



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office



Department
for International
Development

Rory Stewart OBE MP
Minister of State

23 August 2017

C/O William Archer, Secretariat of the APPG
APPG for Sudan and South Sudan
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

Dear William,

I am writing to thank you and the members of the APPG for Sudan and South Sudan for your report '*Engagement Beyond the Centre: An Inquiry Report on the Future of UK-Sudan relations*', and for the comprehensive review on which it is based. I would like to respond to the recommendations proposed in the report and address actions that HMG are implementing in Sudan, in all four areas that you reference: the Peace Processes; Extremism; Migration and the Strategic Dialogue. I have set out the response to mirror the structure of the recommendations as laid out within the report.

Peace processes

As recommended in the Inquiry report, we are pressing the Government of Sudan to abide by its commitments under the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) roadmap agreement. We will continue to lobby both the government and opposition groups to reach an agreement on a permanent cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access, working with international partners and supporting the AUHIP.

The UK Special Representative for Sudan and South Sudan has regular contact with both the Sudanese Ambassador in London and leaders from the opposition groups to urge them to seize the opportunity offered by the peace process. The FCO Africa Director, Neil Wigan, also met the umbrella opposition group, Sudan Call, in Khartoum during the most recent UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue in March.

We agree that civil society's engagement with the peace process is essential, and that the National Dialogue must remain open so that all groups can join and all views are heard. We continue to press the government to deliver a genuine, inclusive, and transparent process.

Regarding debt relief, there are strict technical conditions Sudan has to meet before it is eligible. We have been clear that the Government of Sudan can only achieve this through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries process which requires making serious attempts to reduce poverty, including by ending internal conflict.

As highlighted in the Inquiry Report, the UK and other states encouraged the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to look into the serious allegations about the use of chemical weapons in Darfur. We also raised our concerns during UN Security Council Consultations and directly with the Government of Sudan. The OPCW asked the Government of Sudan, as a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, to share all relevant information, and offered its assistance in any investigation. The Sudanese authorities have since reported to the OPCW that their national investigations have found no evidence of chemical weapon use in the Jebel Marra region. We regularly discuss and raise our concerns about the situation in Darfur with the Government of Sudan and continue to urge them to allow humanitarian access and to allow UNAMID to carry out its core mandate to protect civilians.

In recent months, the Government of Sudan has allowed UNAMID and humanitarian agencies to access Jebel Marra which has enabled vital humanitarian needs assessments to be undertaken. Furthermore, under the reconfiguration of UNAMID, the Mission is expected to open an operating base in Golo, Jebel Marra, in order to focus its emergency relief efforts in this region. The UK Government works closely with members of the humanitarian community to advocate for improved humanitarian access by our partners including in Darfur and the Two Areas.

As penholder for UNAMID in the UN Security Council, we support the reconfiguration of the Mission: as the security situation on the ground in Darfur evolves, it makes sense that UNAMID should also evolve. Given the scale of the changes and the fragile situation in Darfur, it is vital that the changes are implemented sensibly, with appropriate review points. Our priority is to ensure that whatever changes take place, UNAMID is still able to provide protection to civilians. We will continue to push the Government to cooperate fully with UNAMID, and to remove any obstacles and restrictions currently imposed on the Mission.

Extremism

Strong partnerships with civil society are necessary to tackle effectively the growing global threat from extremism. We are actively engaging with civil society in Sudan to explore opportunities for working together to counter the threat from violent extremism.

In response to radicalisation concerns, the UK has engaged directly with the University of Medical Sciences and Technology in Khartoum on counter extremism issues. This led to us supporting two parallel events in 2015 – one at the University in Khartoum and one in Manchester for alumni – which aimed to raise awareness and to engage staff, students and the graduate association on options for tackling the risks of radicalisation. We have also continued to provide outreach material on countering violent extremism to students, staff and parents, and supported the visits of expert speakers to Sudan from the UK; including the Imam of the British Armed Forces in 2015.

We are also piloting youth engagement initiatives in Sudan aimed at countering extremism and promoting tolerance under the FCO's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). In addition, existing UK government programmes and engagement designed to end conflict and promote good governance, human rights and prosperity also aim to contribute to the counter-extremism agenda and improve resilience to extremist messages by promoting an environment of positive opportunities and tolerance.

We agree that the Chevening Scholarship programme is an important link between the UK and Sudan. Since 2014, the British Embassy has tripled the number of Chevening scholarships offered to talented Sudanese nationals moving from an average of 5 to 15 scholarships. This three-fold increase has been made possible by increased funding from the FCO and increased support from our private sector partners in Sudan. The Embassy maintains excellent links with the local business community, with whom we are also working closely on commercial opportunities. Therefore we are optimistic about securing more private sector funding for Chevening in the future, particularly as companies increasingly realise the value of the skills and experience Chevening scholars bring back to Sudan from the UK. For example, a Chevening scholar who studied transport economics is now the Sudanese State Minister for Transport, Roads and Bridges.

