



**THIRD REPORT FROM THE
FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

SESSION 2006-07

ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS 2006

**RESPONSE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS**

*Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
by Command of Her Majesty
June 2007*

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RESPONSE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

1. The Government welcomes scrutiny by the Committee of its work to promote human rights overseas and values the positive co-operation that exists between the Committee and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office over the content and format of the Annual Report on Human Rights.
2. This Command Paper sets out the Government's response to the Committee's 29 April 2007 Report into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's 2006 Annual Report on Human Rights. The Committee's recommendations are set out in bold. Unless otherwise indicated, references are to paragraphs in the Foreign Affairs Committee Report (HC269).

There is a risk with any annual publication, even one dealing with the vitally important area of human rights, that it may become formulaic and lose its 'edge'. It is a credit to a succession of officials and Ministers of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) that, since 1998, they have produced a series of increasingly useful, well-written reports on human rights around the world which have gained the respect of non-governmental organisations and of this Committee. (Paragraph 1)

3. The Government is grateful to the Committee for these positive comments and for its constructive engagement on human rights issues. We will continue to work with the Committee, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and others as we seek to improve the Report and fulfil our objective of informing Parliament and the public of our efforts to promote human rights around the world.
4. The Foreign Secretary has agreed that, in producing the 2007 Report, we should:
 - aim for a more tightly focused Report, concentrating on the UK's action and policies in key countries and themes, and the relevance of human rights to our strategic priorities;
 - consult with key external stakeholders on our communications and engagement on human rights; and
 - change the reporting cycle to cover the calendar year.

We expect to publish the 2007 Annual Report on Human Rights in early 2008. In order to ensure continuous coverage, the 2007 report will cover the remainder of 2006 as well as the calendar year 2007. This will be the 10th Annual Report on Human Rights that the FCO has produced.

5. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office shall consult with the Committee, NGOs and other key stakeholders in the coming months.

We welcome the Minister's evident personal commitment to human rights. However, we conclude that the FCO's human rights policy has to rely on more than the strong commitment of one Minister and we recommend that it should be made more explicit to all Ministers that work in support of human rights is to be fully integrated into the Government's pursuit of the ten strategic foreign policy priorities. (Paragraph 11)

6. As Ian McCartney MP said in his evidence to this year's inquiry, which was quoted on page 9 of the Committee's report, "...the truth is that every Minister in the Government has responsibility in their role to pursue, advocate and be an ambassador for our human rights agenda."
7. Human rights are genuinely mainstreamed within the FCO and are embedded in every Strategic International Priority. All FCO Ministers, led by the Foreign Secretary, are actively engaged on human rights issues and take every appropriate opportunity to raise human rights issues and concerns during their various meetings with contacts, both in the UK and overseas. An example of this is Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett's speech on 17 May 2007 at the Central Party School, Beijing, in which she spoke about freedom of expression and the media, rule of law and good governance.
8. The FCO and the Department for International Development (DfID) are working closely on mainstreaming human rights into international development, building on key messages delivered in the 2006 DfID White Paper. Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for International Development gave a speech on 16 April 2007 in New York, on Development and Foreign Policy, in which he recalled the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and called on support for the International Criminal Court. The strength of this partnership was highlighted on 21 May 2007 by the joint launch by the FCO and DfID of the new DfID publication 'Governance, Development, and Democratic Politics', which aims to deepen understanding on how to put an increased emphasis on human rights into practice.
9. The FCO also briefs Ministers from other government departments to raise human rights issues in their bilateral contacts. At the Economic Community of West African States UNESCO Commemoration of the 200th Anniversary of the Abolition of North Atlantic Slave Trade in Accra on 16 February 2007, Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott called on nations of the world to unite and campaign "to end the unspeakable cruelty that persists in the form of modern day slavery – such as bonded labour, forced recruitment of child soldiers and human trafficking, especially of women and children."
10. The Government shares the view that these issues are of importance for all Ministers and reaffirms that this is the Government's own view.

We recommend that in the 2007 annual report on human rights, the FCO include a substantial section on the work of the Human Rights Council, including an assessment of the extent to which its work is being hampered by particular states or by groups of states pursuing their own agenda, and an evaluation of how well member states are co-operating with the special procedures and with the universal periodic review process. We suggest that this section could include a table showing the voting records of each country on key resolutions. (Paragraph 19)

11. The Government welcomes the Committee's detailed interest in the United Nations Human Rights Council and its restatement of its support for the establishment of the Council last year. The Government agrees with the Committee's analysis in paragraph 18 of its report of the key challenges facing the Council at this early stage of its development, namely: the need to achieve balance in its resolutions on the basis of universal values, establishment of a robust Universal Periodic Review mechanism, and support for the work of the 'special procedures' mechanisms.
12. The Government continues to work actively towards these, and other goals, in order to increase the effectiveness and strength of the new Council. For example, in his address to the Human Rights Council on 13 March 2007, Ian McCartney spoke specifically of the valuable input of the Special Procedures, saying that the Council "must continue to draw on them to the fullest extent". He also recalled the UK's efforts to work for an effective, balanced, Universal Periodic Review process.
13. The Government further welcomes the Committee's specific recommendation on the Council and undertakes to include the issues highlighted in the recommendation in a substantial section on the Human Rights Council in the FCO's Annual Human Rights Report for 2007.

