



Ninth Report
from the
Foreign Affairs Committee
Session 2007-08

Annual Report on Human Rights 2007

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
September 2008*



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NINTH REPORT FROM THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SESSION 2007-08

ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS 2007

RESPONSE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

1. The Government welcomes the Committee's scrutiny of its work to promote human rights around the world. We welcome the constructive relationship that exists between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Committee.
2. This Command Paper sets out the Government's response to the Committee's 20 July 2008 Report into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's 2007 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 (HC533).
 1. **We conclude that the new allocation of Ministerial responsibilities within the FCO is to be welcomed and that it will allow the Government to pursue its human rights agenda more effectively. We further conclude that the Human Rights Annual Report 2007 is an improvement on its predecessors in its accessibility. (Paragraph 8)**
 3. The Government welcomes the Committee's conclusion and is grateful for its positive assessment of our 2007 Annual Report on Human Rights. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will begin planning for its 2008 report in the autumn and will again seek the Committee's views, as well as those of other key stakeholders.
 4. We expect to publish the 11th edition of Annual Report on Human Rights in the first quarter of 2009, covering the calendar year 2008.
 2. **We recommend that the Government should ensure that the key issues of women's rights, children's rights and the promotion of democracy are given greater prominence in next year's edition of the FCO report. We further recommend that the report should set out clearly how these three issues have been factored in to the Government's overall strategy towards individual countries of concern. We also recommend that it should bring out the important role of free trade unions and a free media in the promotion of democracy. (Paragraph 12)**

5. The Government is grateful to the Committee for its conclusion. The promotion of all human rights – including women’s rights – and good governance are, and will remain, a vital part of this Government’s international agenda. Work on promotion of women’s rights is mainstreamed throughout the FCO and we believe that all human rights, including women and children’s, are essential to achieving all the new policy goals. We will seek to better explain how these issues have been factored into the Government’s overall strategy, including towards individual countries of concern, in the 2008 Annual Human Rights Report.
6. We agree with the recommendation to bring out the important role of free trade unions and free media in the 2008 Annual Human Rights Report.
3. **We conclude that the Government has demonstrated commendable commitment to the Human Rights Council. We welcome its decision to stand for re-election, and its success in achieving this. We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government should set out its priorities for strengthening the work of the Council. (Paragraph 19)**
7. The Government welcomes the Committee’s positive comments on our commitment to the Human Rights Council. The Government intends to continue to play a full and active role in the Council. We stood for re-election because we believe that the Council is an important body, which needs the support of UN members if it is to meet its responsibility to “promote universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms”. We were pleased that we were successfully re-elected for an additional three years. During this period we will work hard to support, encourage and, where relevant, drive initiatives that help the Council to deliver its mandate.
8. Our overall priority during the next three years is to see the Council take action aimed at creating genuine improvements in human rights. We will argue in favour of the Council taking a pro-active, progressive approach to human rights. We will continue to support country specific action, despite a number of countries seeking to downgrade the Council’s ability to do such work. Among the many thematic human rights issues on which we engage, we will pay close attention to the work the Council does on freedom of expression and freedom of religion.
9. We will continue to defend the independence of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights against those who wish to see the Council have more control and use this control to silence criticism of human rights violations.
10. We will look to use the Council to advance the Government’s international human rights priorities, including abolition of the death penalty and the fight against torture. We will continue to consult widely with Non-Governmental Organisations to ensure that their views enrich policy-making and that we seize the opportunities to work together to achieve shared goals. We will also continue to look for opportunities to work with countries outside the Western European group, either as part of the EU or nationally, on issues of mutual importance.

