

PART C: Conclusions and Recommendations

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The three Witness Seminars resulted in the preparation of a series of recommendations which were forwarded to the prime minister, Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) with respect to WS1; to DFID and the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs with respect to WS2; and to the FCO and the Ministry of Defence, with respect to WS3. These recommendations are reproduced below.

C.1 Witness Seminar 1: Development Cooperation

The conclusions reached in WS1 are as follows:

At country level, the UN and its agencies have often had considerable impact. Leadership by UK professionals has often been an important ingredient of this success.

The Millennium Development Goals have served as an important focus for UN development activities, in practical achievements and in raising the public profile and popular awareness of the UN's work. The Sustainable Development Goals – to which you² contributed through the high-level panel – will help carry these achievements forward.

But the UN has reached a critical juncture, with weak leadership and an increasingly poor image internationally. The UK needs to press for it to be strengthened.

We identified areas for priority UK attention and action:

1. *The UN System needs a stronger Secretary-General.* The next appointment, due in 2016, is a major opportunity for states to select a highly competent individual with true international stature, vested with adequate authority and freedom to act. We believe that this will require a better appointment process, and limiting the appointment to a single, longer term. We are encouraged by the steps that the UK has already taken in support of this, and by the widespread support for the 1 for 7 Billion campaign, which United Nations Association (UNA)-UK helped to found and which has a grass-roots base of 45 million people worldwide. We ask you, prime minister, Mr Cameron, to use your personal influence to support the call for a fair, open and inclusive process of selection, and for a single, longer term.
2. *The UN System needs stronger leadership at all levels.* 80 per cent of those entering the UN at the level of Assistant Secretary-General and above are political appointees with no previous experience of the UN and often with inadequate qualifications for the posts they hold. A similar situation often exists at other levels of the UN. The UK could do much to improve this situation, for example by supporting clearer criteria for appointments and more professional induction and training schemes at all levels, in all of which the UK has expertise and professional experience to contribute. This also applies to the strengthening of the Resident Coordinator system at country level and coordination processes relating to 'Delivering as One', the enhancement of national ownership, and the promotion of human rights.
3. *The UN System needs structural reinforcement.* One way of achieving this would be increasing the share of UK aid allocated as core (un-earmarked) funding for the UN. We are delighted that the UK has led the way by becoming the first G8 country to meet the 0.7 per cent target. The UK is now the largest contributor to multilateral aid.

4. *DFID studies have shown that multilateral aid, carefully administered, produces high value for money.* Yet a relatively small share of UK multilateral funding goes to the UN's funds and specialized agencies (under 10 per cent), with most going to the European Union, and the share to the UN has fallen since 2011. A larger share going to the UN programmes, especially as core support, would increase the net economic and social impact of UK aid, as well as provide more leverage for the UK on the Boards of the organisations concerned.
5. *The UK's influence on the work of the UN can be greatly strengthened from within by expanding opportunities for UK citizens to work throughout the UN System.* The Conservative manifesto pledges to triple the size of the International Citizen Service with opportunities to volunteer abroad. We applaud this ambition and hope that UN Volunteer opportunities will be publicised through this initiative.

C.2 Witness Seminar 2: Humanitarian Action

While the seminar did not adopt formal recommendations, the seminar's Chair, Adam Roberts, in his concluding remarks, identified six issues arising from the discussions that participants agreed should be considered ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS). They can be summarised as follows:

1. *The need for government consent and cooperation:* Almost all humanitarian activities require consent and assistance from governments, who may perceive humanitarian actors as a threat – to their basic competence and to their legitimacy. While recognising that government actions can contribute to the emergence of a humanitarian crisis or hinder its amelioration, humanitarian actors should consider adopting 'respect' as their default position. This should not preclude criticism when necessary, but may provide a better starting point when seeking to establish working relations with governments.
2. *Respect for the local culture, economy and language:* The legitimacy of a humanitarian operation depends not only on interactions at the state level but also on how much it respects local culture and capacity. This is at least as important as legitimacy from 'on high' based on UN credentials. The importance of speaking local languages was emphasised throughout the seminar but is not reflected adequately in the conclusions of *Restoring Humanity*, the WHS synthesis report.
3. *Clarity on 'protection' of civilians:* Protection of civilians is multifaceted and difficult. The word 'protection' is too often used imprecisely and therefore confusingly. The UN needs to avoid raising false expectations and using vague and imprecise language that inhibits good decision-making. The WHS should discuss the complex relationship between humanitarian action and the protection of civilians in armed conflict. At present, neither the Responsibility to Protect nor the Human Rights up Front initiative are referred to in the preparatory documents for the WHS.
4. *Effective coordination of humanitarian activities:* Good coordination of humanitarian assistance requires effective collaboration between local, national and international actors. This means designing coordination systems that promote this kind of collaboration as well as providing leeway for actors on the ground to build the partnerships they need. The seminar presentations gave a convincing picture of how, whether or not there is improved coordination machinery at the top, a huge amount depends on practical collaboration and personal chemistry. This implies also a need to ensure quality appointments to key positions.
5. *Improved management of whistle-blowing:* A particular problem within the UN System is the perception that staff members are reluctant to report failures, abuses or corruption because they fear that their reports may be ignored or that they will face retribution. Documents for the WHS make welcome references to accountability and transparency but unfortunately no mention of whistle-blowing.

6. *Financial stability and predictability*: Financing of humanitarian action is too precarious. The WHS needs to identify a range of new solutions. This could include more flexibility in the allocation of bilateral assistance; for example, the use of development aid for emergency relief, including in countries not classified as 'developing'.

C.3 Witness Seminar 3: Peace and Security

The UK at the Security Council

1. Continue to support improvements to Council working methods that increase transparency, accountability and effectiveness;
2. Continue to work towards strengthening the Council's capacity to act preventively, including by pushing for briefings from the secretariat and for an action-orientated Council culture;
3. Call out states that are reverting to outdated conceptions of sovereignty or that disregard the protection of human rights and the authority of the Council, and engage them in open debate;
4. Support the closer integration of the work of the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Political Affairs (DPA);
5. Consider how to help strengthen the capacity of elected Security Council members to work effectively on the Council.

The British government

1. Reconsider its investment in diplomacy and the FCO;
2. Outline a strategy for the UN and its place in British interests;
3. Improve knowledge and understanding across Whitehall of the UN, its constraints and its importance to British national interests;
4. Maintain the political independence of appointees to the Secretariat and ensure that such positions are recruited on merit;
5. Continue to strengthen its engagement with UN peace operations, including its work on the Council and its contributions of civilian, military and police personnel.

British parliamentarians

1. Hold the government to account on its commitment to the FCO, demonstrating support for stronger investment in the UK's diplomatic capacity;
2. Scrutinise the government's approach to the UN and call for a comprehensive strategy that establishes the place of the UN in UK national interests;
3. Insist on regular briefings about the UK's work on the Security Council, particularly with regards to improving working methods and strengthening its preventive capacities.

Notes

¹ The opinions expressed here represent the views of the author and participants in the Witness Seminars, and not necessarily those of the IDS, the UNA or BAFUNCS.

² Here, 'you' refers to the UK government. In July 2012, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the 27 members of a high-level panel to advise on the global development framework beyond 2015, the target date for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The panel was co-chaired by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, and Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom, and it included leaders from civil society, the private sector and government. The panel was part of the Secretary-General's post-2015 initiative mandated by the 2010 MDG Summit (excerpt from www.un.org/sg/management/hlppost2015.shtml).