We recommend that in its response to this Report the Government explain what results on the ground have flowed from its leading role on the 'protection of civilians agenda' at the United Nations, and what steps it has taken to achieve effective implementation of the Responsibility to Protect. (Paragraph 23)

14. The Government appreciates the Committee's recognition of the UK's leading role on the 'protection of civilians' and 'Responsibility to Protect' agenda at the United Nations and welcomes the opportunity to explain what results this role has helped to bring about.
15. The UK has played a decisive role in the UN Security Council to ensure robust protection mandates for UN peacekeeping operations. For example, the UK helped to achieve strong protection language in resolution 1706 on Sudan and resolution 1756 on the Democratic Republic of Congo. Strongly worded mandates often have a direct impact on the ability of troops to take specific civilian protection measures.
16. The UK also supports and plays an active role in the regular Council briefings by the UN Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Sir John Holmes. We believe that his briefings raise the international community's awareness of, and attention to, the protection of civilians.

17. Rapid and effective responses by the humanitarian community are important to help civilian populations affected by war. The UK provides significant financial and political support to those agencies that are providing humanitarian assistance in affected countries, such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, which is working to provide a more systematic and co-ordinated response to the protection of the internally displaced. The safety of humanitarian workers and their access to affected civilians are important elements of the protection agenda. To this end, we have worked to ensure that peacekeeping missions, such as those in Lebanon and Somalia, are mandated to help provide safe access for the provision of humanitarian assistance.
18. The UK is continuing to lead efforts in the UN to maintain and build international consensus on how to implement the commitments made at the World Summit in 2005 on Responsibility to Protect. UN Security Council resolution 1674, which the UK drafted and negotiated through the Security Council, explicitly affirmed the World Summit outcome on Responsibility to Protect.
19. The UK also worked to embed the Responsibility to Protect commitment in relevant, country-specific Security Council resolutions. One example is Sudan, where the UK was the main sponsor of resolutions 1706 and 1755, which make references to the Responsibility to Protect provisions of the World Summit Outcome Document.
20. We are also working with other member states and with civil society to develop a better shared understanding of the comprehensive nature of Responsibility to Protect, i.e. that it is a construct that recognises the primary responsibility of states, and the international community's responsibility to help and support them in the first instance. To that end, the UK has funded a project run by the World Federalist Movement that has developed the capacity of civil society world-wide to advocate for Responsibility to Protect at national and international levels.
21. In practice, the international community is implementing Responsibility to Protect by taking collective action through UN bodies and missions in response to the unacceptable situation in Darfur. Many of these actions carry the spirit of Responsibility to Protect, if not always the label. Positive results include agreement to a UN Heavy Support Package; progress in the International Criminal Court's efforts to hold accountable those accused of serious crimes in Darfur; the signing of a humanitarian communiqué with the UN; and a declared willingness on the part of the Sudanese government to start political talks. But of course the situation in Darfur remains unacceptable and our efforts will continue.
22. In addition, the UK is a strong supporter of the international criminal tribunals, which are a key part of the international community's efforts to protect civilians by combating impunity for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The International Criminal Court (ICC) for example, is making important progress. The first ICC trial, that of Thomas Lubanga accused of crimes against children in the Democratic Republic of Congo, is a key development, as is the issuing of arrest warrants against two individuals in the ICC's Darfur investigation. The ICC will, we believe, assist in global efforts to deter the worst crimes against civilians.

23. The Government recognises the need to further embed ‘protection of civilians’ and specifically, the Responsibility to Protect into the considerations and actions of the international community. We will continue to seek opportunities to push these principles further, together with our key international partners.

We recommend that the Government continue to give leadership on moves to create an Arms Trade Treaty and that it do its utmost to persuade the United States to support this. (Paragraph 28)

24. The Government welcomes the Committee’s recommendation and remains committed to lead efforts to work towards an international treaty to set standards for the trade in conventional arms. The Government will continue to work with supporters, including civil society and industry, to encourage participation in the United Nations’ process, and eventually to secure a strong treaty to end irresponsible arms trading.
25. As noted in the Committee’s Report, following the successful passage of the UN Arms Trade Treaty Resolution in December 2006, the UN Secretary-General has sought views from member states on the feasibility, scope and draft parameters of a treaty. The UN has now extended its deadline for submissions until June. The United Kingdom was the first country to feed in views and we are actively encouraging others to do so. We understand the UN had received 73 national papers by 31 May 2007.
26. To ensure a future treaty has the greatest impact, the Government is working to persuade all major arms manufacturers, including the United States, to support this initiative.

We welcome the decision by the Government to attend the Oslo meeting on cluster munitions—which was boycotted by Russia, the United States and Israel—and to sign the Oslo Declaration. We also welcome the Government’s announcement that it is withdrawing from service its ‘dumb’ cluster munitions immediately and its decision to press for a worldwide ban on such munitions. We recommend that the Government exert strong pressure on other countries to dispose of their ‘dumb’ cluster munitions immediately. We note that United Kingdom armed forces will retain some types of cluster munition. We recommend that in its response to this Report the Government clarify which cluster munition types are to be retained in service; for how long it is expected they will be retained; and whether the Government has any plans to work towards an early international agreement to ban all cluster munitions. We also recommend that a section on the impact on civilians of cluster munitions be included in the Annual Human Rights Report 2007. (Paragraph 38)

27. To minimise the humanitarian impact of cluster munitions the Government has already removed from service its ‘dumb’ cluster munitions and is urging others to take similar action (as recommended by the Committee). We are also fully committed to negotiating a legally binding instrument that prohibits use, development, transfer and production of those cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians (as per the Oslo Declaration).
28. In order to maximise universal humanitarian benefit from a new cluster munitions agreement, we believe it is essential to include the major users and supplier countries. A process that omits these vital countries will have a limited humanitarian impact. That is why we are active within the existing Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) to build consensus

among its 102 states to address humanitarian concerns related to these weapons by agreeing a negotiating mandate in 2007 as the necessary means to deliver a new legally binding protocol within the CCW. This approach is supported by the UN Secretary-General, the majority of CCW states parties and many of those who have declared support for the Oslo Declaration. If our efforts to achieve this do not bear fruit then a parallel track to the CCW such as the Oslo process may become the only means through which we can secure our aim.