11. The new Universal Periodic Review mechanism, which began early in 2008, will be a particularly important priority for the Government. We believe that the United Kingdom set a good example for others in the way we approached our review in April. We are engaged with a range of other countries that will be reviewed to share our experience. Many UN members are concerned that the Universal Periodic Review will be used to “name and shame” them, and are likely to be defensive in response. Our aim is to encourage all countries to engage constructively with the review. We will encourage them to consult widely at the national level before compiling their reports; to receive positively recommendations for improvement; and to be willing to implement such changes domestically.
12. If the majority of states approach the Universal Periodic Review in this way, we believe this will make a significant contribution to the success of the Human Rights Council as a whole. The Government will continue to contribute to each country review and ensure that both human rights achievements and challenges are reflected, along with constructive recommendations for improvement.
13. The Human Rights Council faces a significant number of challenges. Nonetheless, it is uniquely placed to promote global improvements in human rights. The Government is committed to helping it to do so.
4. **We conclude that the Government has played a leading role in building support for an Arms Trade Treaty. We recommend that the Government should continue its efforts with vigour and determination, in particular by aiming to convince sceptical states that the treaty will be most effective if it includes all conventional arms. (Paragraph 23)**
14. We welcome the continuing interest and support from the Committee in taking forward our campaign towards an Arms Trade Treaty. The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have reiterated that negotiating a robust Arms Trade Treaty remains a priority for the Government. We maintain a programme of close engagement with a broad range of stakeholders, including industry and civil society as well as internationally with countries that support, and those that are sceptical about, an Arms Trade Treaty.
15. The Government has participated in the three UN Group of Government Experts meetings this year, where all 28 countries chosen by the UN (including the US, Russia, China, Pakistan, India and Egypt, as well as a number of supportive countries) held discussions on the scope, parameters and feasibility of a treaty. The UK will not support the conclusion of a weak Arms Trade Treaty. We will continue to engage with supporters and sceptics to obtain agreement for a treaty whose scope is as wide as possible.

5. **We conclude that the Government's eventual support for the prohibition of all current cluster munitions is very welcome. We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government should set out its strategy for obtaining the support of the US Government and other non-signatories to a ban on cluster munitions, and the implications of the Convention for future military co-operation with such states. (Paragraph 30)**
16. The Government is grateful to the Committee for its conclusion. On 28 May, the Prime Minister announced the Government's support for a ban on cluster munitions, including UK cluster munitions currently in service. This confirmed the Government's commitment to address the humanitarian concerns that cluster munitions raise, and helped to ensure the successful conclusion of the Oslo Process in Dublin earlier this year. The Government is delighted at the outcome of the Dublin Diplomatic conference and proud of the role the United Kingdom played in bringing about the new Convention on cluster munitions that was adopted by over 100 countries in Dublin on 30 May 2008. The Government believes the new Convention is strong and will help to make the world a safer place. The Government plans to sign the Convention when it opens for signature on 3 December in Oslo, and we are studying the text to establish what legislation is needed before we can proceed with ratification.
17. The Prime Minister wants to see the widest possible adherence to the norms of the Convention. The Government is leading by example by taking significant steps towards implementing its norms prior to ratification. The armed forces have withdrawn from service their remaining cluster munitions, the M85 and CRV-7 Multi Purpose Sub Munition, and have started the disposal process.
18. As the Prime Minister said to the house on 4 June it is the Government's ambition to have a global treaty on cluster munitions. With this aim in mind, the Government will work with our international partners to promote the widest possible support for the future convention. Universalisation is a long-term aim. The major users and producers, including the United States, have shown no interest in joining the Convention in the near future, but they are actively engaged in the ongoing process within the Certain Conventional Weapons Convention. Our immediate effort with these countries is therefore focused on securing a credible Protocol on cluster munitions within the Certain Conventional Weapons Convention that will deliver a strong humanitarian result. The Government welcomes the announcement in July of changes to United States' policy on cluster munitions as a positive step towards this shared goal.
19. It is the Government's view that Article 21 of the new Convention ensures that the UK will be able to fully participate in Chapter VII, NATO, EU and other coalition operations with partners not party to the Convention. The Government is pleased that participants in the Oslo Process recognised the necessity of such a provision and the Government believes that the article contains sufficient safeguards to ensure that states parties will abide by the Convention's spirit and norms.

6. **We conclude that the Government has made a good start to its work on corporate social responsibility. (Paragraph 35)**
20. The Government thanks the Committee for its conclusion. Following the development of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's new strategic framework, the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform now has lead Government responsibility for corporate social responsibility.
7. **We conclude that the progress made by the International Criminal Court is to be welcomed. However, international criminal law will only be effective in preventing human rights abuses if applied in a systematic and consistent way. We recommend that the Government should continue to urge the next President and Congress of the United States to accede to the Rome Statute of the ICC. We further recommend that the Government should seek to extend the ambit of the role of the ICC so that any individual who clearly and deliberately commits gross life-taking and life-threatening violations of human rights can be brought before it. (Paragraph 41)**
21. The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion that progress made by the International Criminal Court is to be welcomed. The Government shares the Committee's view that international criminal law will be most effective if applied in a systematic and consistent way. The Government works with EU partners towards achieving universality of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and looks forward to discussing this issue with the next US Administration.
22. The Government does not share the Committee's view that we should seek to extend the ambit of the International Criminal Court. The Government notes that the crimes over which the International Criminal Court has jurisdiction are defined in the Rome Statute. Many "gross life-taking and life-threatening violations of human rights" already fall within the existing broad scope of the definition of crimes against humanity, which includes murder, extermination, torture, slavery and rape when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population.
8. **We conclude that the Government has a moral and legal obligation to ensure that flights that enter UK airspace or land at UK airports are not part of the "rendition circuit", even if they do not have a detainee on board during the time they are in UK territory. We recommend that the Government should immediately raise questions about such flights with the US authorities in order to ascertain the full scale of the rendition problem, and inform the Committee of the replies it receives in its response to this Report. (Paragraph 47)**

