestall violence using the tools outlined above. We continue to work actively with international partners to develop effective policy approaches to promote R2P and prevent atrocities.

The UK Government is firmly committed to efforts which highlight injustice, protect civilian populations and prevent and resolve conflict. We will continue to press ahead with work which builds inclusive and stable environments through initiatives on Women, Peace and Security, Girls’ Education, the Protection of Civilians, Children and Armed Conflict, Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, tackling Modern Slavery, promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief (including tackling the persecution of Christians) and Freedom of the Media.