29. In response to the Committee's recommendation to clarify those cluster munitions which remain in service and for how long, the Ministry of Defence has informed us that they will retain the 155mm L20A1 artillery round, which contains the M85 sub-munition and which we do not consider a 'dumb' cluster munition due to each sub-munition having a self-destruct mechanism. This will remain in service until approximately the middle of the next decade (although this date is subject to review). Consequently, the Government does not consider it possible to work for an early international agreement to ban all cluster munitions as the Committee suggests.
30. Finally, in response to the Committee's recommendation that a section on the impact on civilians of cluster munitions be included in the Annual Human Rights Report 2007, we can confirm that we will be providing such information.

We conclude that the Government's decision to halt the inquiry into the al Yamamah arms deal may have caused severe damage to the reputation of the United Kingdom in the fight against corruption. We recommend that in its response to this Report the Government set out what steps it has taken since that decision to maintain momentum on international anti-corruption measures, and how it has responded to the OECD's criticisms of the decision. (Paragraph 42)

31. We do not agree with the Committee's view that the decision to halt the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) inquiry may have caused severe damage to the reputation of the United Kingdom's fight against corruption. On 12 March 2007, Hilary Benn published a report on progress with the Government's anti-corruption action plan, whose activities he coordinates. This set out the wide-ranging activities we have undertaken since July 2006, when the plan was agreed. They include:
 - strengthening the UK's capacity to investigate allegations of foreign bribery;
 - strengthening the UK's capacity to deter and investigate the laundering of corrupt assets by political élites;
 - advocacy of the implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption and other international instruments in different international fora; and
 - work with the private sector on both specific anti-corruption initiatives, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and on efforts to raise UK business awareness around the world of the damage corruption can cause.

32. The UK explained in detail the background to the SFO's decision to the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) at both the January and March Working Group meetings. The joint note from the Attorney General's Office and the SFO sent to the OECD in January sets this out clearly and is in the public domain.
33. The Group welcomed the UK's openness and additional explanations provided in the context of almost an entire day's worth of discussions spread over two Working Group meetings. The UK's transparency and readiness to engage with its OECD peers in detail on the British Aerospace case has set high standards.
34. As is well known, the Group continues to have concerns about the background to this decision, including on whether the SFO's decision was consistent with the OECD Bribery Convention. It has not been able to come to a definitive view. These concerns have in part contributed to a decision by the Working Group to commission a further review of the UK, focussed on developments in legislation on anti-bribery and on matters relating to the investigation and prosecution of such offences. This supplementary review is not an inquiry into the SFO and al Yamamah or any other specific case. The UK will co-operate fully with the OECD in the preparation and organisation of this review.

We conclude that the International Criminal Court is making good progress and we welcome the Government's support for it. We agree with the Minister that there can be no amnesty for those indicted by the Court and we recommend that the Government maintain this policy. (Paragraph 47)

35. The Government welcomes the Committee's conclusion. The United Kingdom will continue to support the consolidation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) as a key pillar of the international community's efforts to combat the most serious crimes of international concern.
36. We agree that it is essential that the role of the ICC is fully reflected in the approach of the international community to conflict and post-conflict situations. It remains our view that, where the Court is engaged in such a situation, including where arrest warrants have been issued, that approach should be compatible with the Rome Statute of the ICC.

We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government make clear what requirements have been made of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia under the NATO Partnership for Peace agreements and that it provide its assessment of whether these are being fulfilled. (Paragraph 53)

37. The Government notes the Committee's recommendation. NATO has made clear that it expects Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to co-operate fully with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and that NATO will closely monitor their respective efforts in this regard. Full co-operation with the Tribunal remains a fundamental requirement in order to make progress towards the European Union and NATO.
38. The ICTY Chief Prosecutor's latest biannual assessment, delivered to the UN Security Council on 15 December 2006, was that neither Serbia's nor Bosnia-Herzegovina's co-operation with the Tribunal was satisfactory. The Government shares the view that Serbia and Bosnia-

Herzegovina need substantively and concretely to improve their co-operation. As a strong supporter of the Tribunal, we continue to maintain pressure on them, bilaterally and with our EU, NATO and other international partners, to fulfil their international obligations by transferring the remaining fugitives to the Tribunal.

We welcome the Government's constructive role in helping to bring Charles Taylor to justice. We recommend that the Government work with its international partners to ensure that Charles Taylor's trial in The Hague remains accessible to the population in Sierra Leone. (Paragraph 56)

39. The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation. Despite the transfer of former President Taylor's trial from Freetown to The Hague for security reasons, it is essential that the Special Court for Sierra Leone's proceedings in The Hague remain accessible to the people of Sierra Leone and Liberia. The United Kingdom is committed to working with the Court, international partners and Non-Governmental Organisations to ensure that this is the case.
40. For example, the United Kingdom is a strong supporter of the Court's outreach and education programme, which is already active in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The United Kingdom has also contributed £160,000 to a major BBC World Service Trust project to develop, deploy and support a team of six Sierra Leonean and Liberian journalists to cover the trial proceedings.