23. The Foreign Secretary explained in his letter to the Chairman of 18 March that our purpose in submitting a list of flights to the US was to identify whether rendition of an individual had in fact occurred. The Government does not consider that a flight transiting UK territory or airspace on its way to or from a rendition operation constitutes rendition. Nor do we consider that permitting transit or refuelling of an aircraft without detainees on board without knowledge of what activities that aircraft had been or would be involved in, or indeed whether or not those activities were unlawful, to be unlawful in itself. There are more than two million flights through UK airspace annually. It would be unreasonable and impractical to check every aircraft transiting UK airspace on the basis that it may have been, at some point in the past, and without UK knowledge, involved in a possible unlawful operation. Instead an intelligence-led approach is and must be employed. If individuals are reasonably suspected of committing criminal offences, or if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that aircraft are being used for unlawful purposes, then action can be taken. The nature of that action would depend on the facts and circumstances of any case.
- 9. We conclude that the Foreign Secretary's view that water-boarding is an instrument of torture is to be welcomed. However, given the recent practice of water-boarding by the US, there are serious implications arising from the Foreign Secretary's stated position. We conclude that, given the clear differences in definition, the UK can no longer rely on US assurances that it does not use torture, and we recommend that the Government does not rely on such assurances in the future. We also recommend that the Government should immediately carry out an exhaustive analysis of current US interrogation techniques on the basis of such information as is publicly available or which can be supplied by the US. We further recommend that, once its analysis is completed, the Government should inform this Committee and Parliament as to its view on whether there are any other interrogation techniques that may be approved for use by the US Administration which it considers to constitute torture. (Paragraph 53)**
24. The Committee will be aware that the UK unreservedly condemns the use of torture as a matter of fundamental principle. The Government ensures that relevant UK CT co-operation with the US, as with any other partner, would be lawful by reference to our domestic law and applicable international law. We do not simply rely on general assurances a State might give on the use of torture. For example, the UK carefully evaluates any intelligence received from foreign sources, including the US, where it is clear it has been obtained from individuals in detention.

25. The US are fully aware of our views on waterboarding and have actively engaged in a dialogue on all aspects of counter-terrorism and human rights issues, including the handling of detainees. It should be noted that it was the US Government itself that made public its use of waterboarding and the fact that the technique was used in a small number of specific cases in the past. Continued close co-operation with the US is absolutely critical to our ability to counter the threat to the UK posed by global terrorism. We consider that our ongoing dialogue with the US on counter-terrorism and human rights issues to be the appropriate course.
26. The UK legislation criminalising torture (implementing the UN Convention Against Torture) defines it as any act which causes severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, which is intentionally inflicted on a person. But whilst in some cases it will be clear that a certain technique constitutes torture, in other cases it will not be possible to determine whether the use of a particular technique is torture without taking into consideration all the circumstances of the case. For this reason the Government judges that an analysis along the lines that the Committee suggests would not be meaningful.
- 10. We conclude that it is extremely important that the veracity of allegations that the Government has “outsourced” interrogation techniques involving the torture of British nationals by Pakistani authorities should be investigated. Irrespective of these allegations, we recommend that the FCO should immediately seek full consular access in all cases where it is aware of mono- or dual-national British citizens being detained by the Pakistani authorities, and in particular by the Inter-Services Intelligence agency. We conclude that it is not acceptable for the Government to use an individual’s dual nationality as an excuse to leave him or her vulnerable to the prospect of possible torture. (Paragraph 62)**
27. The Government absolutely denies the serious allegation that it has “outsourced” torture as a way of extracting information. We unreservedly condemn the use of torture and our clear policy is not to participate in, solicit, encourage, or condone the use of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment for any purpose.
28. The Government takes allegations of mistreatment very seriously. As the Foreign Secretary told the House on 17 July, “the Security Service has checked for any relevant information in light of the media allegations and informed [him] that there is nothing to suggest that it has supported torture in Pakistan or anywhere else”.
29. If there was a question of any person acting in an official capacity being engaged in an act of torture then this would be a matter for the police. If any individual believes that their Human Rights have been infringed as a result of actions carried out by, or on behalf of, any of the intelligence services then they should take their case to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal.