The significance of cultural exchange was highlighted within the APPG's report. The British Council were part of the UK delegation to the third round of the UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue. Both sides affirmed their strong commitment towards cultural exchange and its important role in building on our shared history, helping engage the next generation. During the Strategic Dialogue the British Council and the Ministry of Culture agreed on holding British and Sudanese weeks in Sudan and the UK, accessing the Cultural Protection Fund. They also agreed to establish a UK alumni

association in Sudan, accessing UK research networks and engaging community colleges. In addition to this, both agreed to work together on a conference on access to education in December 2017.

Furthermore, the Sudanese Ministry of Information, the British Embassy and the BBC have agreed to continue discussions on the reestablishment of BBC Arabic in Sudan.

Migration

Engaging with the Government of Sudan on migration issues does not mean that we will focus less on the conflicts or human rights situation. Rather, engaging with the Government provides another channel to raise human rights concerns directly. This was done most recently during the UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue on 29 March where we stressed the importance of tackling irregular migration in a way that was compliant with human rights. We have also used our engagement with the Sudanese Government as an opportunity to raise specific areas where we have concerns, including the reported deportation of a number of asylum-seekers to Eritrea.

The UK and Sudan have been discussing how to take forward migration concerns under the umbrella of the 'Khartoum Process'. Sudan has also signed up to the Valletta Summit Action Plan, which includes actions to address the root causes of migration such as conflict and human rights abuses. We will hold the Government of Sudan to account on its commitments.

The EU is our principal vehicle for engagement on migration in Sudan. The 'Better Migration Management' (BMM) is a regional project, which is financed under the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (to which the UK contributes financially) and is designed to improve migration management across the Horn of Africa. No BMM projects have started yet. The EU and the consortium of EU Member States will retain responsibility for the implementation of the BMM project, and activities will be carried out by experts from EU Member States, international organisations and Government of Sudan. No funding will be decentralised to, or channelled through, the beneficiary countries' Government structures.

The APPG's report references the need to safeguard any equipment provided to Sudanese security officials. We currently have no plans, either bilaterally or through the EU, to provide equipment to the Sudanese Government. Any future provision of civilian equipment will only be considered positively if it is necessary for improving critical aspects of the Government's migration management system that will curb trafficking and smuggling. In doing so, the EU and its Member States will not compromise on its overriding rights-based and do-no-harm principles. Any future provision of civilian equipment will have to be in line with the Official Development Assistance (ODA), and adhere to the existing EU sanctions regime against Sudan,

which amongst others establishes an embargo on arms and related materiel, and a ban on the provision of related services.

Strategic Dialogue

Since the publication of the Sudan and South Sudan APPG's report on the future of UK-Sudan relations we have had the third round of the UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue, which was hosted by the Government of Sudan in Khartoum on 29-30 March. The UK delegation included representatives from a cross section of government departments including the FCO, DFID, and the Home Office. Our meetings covered a diverse range of bilateral issues, including the peace process, human rights, humanitarian and development issues, counter-terrorism, migration, culture and trade. We have developed, with the Sudanese Government, a high level objectives document with agreed action points and will closely monitor progress against those objectives. We would be happy to keep the APPG regularly updated on this.

The Head of the FCO's Human Rights and Democracy Department was part of the UK delegation at the Strategic Dialogue, reflecting our continued commitment to human rights in Sudan. He participated in a session with the Ministry of Justice on human rights and discussed modern slavery with Sudanese counterparts focused on migration. As recommended in the APPG's Inquiry Report, international human rights and democratic values were central to our discussions and we were pleased to hear of the Government of Sudan's intentions to accede to key international human rights treaties. We committed to maintaining a regular dialogue on human rights at all levels, including on the subject of trafficking in people.

In addition to discussing human rights through our Strategic Dialogue, we regularly raise human rights issues, such as freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief, with the Government of Sudan. We have also lobbied senior members of the Government of Sudan about the detention of human rights defenders, including Dr Mudawi Ibrahim, and our Embassy staff regularly attends human rights trials.

Supporting Sudan to achieve sustainable peace, an improved human rights situation and political reform will remain at the core of all our engagement on Sudan. I would like to thank you again for your continued engagement on a number of important issues in Sudan and South Sudan and re-emphasise the willingness of the Foreign

and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development to continue to work closely with the APPG. I look forward to meeting members of the group soon.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rory Stewart". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rory Stewart