We recommend that the Government include a section exploring the ethical dilemmas on the use of evidence and information derived from torture in the Annual Human Rights Report 2007. (Paragraph 71)

41. We reaffirm that the Government, including the intelligence and security services, never uses torture for any purpose, including to obtain information.
42. The Government acknowledges the Committee's recognition of the ethical dilemmas relating to the use of information that may have been derived from torture, and undertakes to explore the Committee's recommendation that a section on these dilemmas should be included in the Annual Human Rights Report 2007.

We recommend that the Government ask the United States administration to confirm whether aircraft used in rendition operations have called at airfields in the United Kingdom or in the Overseas Territories en route to or from a rendition and that it make a clear statement of its policy on this practice. (Paragraph 80)

43. As the Committee is aware from the written ministerial statement given to the House by the then Foreign Secretary in January 2006, the Government has co-operated with a number of international inquiries into rendition. There is no new evidence that UK airspace (or that of the Overseas Territories) has been sought by the US to use for rendition, other than the four cases already known about and mentioned by the Committee in its Report. The Committee also heard a full, clear statement of the Government's policy on rendition at this time. Our position has not changed.

44. The Government has made clear to the US administration that we expect the US to seek permission to render detainees via UK territory and airspace (including the Overseas Territories). We have made clear that we will grant permission only if we are satisfied that the rendition would accord with UK law and our international obligations, and we have explained how we understand our obligations under the UN Convention Against Torture and the European Convention on Human Rights. We are clear that the US would not render anyone through UK airspace (including the Overseas Territories) without our permission.
45. In her statement of 5 September 2006, the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice said, referring to allegations of rendition flights:

*“The United States has respected – and will continue to respect – the sovereignty of other countries. The United States does not transport, and has not transported, detainees from one country to another for the purpose of interrogation using torture.
The United States does not use the airspace or the airports of any country for the purpose of transporting a detainee to a country where he or she will be tortured.
The United States has not transported anyone, and will not transport anyone, to a country when we believe he will be tortured. Where appropriate, the United States seeks assurances that transferred persons will not be tortured.”*

46. In these circumstances, the Government does not consider that seeking a further clarification from the US administration of its policy is necessary.

On February 1 the Committee wrote to the FCO requesting a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding between the United Kingdom and Iraq governing the transfer of individuals detained in Iraq by UK forces, as referred to in a Written Answer of 9 January (HC Deb, col 520W). We recommend that this Memorandum of Understanding is provided to the Committee forthwith. (Paragraph 85)

47. The Government notes the Committee’s request. The Iraqi Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice, with whom this bilateral agreement was signed, did not consent to our request to make a copy of this Memorandum of Understanding public.

We conclude that since February 2006 there has been a further grave deterioration in respect for human rights in Iraq, in large part caused by the worsening security situation. We are concerned by allegations that some Iraqi ministers and ministries are involved in human rights abuses, and by the sharp rise in the number of executions and claims of unfair trials in Iraq, including the trial and execution of Saddam Hussein. We recommend that the Government redouble efforts to promote respect for the rule of law and for human rights in organs of the Iraqi state. (Paragraph 92)

48. The Government agrees with the Committee’s view that the human rights situation in Iraq has deteriorated since February 2006. The worsening security situation is not only a significant cause but also hampers the efforts of the Government of Iraq and international partners to respond.

49. We urge the Government of Iraq to investigate allegations of abuse. They have conducted a number of investigations of officials, although progress has not always been adequate. We share the Committee's concerns about the rise in the number of executions and claims of unfair trials in Iraq. We regularly press the Government of Iraq at the highest level about the importance of an independent judiciary and fair trials, and voice our opposition to the use of the death penalty.
50. We have also expanded the scope of our technical assistance in support of the rule of law. Our rule of law programme includes practical support, training and advice to the Basra police, prison service and judiciary, as well as judicial training projects in Baghdad. The Government will continue to work wherever possible to help the Government of Iraq to promote the rule of law and respect for human rights.

We remain concerned by the lack of progress in achieving basic human rights in large sections of Afghan society and we recommend that in the Annual Human Rights Report 2007, the Government provide statistics on incidence of rape, honour killings and other abuses against women in Afghanistan. (Paragraph 98)

51. The Government shares the Committee's concerns on the lack of progress in the field of human rights in Afghanistan. The need for provision of security remains one of the biggest challenges to the promotion of human rights. Equally challenging is the precariousness of the provision of rule of law including access to the judicial system and the fragility of governance.
52. The foundation of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission in May 2005 was a step forward. So far, this Commission has conducted over 700 educational and public awareness events involving over 23,000 people, 7,000 of whom were women.
53. While women now play an unprecedented role in public life in Afghanistan, the Joint Co-ordination Monitoring Board, co-chaired by the UN's Mission in Afghanistan and the Afghan Government, has found there has been little progress in the past year. For example, weak capacity, lack of training, insensitivity to women's rights and deeply entrenched norms of women's subordination mean the Afghan police force is not accessible to Afghan women facing any form of violence. For these reasons women rarely come forward to report abuses, making it difficult to obtain accurate statistics. A small number of international organisations have begun addressing the issue of Afghan women's status and wellbeing, including WOMANKIND, to which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has provided financial support. The Government is not currently in a position to provide statistics on the incidence of rape, honour killings or other abuses against women, but we believe that WOMANKIND's research and findings give the best overall picture currently available of the trends of abuse against Afghan women. The information from WOMANKIND can be found at <http://www.womankind.org.uk>