30. The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation that the FCO should seek consular access in all cases where it is aware of mono-national British citizens being detained by the Pakistani authorities. Indeed it is our policy to do so.
31. In line with consular policy, we would not normally offer consular assistance to dual nationals in their country of other nationality. However, we do make an exception to this rule if, having looked at the circumstances of the case, we consider that there is a special humanitarian reason to do so. Such circumstances might include cases involving minors, forced marriage, an offence which carries the death penalty or other concerns such as allegations of torture.
32. When we do seek access to a detained dual national in the country of their other nationality, that access, and any help we can provide, will depend on the agreement of the state of other nationality.
33. It should be noted that we may not be aware that a dual national is being held or that there may be allegations of torture, as the detaining authorities may not inform us of the detention, or to allow the person to contact our consular staff.
11. **We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government should explicitly state whether UK officials met any of the four dual nationals to discuss non-consular matters and should also state why non-consular access was granted to one UK national, but not consular access. We also recommend that the Government should further tell us whether it was aware of all six individuals at the time of their detention, and whether intelligence or evidence gained by the Pakistani authorities in its interrogation of any of these men led in whole, or in part, to further investigations or charges in the UK. We further recommend that the Government should describe its collaboration with the Inter-Services Intelligence agency, and its human rights concerns about this organisation, in its response to this Report. (Paragraph 63)**
34. The Government is currently aware of eight cases of British or dual British/Pakistani nationals having been detained on suspicion of terrorist offences in Pakistan since 2000 (and took steps to amend an earlier Parliamentary answer on this question as soon as its inaccuracy came to light). It is difficult to give precise numbers as we are not always given consular notification of the detention of dual British nationals in the country of their other nationality.
35. Consular officials were aware of six of the eight individuals at the time of their detention. Consular access was sought and given for both UK mono-nationals. In one case our request was initially denied, but subsequently access was given before deportation. Consular access was also sought, in two of the six dual national cases. In one of these cases access was not granted before the individual was released. The other individual remains in Pakistani custody and we continue to press for consular access.

36. The Government notes the Committee's recommendation but can neither confirm nor deny whether UK officials met any of these eight individuals to discuss non-consular matters.
37. The Government notes the Committee's interest in our collaboration with the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate. It is the Government's long standing policy not to comment on intelligence-related issues. This includes details of UK intelligence agency collaborations with foreign intelligence services. All intelligence received from foreign sources is carefully evaluated, particularly where it is clear it has been obtained from individuals in detention. Evidence obtained as a result of any acts of torture would not be admissible in criminal or civil proceedings in the UK.
38. The Government shares the Committee's concerns about allegations that the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) has mistreated detainees and we are aware of several NGO reports of human rights abuses perpetrated by Pakistan's intelligence and police authorities. We encourage the Government of Pakistan to meet its human rights obligations through bilateral contact and regular EU representations. We also ensure that our programme of support for building Pakistan's counter-terrorism capacity addresses the importance of compliance with internationally agreed human rights standards. We work closely with the Government of Pakistan to support its counter extremism efforts through development support, institutional capacity building work to improve governance and through increased investment in education. We are also engaged in projects to help build improved capacity for counter-terrorism, for example through legislative mechanisms and practical training on forensics, terrorist financing and crisis management.
39. We continue to press the Government of Pakistan to ratify the Convention against Torture (CAT) which Pakistan signed in April of this year. We hope the Government of Pakistan will make urgent progress by incorporating the obligations under CAT into domestic law.
12. **We conclude that, in the case of Saadi v. Italy, the Government clearly attempted to water down its anti-torture commitments. We also conclude that it is disturbing and surprising that such arguments were made in the name of the United Kingdom and we believe this gives cause for serious concern. (Paragraph 72)**
40. The Government, in its intervention in the European Court of Human Rights case of Saadi vs. Italy, did not attempt to water down its anti-torture commitments. The UK consistently and unreservedly condemns the use of torture. We work hard with our international partners to eradicate this abhorrent practice. The Government has made it clear that we would not deport an individual if we believed that there was a real risk of their being tortured on return.