We recommend that in its response to this Report the Government set out how much compensation it has paid to civilian victims of British military operations in Afghanistan, to how many persons such payments have been made, and in what circumstances. We also recommend that the Government state what steps it has taken to remind its NATO allies of the need to pay compensation in appropriate cases. (Paragraph 103)

54. The UK does everything it can to avoid civilian casualties or damage to civilian property. When either of these do occur, the UK recognises its national responsibility to pay compensation promptly for valid claims. Thus, over the course of the financial year 2006/2007, the UK has processed 105 claims arising from our operations in Afghanistan, 14 of which remain under investigation, as set out in the table below:

UK CLAIMS IN AFGHANISTAN – FINANCIAL YEAR 2006/07

STATUS	No.	AMOUNT CLAIMED £
Settled	42	136,361
Transferred*	19	27,002
Denied	30	62,319
Under Investigation	14	56,006
TOTAL	105	281,688

*Note: Major claims, such as those relating to civilian fatalities, are transferred from Theatre to the Ministry of Defence for adjudication.

55. The UK considers that while it is the responsibility of the individual International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Contributing Nations to meet any valid claims from civilians made against them, it is important to the overall success of the ISAF Mission that they should do so promptly. The UK encourages its ISAF partners to deal with claims from civilians resulting from unintentional damage following ISAF action swiftly, and to meet valid claims promptly.

We conclude that there is growing cause for concern at the very serious abuses of human rights being perpetrated by the military junta in Burma. Although the Chinese and Russian vetoes of the recent UN Security Council resolution against Burma may have boosted the military junta in the short-term, we recommend that the Government maintain its efforts to raise the issue of Burma in the Security Council and in other organs of the United Nations. (Paragraph 109)

56. The Government agrees with the Committee’s recommendation. We co-sponsored the proposed Security Council resolution in January and will continue to support all action in the UN that helps to promote reform and positive change in Burma. We will continue to work within the UN to ensure that Burma remains on the UN Security Council agenda. We are also ready to support practical and effective proposals for tackling Burma’s problems at the Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly.

We conclude that the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue is still failing to make substantive progress. We recommend that the Government consider introducing a timeframe for the completion of specific objectives, to increase the transparency of the success or otherwise of the Dialogue. (Paragraph 116)

57. The Government notes the Committee’s conclusion and recommendation for the UK–China Human Rights Dialogue. We acknowledge that progress between rounds has been incremental. However, the value of the dialogue needs to be judged in the context of our wider engagement

with China in the areas of human rights, reform and political and social development. Moreover, we believe there have been significant improvements to the dialogue process since it began in 1997, including in the quality and depth of exchanges and in participation.

58. We do not agree that introducing a timeframe for the completion of specific objectives at the dialogue would be beneficial. We will, however, continue to publish our wider objectives in our Annual Human Rights Report and our assessment of China's progress against these. We are currently working to improve the transparency of our work on human rights in China and will shortly be inviting the Committee to a discussion on this.

We recommend that the Government apply pressure on Colombia to agree to a longer extension to the mandate of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Colombia and that it set out in its response to this Report the signs that the Colombian authorities are co-operating constructively with the Office. We further recommend that the Government make a full statement of its policy on Colombia's Justice and Peace Law. (Paragraph 122)

59. The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation and will continue to apply pressure on Colombia to agree to a longer extension of the mandate of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Colombia. We believe that the Office will continue to play a key role in helping Colombia. The UK strongly supports the role of the UN in helping Colombia tackle its human rights issues and has publicly stated this support on many occasions. We welcome the affirmation of the Government of Colombia's support for the extension of the mandate and look forward to a formal renewal later this year. We support the extension of the mandate, and have encouraged the Government of Colombia to formalise this without delay.
60. The OHCHR 2006 Annual Report on Colombia (issued on 15 March 2007) recognises that the Government of Colombia is taking positive steps and has made an increased political commitment to improve the human rights situation. For example, it welcomes the Government of Colombia's new strategy to investigate human rights cases involving trade union victims, backed by more resources and a new team of specialist prosecutors.
61. The Justice and Peace Law (a framework for demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of illegal armed groups) agreed in June 2005, after a lengthy debate in the country's democratic institutions, has attracted much attention. With its EU partners, the UK has always made clear that establishing a proper legal framework was indispensable for consideration of further EU engagement with the peace process in Colombia. The UK and its EU partners continue to work actively with the Government of Colombia to strengthen implementation of the Justice and Peace Law.
62. Together with EU partners, we have expressed our readiness to assist the Colombian government and civil society in providing support for those affected by the internal conflict and the reinsertion and demobilisation of child soldiers, complementing existing programmes developed by UNICEF and others.

63. Following the introduction of the Justice and Peace Law, over 40,000 combatants have laid down arms. We are aware that some demobilised paramilitaries have joined new illegal structures. The Government of Colombia recognises this serious problem and is taking action. Any individuals who take up arms again will lose entitlement to the benefits of the Justice and Peace Law. Our Embassy in Bogotá continues to meet with civil society groups to discuss issues such as this and regularly raises these concerns with the Government of Colombia.
64. The UK is currently supporting projects aimed at capacity building for the prosecution service and the ombudsman's office, which is contributing to justice and victims' rights elements of the Justice and Peace Law.

We conclude that the recent Presidential election in the Democratic Republic of Congo presents an important opportunity to move on from the dreadful human rights abuses of recent years. We recommend that the Government use its position on the UN Security Council to ensure that the international peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo is maintained at its current strength until the security situation has stabilised. (Paragraph 126)

65. The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion that last year's elections marked a historic moment for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Congolese people. The peaceful conduct and significant turnout illustrated the Congolese people's shared desire for peace and stability. But the human rights situation remains poor, particularly in eastern DRC. Widespread abuse, including sexual violence, continues. Government soldiers and militia groups continue to prey on civilians with impunity.
66. The UK and international partners frequently remind the Congolese authorities of the need to protect civilians from abuses and to respect freedom of expression. Improvement of the human rights situation and respect for international human rights obligations must be top priorities for the newly elected government. The EU's work on reform of the army and its pay structure should also help increase the discipline of Congolese soldiers.
67. We were shocked by the violence which occurred in March 2007 in Kinshasa, in which many innocent civilians were killed. Whatever the provocation, the use of heavy weapons in a major city densely populated with defenceless civilians is totally unjustified. The Foreign Secretary issued a statement condemning the violence and urging the two sides to return to peaceful and democratic dialogue. We expect the Congolese authorities and the international peacekeeping mission (MONUC) to investigate these events fully.
68. The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation that the UK should support MONUC's continued presence in the DRC. MONUC has performed a vital role in helping to keep the peace process on track. The UK continues to encourage MONUC to take a robust stance against militia groups that threaten the civilian population and commit human rights abuses. We want MONUC to maintain current troop strengths in the immediate future. Eventual drawdown should take place against specific benchmarks and as the security situation on the ground allows.

We conclude there is a danger that international preoccupation with Iran's nuclear programme could overshadow concerns over the deteriorating human rights situation there. We recommend that the Government work with its international partners to maintain awareness of human rights abuses in Iran. (Paragraph 134)

69. The Government is grateful for the Committee's conclusion that concerns over the deteriorating human rights situation in Iran could be overshadowed by international preoccupation with Iran's nuclear programme. The Government is acutely aware of this risk and remains committed to a broad policy approach towards Iran, designed to address the full range of international concerns including Iran's role in the region and support for terrorism in addition to human rights and nuclear proliferation. We want a long-term relationship with Iran based on co-operation, but this relationship can only progress if Iran takes action to address all our main areas of concern including respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We take every opportunity to raise these concerns with the Iranian authorities.
70. It remains the long-standing policy of the UK Government, and the EU, to support reform in Iran and to stand up for the international human rights standards to which many Iranians aspire. We are deeply concerned that the human rights situation in Iran continues to worsen. Overall use of the death penalty is increasing in Iran, against a world-wide decline, and juvenile offenders still receive death sentences. Restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly are growing – evident through the closure of reformist newspapers and websites and the recent arrests of protesters, exercising their right to peacefully express their opinions.
71. The Government works closely with international partners, including the EU and UN, to maintain awareness of human rights abuses in Iran. With EU partners, we raise our concerns about human rights regularly with the Iranian authorities, and continue to support debate and action in United Nations fora. All EU countries co-sponsored a resolution on human rights in Iran, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2006. We also maintain close contacts with international human rights organisations which monitor and highlight Iranian human rights abuses.
72. The Government welcomes the Committee's recommendation that we should continue this work. The Government will continue to work closely with international partners both to highlight publicly these recurring human rights violations and to put pressure on the Government of Iran to take positive steps to address them. The Committee's recommendation will help us in our endeavours.
73. The Committee's Report also referred to the detention of 15 British sailors and marines in Iran in March–April 2007. The Government is concerned by reports about the treatment of the Royal Navy personnel during their illegal detention in Iran. This issue will be considered as part of the investigations that were announced by the Secretary of State for Defence on 16 April.

We welcome the Government's undertaking to provide a comprehensive account of the war in Lebanon in the Annual Human Rights Report 2007, and recommend that this should include details of the casualties on both sides suffered both during the war, and, as a result of the accidental detonation of unexploded munitions, subsequently. (Paragraph 141)

74. The Government accepts the Committee's recommendation that the Annual Human Rights Report 2007 should include comprehensive coverage of the conflict in Lebanon in 2006. The Foreign Secretary has already publicly said that this year's report would cover the conflict more fully. This will include casualty figures for both sides and an assessment of the effects of unexploded munitions.
75. During the conflict we made clear our deep concern at the deaths of civilians, and at the destruction of civilian infrastructure. We urged Israel to act in proportionate and measured ways, so as to minimise civilian death and suffering. We have regularly called on Israel to uphold all its obligations under international law, including its obligation to respect the principle of proportionality. We condemned Hizbollah's firing of rockets at civilian population areas.
76. Since the conflict we have made clear on several occasions our concern about levels of unexploded ordnance and cluster munitions in south Lebanon. The UN Mine Action Coordination Centre (UNMACC) estimates there are around one million unexploded cluster bomblets in Southern Lebanon. These pose a continuing threat to civilians. UNMACC has already cleared 50,000 unexploded cluster bombs. It will take an estimated 12–15 months to clear those remaining. The UK has pledged £2.7 million to help with the clean-up.

We conclude that, although the major responsibility must lie with Hamas' refusal to meet the Quartet's demands, the Western and Israeli financial boycott of the Palestinian Authority has also contributed to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian Territories. (Paragraph 150)

77. The Government agrees that the burden of responsibility for the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories lies with Hamas and its failure to accept the three Quartet principles (a commitment to non-violence; recognition of Israel; and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Roadmap). The Government accepts that direct budgetary support, with appropriate fiduciary controls, is the most suitable method of channelling money to the Palestinians and is committed to resuming direct budgetary support as soon as it is practically and politically possible.
78. The Government, together with our European partners, has worked tirelessly and creatively to ensure that the Palestinian people do not pay the price of Hamas' failure. This is why the European Commission established the Temporary International Mechanism, as mandated by the Quartet and based largely on a UK proposal. This pays allowances to all public sector workers (non-security) and to the most vulnerable Palestinians such as pensioners. The Government agrees that Israel's withholding of Palestinian customs revenue has had a significant detrimental impact on the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Government, both within the EU and bilaterally, continues to call on Israel to release these funds.