41. The Government is committed to respecting and promoting human rights, not just because it is the right thing to do but also because it is one of the most effective ways to undermine terrorism. In the UK's interventions to the European Court in *Saadi vs. Italy* and two other cases (*Ramzy v the Netherlands* and *A v the Netherlands*), we were not arguing that any individual should be deported no matter what risk he or she might face on return. The UK argued that it should be possible to take account of the risk posed by an individual to the community as a whole as well as the possible risk to the individual on return when considering a deportation on the grounds of national security. The UK also argued that where an applicant presents a threat to national security, stronger evidence must be adduced to prove that the applicant would be at risk of ill-treatment in the receiving country. The Court rejected these arguments and we respect their judgment. We fully expect the Court to deal with the matter in the other existing cases, to the extent it needs to, consistently with its decision in *Saadi*. We are not currently planning to make any further interventions on this issue.
- 13. We conclude that the European Union can and must do more to help the United States in bringing about the overdue closure of the detention facilities at Guantánamo Bay. We welcome the Government's representations on behalf of the five British residents in Guantanamo Bay. Given its decision to intervene in their cases, we recommend that the Government should express particular concern over the prospective trial of Binyam Mohamed under the Military Commissions Act and lobby strongly against any use of the death penalty if he is found guilty. We recommend that the Government should continue to press for the return of Binyam Mohamed and Shaker Aamer to the UK. (Paragraph 77)**
42. The Government notes the Committee's conclusion on the role that the European Union could play in assisting the United States to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay. We will continue and where possible, ramp up, our engagement with EU Member States on this issue.
43. Our position on the death penalty is well known. However, our present understanding is that the Military Commissions Prosecutors at Guantanamo Bay have indicated that they will ask for a sentence of life imprisonment if Mr Mohamed is found guilty by a Military Commission. That said, it is far from clear that the jury would agree to such a sentence, as the recent *Hamdan* case illustrates.
44. The Government continues to press for the release of Mr Mohamed from Guantanamo Bay and return to the UK. In parallel to the current Judicial Review proceedings brought by Mr Mohamed's lawyers relating to information held by the Government which may assist him in a future Military Commission trial, we have also gone to considerable lengths to ensure he is able to access this information through the US legal system. The Government's position on the Military Commissions Act remains that we have outstanding concerns about a number of its aspects.

45. We are no longer in active negotiations for the return of Shaker Aamer to the UK although we continue to discuss his case with the US authorities. Our request for his release and return to the UK remains open should the US position change.
14. **We conclude that the Minister's commitment to introducing regulation for private security companies is to be welcomed. We further conclude that the delay in introducing regulation has been unacceptable. We are disappointed that there was no mention of legislation on private security companies in the Prime Minister's Draft Legislative Programme 2008-09, and we recommend that the Government should announce its intention to introduce the relevant legislation in the forthcoming Queen's Speech. We further recommend that such legislation should impose strict regulation on private security companies, and ensures that these companies can be prosecuted in British courts for serious human rights abuses committed abroad. (Paragraph 82)**
46. The Government thanks the Committee for its recommendations. The Green Paper of 2002 on Options for Regulation set out a number of issues surrounding the regulation of Private Military and Security Companies. The industry has since expanded considerably and the former Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, subsequently requested a further review on the options for regulation in late 2004.
47. The review was completed in 2005 and considered a number of ways forward including self-regulation on the basis of a code of conduct drawn up by government and the sector's trade association, legislation to establish controls on the exporting of private military and security services akin to those in the export of military and sensitive goods, and a government register of approved companies. We have also considered international regulation based on common international values and norms. However, the review and subsequent analysis also highlighted difficulties related to implementation or enforcement, with respect to each of the options. These issues have since been the subject of extensive Ministerial correspondence and official consultation.
48. The Government has undertaken to keep Parliament fully informed of its proposals in this area. As soon as Ministerial agreement about how to regulate the Private Military and Security Company industry has been reached, a statement will be made to Parliament.
49. As regards the Committee's recommendation that legislation should ensure that Private Military and Security Companies can be prosecuted in British courts for serious human rights abuses committed abroad, there is already legislation penalising grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions, as well as torture, genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. This applies to acts committed by United Kingdom nationals overseas abroad, ensuring that such persons can be prosecuted for these most heinous acts even if they take place overseas.