We conclude that, despite welcome improvements in women's rights and legal reforms, the serious nature of human rights abuses in Pakistan and the importance of establishing a culture of human rights in the country mean that Pakistan warrants inclusion as a country of concern in the Annual Human Rights Report 2007. (Paragraph 154)

79. The Government agrees with the Committee that there have been some important improvements in women's rights in the past year and welcomes President Musharraf's commitment to improve these still further. The Government shares the Committee's view of the importance of developing the culture of human rights in Pakistan.

We plan to carry out an inquiry into aspects of the United Kingdom's and the EU's relations with Russia later this year, and will ensure that the human rights dimension is covered as part of that work. (Paragraph 161)

80. We welcome the Committee's intention to carry out an inquiry into aspects of the United Kingdom's and the EU's relations with Russia, including the human rights dimension. We set out our position on these issues in our Memorandum to the Committee's 'Russia: Global Security' inquiry, submitted in May 2007. We welcome further dialogue with the Committee on these issues.

We recommend that the Government use its close relationship with Saudi Arabia, including through the "Two Kingdoms Dialogue," to set measurable and time-limited targets for specific human rights objectives, in particular in the areas of women's rights, the use of torture and the application of the death penalty. (Paragraph 164)

81. The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation that we should continue to use our close relationship with Saudi Arabia and work with the EU to improve the human rights situation, through the provision of training, support and assistance.

82. Whilst the pace of reform may seem slow, as noted in the Annual Human Rights Report, recent improvements include:

- the first official visit by Human Rights Watch in November 2006;
- women's rights openly discussed during the Gulf Businesswomen's Forum and in the National Dialogue Forums from 3–5 April 2007 in which women participated; and
- the Saudi Arabian government starting to issue individual identification cards to every female citizen, terminating the current practice of women carrying family cards listing only their names. Female citizens who have valid passports can obtain identification cards without needing verification from a male guardian. During the year the government continued to issue national identification cards to women, despite a national campaign against the practice by some religious conservatives.

83. However, the Government does not agree with the Committee's recommendation that measurable and time-limited targets should be set. The Government believes that attempting to set such targeted objectives would not help the UK to continue to play a helpful role in the reform process in Saudi Arabia. Due to the sensitive nature of reform there, we believe that publicly announcing targets of what we wish to achieve could be counterproductive and undermine the very reform process.

We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government comment on the current human rights situation in Somalia, including the impact on civilians of the recent US air-strikes against terrorist targets. (Paragraph 168)

84. The Transitional Federal Government is the internationally recognised government of Somalia. But it has limited capacity in many parts of the country. This does not mean that Somalia is “off the radar,” as was stated in the Committee’s report. It remains a major cause of concern in UK foreign policy.
85. The UK has taken a lead in coordinating the international response to the opportunities and risks arising from the Ethiopian intervention last December. For example, we sponsored the UN Security Council resolution 1744 of 20 February which authorised the deployment of an African Union Stabilization Mission for Somalia and have been among the first to commit funds to support the Mission and to develop African Union capacity. Furthermore, we were founding members of the International Contact Group on Somalia. Within the EU and in other fora we have been vocal in stressing the need for an effective response, unhindered humanitarian access and an end to violence on both sides.
86. While the reconciliation process must be Somali-owned, we strongly believe that the Transitional Federal Government must become more inclusive and reach out to all clans and all parties in Somalia that renounce violence, and we have repeatedly stressed this to them. Lord Triesman did so in person when he met President Yusuf in London on 22 February 2007.
87. The humanitarian situation is of particular concern to us. We have repeatedly stressed to the Ethiopian Government that they should use only appropriate force and that their forces should leave the country as soon as is practical. They have told us that they intend to do so and that they have reduced force numbers by more than half since late February. According to UN agencies, humanitarian conditions in the refugee camps are difficult, with ongoing high levels of child malnutrition. We recognise the lengths to which the Kenyan authorities have gone in offering shelter to the 174,000 Somalis currently believed to be in camps, and they have legitimate security concerns about the influx of large numbers of Somalis. However, we remain concerned that, since the beginning of the year, they have denied entry to the camps to some Somalis genuinely seeking to flee from conflict. We have made clear to the Kenyan Government the importance that we attach to humanitarian convoys being allowed to cross the border.
88. We agree that many members of the former Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) were by no means radicals and that the UIC had brought elements of security to Mogadishu and some parts of central Somalia. However, we do not believe that they had succeeded in bringing general stability to large parts of the country. Furthermore, we too were very concerned about imposition of unpopular and unjust policies by the UIC (e.g. restriction of freedom of expression, imposition of Sharia law) and by the increasing radicalisation of some parts of the organisation that led to the Ethiopian intervention and the resulting disbanding of the UIC.
89. We are aware that the US conducted air-strikes in January 2007 against specified Al-Qaeda linked targets. However, we are not able to verify the claims of civilian deaths and so cannot comment other than that the US denies this.