15. **We conclude that the overall human rights situation in Afghanistan is difficult and in some areas appears to be worse than at any point since the fall of the Taliban. The failure of transitional justice, backsliding on women's rights, and the deteriorating security situation are of particular concern. We recommend that the Government should devote greater attention to the peace, reconciliation and justice action plan in Afghanistan, and be more open about the failures of the Afghan authorities. We further recommend that next year's report should include a specific section on the action being taken by the British Government to stop poppy cultivation, on which the UK has lead responsibility in Afghanistan, and an analysis of how good governance is being undermined by the most prominent warlords in the country. (Paragraph 88)**
50. The Government shares the view that the human rights situation in Afghanistan is difficult. Many challenges remain but significant progress has been made, for example the establishment and successful operation of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.
51. Efforts regarding transitional justice have not had a decisive impact, but we do not agree they have failed. Transitional justice is an ongoing process that must be Afghan led. We have pressed the Afghans to summon the political will to place priority on this issue. We gave the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission £500,000 to support its Three-Year Action Plan for 2006-2008, which includes the implementation of the Peace, Reconciliation and Justice Action Plan. Our support helps enable the Commission to continue to collect and record evidence of past human rights abuses, raise awareness about transitional justice and lobby the Afghan government for action. In 2007, the Commission estimated that its own Transitional Justice Unit documented 86 mass graves related to past human rights abuses. Such information will be vital to any future progress on transitional justice.
52. The Government has always said that a military approach in Afghanistan should be supported by a policy of political outreach. We fully support President Karzai's efforts to reconcile disaffected Afghans into society's mainstream, providing they renounce violence and accept Afghanistan's Constitution.
53. Progress is still being made on women's rights. Nearly 2 million girls are now enrolled in school, compared to almost none in 2001. In addition, 27% of seats in the Lower House of the Afghan Parliament are now held by women.

54. Regarding the security situation, the Taleban have been prevented from returning to power and their control by intimidation and violent repression is being rejected; al-Qaeda terrorists are being hunted down. Expanding areas of control and relative security in Helmand and elsewhere are an indication of our military success against the insurgency. In these areas, development and better governance are happening – but at a necessarily slow rate, given the limitations on Afghan capacity. But as the violence has turned to more indiscriminate suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices there is a perception that at the national level the security situation is worsening and that progress will be more difficult.
55. Increasing numbers of Afghan National Army and police are being trained, enabling the Afghan security forces to play a growing role in providing security for their country. 2007 saw significant steps forward in the Rule of Law sector, with the establishment of the European Policing Mission, the commencement of a large, US-led district level police training programme, and the finalisation of the Afghan government's National Justice Sector Strategy and Programme as part of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.
56. But more needs to be done to ensure that work in this sector is properly coordinated by both the international community and the Afghans, and that policing reform and wider justice work is brought closer together. In 2008, the International Policing Coordination Board will develop a policing plan to define the role of the police in Afghanistan's security architecture, as well as the initiation of the World Bank-funded Justice Sector Reform Project. In summer 2008, the Afghan National Security Forces will formally take responsibility for Kabul's security.
57. All UK action on counter narcotics in Afghanistan is in accordance with international human rights legislation. We agree that the drugs trade undermines efforts to extend governance and we are taking a series of actions to address this. The next edition of the FCO's Annual Human Rights Report will include an assessment of governance issues, as good governance is key to ensuring the promotion and protection of human rights. While we envisage that this section will include aspects of the narcotics trade, recognising that the effects go beyond governance. The UK will continue to help the Afghan Government implement their National Drug Control Strategy and this year the UN have reported significant progress: poppy cultivation has decreased 19% – to below 2006 levels; and poppy free provinces have increased from 13 to 18. However, poppy cultivation is becoming concentrated in the south of Afghanistan. The UK is concentrating our support to tackle the narcotics trade – especially in Helmand, which accounts for 66% of cultivation – through assistance for interdiction, rule of law, eradication, alternative livelihoods and provincial and national governance. Despite the progress seen in 2008, the situation is fragile and we are working to sustain the success and further extend the authority of the Afghan government.

16. **We conclude that the human rights record of the Burmese junta, evidenced by its response to pro-democracy protests and the devastation of Cyclone Nargis, is reprehensible. We strongly support the Government's efforts to promote human rights in Burma, and we praise its generous donation for the victims of the storm. We recommend that the Government should put in place very strict measures to ensure that its aid cannot be misused by the regime, and inform us of these measures in its response to this Report. We further recommend that, in principle, the Government should not rule out invoking the "responsibility to protect" in situations such as Burma, but that this should be guided by a practical assessment of the situation on the ground, and the likely wider consequences of such intervention. (Paragraph 96)**
58. The Government fully agrees with the Committee that strict measures need to be taken to ensure that UK aid to Burma cannot be misused by the regime. UK relief for Cyclone Nargis is delivered through the UN, Red Cross and international and local non-governmental organisations. We make every effort to ensure that all UK aid – both for cyclone relief and for our main aid programme – is delivered in compliance with EU sanctions. Our assistance is monitored very closely by the British Embassy and DFID Office in Burma. Any reports of misuse or diversion of our aid are followed up thoroughly.
59. The Government agrees on the importance of the Responsibility to Protect in any situation where governments are unable or unwilling to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity. The Government shares the Committee's view that the international community's response in situations such as Burma should be guided by a practical assessment of the situation on the ground and of the likely wider consequences.
17. **We conclude that there continues to be little evidence that the Government's Human Rights Dialogue with China is achieving significant results. We conclude that, as at the time of our agreeing this Report, the Prime Minister is correct to attend the Olympic Games. However, the Olympics represent a unique opportunity to advance the cause of human rights in China. We conclude that there is mounting evidence that the Chinese authorities are taking repressive measures to prevent any of their citizens from expressing visible dissent in the run up to or during the Games. We recommend that the Government makes immediate public and very strong condemnation of this. We further recommend that the Government should be ready to discontinue the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue if substantial progress is not made in the coming year. (Paragraph 103)**

60. We have consistently raised our concerns with the Chinese authorities over restrictions on individuals legitimately exercising their rights, including the right to protest, and will continue to do so. We raised specific concerns expressed by NGOs about measures to curb visible dissent ahead of the Olympic Games. We firmly believe it is in China's own interest to permit free and peaceful expression of a wide range of views and opinions. During his visit to China for the Olympics, the Prime Minister raised human rights issues with President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao.
61. The Olympics are widely seen as a vital milestone in China's emergence as a country of global importance. We hope that China's experiences during the Games will reinforce the arguments for the ongoing process of reform in China. Constructive engagement with China, including dialogue on human rights, is the best way for the Government to promote this.
62. Working for improvements in China's human rights situation remains a priority for the Government. As the Committee is aware, the Government maintains a multi-layered strategic approach, which includes high level lobbying – with the EU and like-minded countries where appropriate – to encourage political progress, and project work to deliver concrete assistance on the ground. (In July the FCO Strategic Programme Fund programme board approved £560,000 of funding for new China human rights projects). The dialogue is a key element of this approach. We regularly review its effectiveness, including through stakeholder consultation, and, as the Committee is aware, we continue to introduce changes in the format to facilitate more in-depth exchanges. NGOs, and some individual prisoners, share our view that our lobbying on cases of concern contributes to better treatment and to early releases. In addition, we continue to see value in using the dialogue to expose senior Chinese officials to UK practice and expertise, and discuss in detail ways in which China can work towards compliance with international human rights standards. For these reasons, we do not agree with the Committee's recommendation that the Government should link continuing participation in the dialogue to progress in specific areas within a limited time-frame of one year.
- 18. We conclude that China's policies towards Tibet have fostered a culture of repression. We condemn the use of violence either by Tibetans or the Chinese Government during the recent disturbances. We welcome the British Government's calls for restraint and dialogue between the two parties. We recommend that the British Government should press the Chinese authorities to allow an independent and international investigation to take place in Tibet, and to impress on the Chinese Government that they should recognise that there is currently a significant window of opportunity to make progress in resolving the dispute over Tibet based on the demand by the Dalai Lama for "genuine autonomy", not independence. (Paragraph 112)**

63. The Government continues to follow developments in Tibet closely. Like the Committee, we have condemned all violence during the unrest earlier this year, but have emphasised the need for China to respect the right of individuals in Tibet to peaceful expression of their views. We have pressed the Chinese authorities to ensure that all those detained during the disturbances in March should be treated in accordance with international fair trial standards. We believe the Chinese government should lift restrictions on access to the region, which would aid an independent assessment of the situation. We continue to encourage China to issue an open invitation to all UN Special Rapporteurs to visit China, including the UN Special Reporter on Freedom of Religion or Belief. We continue to ask the Chinese government to disclose full information on the situation of those individuals still detained following the disturbances.
64. The Government has made clear to the Chinese at the most senior level our view that the Dalai Lama is not seeking independence for Tibet. We have drawn attention to his statements opposing violence and indicating a wish to work for meaningful autonomy. We firmly believe that the best way to achieve this, and to resolve the underlying political difficulties in Tibet, is through dialogue between the Chinese Government and the Dalai Lama. We continue to press for this. We are pleased that the two sides have restarted the process of dialogue and we hope that a further round of talks will be convened as soon as possible. It is important that these talks address the substantive issues involved and allow genuine progress to be made towards resolving them.
- 19. We conclude that the human rights situation in Colombia is serious and shows little sign of improvement. We further conclude that allegations of extra-judicial executions by the Colombian military, and the continued targeting of trade unionists, cannot be ignored. We therefore believe it is inappropriate for the Government to provide military aid to Colombia without any reference to human rights improvements. Noting recent moves by the US Congress to freeze some aid to Colombia on human rights grounds, we recommend that the Government should request the Colombian military to demonstrate measurable and verifiable human rights improvements in exchange for future assistance. We further recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government should set out a range of possible measures that could be used for this purpose. (Paragraph 117)**
65. The Government is grateful to the Committee for its findings on Colombia. We agree that the human rights situation in Colombia is serious. We assess that improvements have been made to the security and human rights situation in Colombia in recent years, as the UN has commented (2007 UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Report on Colombia). But deep problems remain. One of our main priorities is to provide Colombian civil society and the Colombian Government with tools to improve this difficult situation, alongside seeking to tackle the flow of drugs from Colombia to the UK.