We recommend that the Government continue to use all available forums to apply pressure on the Sudanese regime and its international allies to halt the atrocities in Darfur. We further recommend that the Government seek to ensure that the mandate of any UN force deployed in Darfur is not so watered down as a result of compromises with Sudan's authorities as to render it ineffective. (Paragraph 173)

90. The Government welcomes the Committee's recommendations. We are committed to a peaceful and prosperous Sudan. We will continue to play a leading role in international efforts to work towards a peaceful future for Darfur. We are engaging at the very highest level to press all sides to end the conflict and to ensure those responsible for atrocities are brought to justice, including full support for the International Criminal Court. We are committing considerable resources to help to alleviate the immediate humanitarian crisis and will continue to push for full humanitarian access for Non-Governmental Organisations operating in Darfur. We are the second largest bilateral humanitarian donor, having contributed over £190 million in humanitarian assistance to Sudan since April 2004.
91. The Foreign Secretary made clear when she chaired a meeting of the Security Council on Darfur on 16 April 2007 that the international community needed to continue to put pressure on the Government of Sudan and Darfuri rebels to cease all violence in Darfur. We have regular discussions with partners to take this forward. We are now pursuing further targeted UN sanctions against individuals on any side who violate the ceasefire, impede the peace process or commit human rights violations. We are working to extend the UN arms embargo on Darfur to the whole of Sudan.
92. The peacekeeping force for Darfur will be an African Union–United Nations hybrid operation. We are pressing the AU and UN to agree quickly the full details of this joint force. It must then be agreed by the Sudanese Government and endorsed by the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council. We are pressing the AU and UN to ensure that the force is effective and can protect Darfur's citizens; there must be no compromise on sufficient troop numbers, strength of mandate, a robust command and control structure and sustainable funding through the UN. We are also working with partners to ensure that the force will be funded and deployed as soon as possible. In the meantime, the UK is continuing to support the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS). As one of its leading contributors, we have committed over £65 million since its inception. We are lobbying other EU member states and the wider international community to provide further funding to support AMIS's operations until the hybrid force can take over.

We recommend that the Government include more information on recent developments in the human rights situation in Thailand in the Annual Human Rights Report 2007. (Paragraph 175)

93. The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation and will supply information in the 2007 edition of the Human Rights Annual Report.

We recommend that if the Uzbek authorities fail to provide for an independent investigation into the Andizhan massacre or fail to make significant improvements in their respect for human rights, the Government should press for the EU to impose tougher sanctions against Uzbekistan. (Paragraph 179)

94. The Government shares the Committee's concern about Uzbekistan. EU sanctions are imposed by the consensus of all EU member states. We will continue to argue that the measures should reflect the response of the Uzbek Government to the EU's concerns about Andizhan and concrete progress on human rights in Uzbekistan.
95. The EU believes in critical engagement and keeping open channels of dialogue. The UK supports this stance. Therefore we will continue to argue that the EU must maintain sanctions, while working with the Uzbeks to improve the human rights situation in the country through the Human Rights Dialogue under the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement.
96. Our Ambassador Iain Kelly and his team in Tashkent, working closely with EU and NATO colleagues, will continue to maintain pressure on the Uzbek authorities in calling for democratic reform. They have been pursuing our agenda with the Uzbeks in increasingly difficult circumstances and will continue to do so.

We conclude that the appalling human rights situation in Zimbabwe has deteriorated over the past year. We recommend that the Government continue strongly to urge South Africa to apply greater pressure on the Mugabe regime. We further recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government set out what progress has been made on the issue of Zimbabwe at the UN Security Council. (Paragraph 187)

97. The Government shares the Committee's conclusions on the deteriorating human rights situation in Zimbabwe. We will indeed continue to urge South Africa and surrounding states to apply greater pressure on the Mugabe regime. The Committee will be aware of efforts made by the Government to raise Zimbabwe and Mugabe's devastating misgovernment with the wider international community. Much of that effort has been directed at African leaders, particularly those within the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). As Zimbabwe's southern neighbour and the country most affected by the increasing outflow of economic migrants, South Africa is a key interlocutor. We will be following closely President Mbeki's progress as SADC mediator to encourage dialogue between the parties in Zimbabwe with a view to ensuring free and fair elections in March 2008.
98. The UK, with support from other partners, has ensured that Zimbabwe's misgovernment has been raised in both the UN Security Council and the UN Human Rights Council. At our request, the Office of the Co-ordinator for Humanitarian Affairs briefed the Security Council in New York on the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe. The UK and the European Union, with the support of 50 members of the Human Rights Council, made statements at the Human Rights Council expressing our deep concern at events in Zimbabwe. We urged the Government of Zimbabwe to allow its people to express their political views without harassment, intimidation or violence and to repeal repressive legislation that curtails the freedom of the media, expression and association. In addition, we urged the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression and the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture to visit Zimbabwe and report back to the Human Rights Council. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has committed herself to monitoring the judicial process against Mr Tsvangirai. Ministers have made clear to the Zimbabwe Ambassador in person our concern at violence against human rights defenders and trade union members.

99. The EU has renewed and extended the targeted measures that impose visa restrictions and an asset freeze on 130 individuals and a ban on arms sales to Zimbabwe. The EU visa ban list will shortly be extended to include the names of two prominent police officers responsible for human rights abuses in Zimbabwe. With support from our partners, we have ensured that Zimbabwe's voting rights have not been restored at the International Monetary Fund in the absence of economic and fiscal policy reform. We continue to provide assistance to human rights defenders and to provide humanitarian assistance to the ordinary people of Zimbabwe (£143 million over the last five years).

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