66. Reports of extra-judicial executions committed by members of the Colombian Armed Forces continue. Abuses committed by State actors are completely unacceptable. Ministers have raised these concerns with the Colombian government at the highest levels. Partly with UK help, the Colombian Armed Forces are now determined to tackle this issue, and to ensure that any of their members committing such abuses are charged with and punished for their actions.
67. The ongoing plight of trade unionists is of great concern. There has been a worrying increase of killings in 2008. Ministers have publicly called on the Colombian government to do its utmost to ensure that the people striving for improved human rights in Colombia, including trade unionists and human rights defenders, are able to do their work safely and without fear. We welcome the Colombian government's programme of protection for trade unionists, and hope that its effectiveness is robust. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, working with the Trades Union Congress, organised a visit of Colombian trade unionists to the UK in March 2008. We are continuing to liaise with them and the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) to explore how the UK can continue to offer support to Colombian trade unionists.
68. The Committee's report refers to the UK Government "military aid" to Colombia. The term is inaccurate. We do not provide the Colombian Armed Forces with unconditional aid, funds or equipment. UK cooperation to the Colombian Armed Forces focuses on three areas:
- The fight against the drugs trade that does so much damage to societies in both Colombia and in the UK. The Government's counter-narcotics work is tightly focussed on helping the Colombians tackle drugs production and at the same time disrupt trafficking organizations and networks, often at the highest levels.
 - Providing advice and support for human rights training, the implementation of human rights and international humanitarian law in practice, and improved justice and respect for the rule of law within the military. We have already begun to see the benefits of this training, as shown by the recent publication of a new Human Rights doctrine by the Colombian Ministry of National Defence. This is intended to be used as a benchmark by the Armed Forces; and
 - Training Colombian staff involved in the removal of landmines in line with the Ottawa Treaty. This is essential work – Colombia has the largest number of landmine victims in the world, and our training is helping the Colombians to rid their territory of the terrible legacy of devices by illegal armed groups and narco-organisations.

69. Our work in these areas is closely monitored and is contributing to building institutional structures and capacity to tackle many of the major problems Colombia faces, including that of impunity. The withdrawal of this assistance would be counter-productive in each of these areas specifically, and in our wider efforts to encourage the Colombian government to ensure their officers consistently adhere to international humanitarian and human rights law.
70. The Government agrees with the Committee that it should continue to closely monitor the overall human rights situation in Colombia, and the effectiveness of our cooperation in Colombia, as elsewhere. We will include such an assessment in the FCO's Annual Human Rights Report of 2008. This assessment will include:
- Colombian Armed Forces commitment to embedding human rights training and adherence throughout its services;
 - Progress on landmine removal, and Colombian compliance with its Ottawa Convention commitments;
 - Colombian Government commitment to tackling illegal drug-trafficking;
 - The UN Office for High Commissioner for Human Rights report for 2008.
20. **We conclude that Iran's human rights record remains shocking and appears to be deteriorating. We welcome the Government's recognition that treating human rights in Iran as an issue of secondary concern would be counter-productive. We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government should set out where it believes progress can realistically be made in advancing human rights in Iran and the further action that the Government itself is taking to achieve such progress. (Paragraph 122)**
71. The Government shares the Committee's view that Iran's already poor human rights record appears to be deteriorating. Executions continue apace, often in the absence of the most basic minimum standards, the right to freedom of expression is routinely denied, and human rights activists face growing pressure. The Iranian government refuses to engage with the international community on human rights issues. In this context, the Government believes that the most significant impact we, and the wider international community, can have in advancing human rights in the country at the present time is by ensuring that international attention remains focussed on the human rights environment in Iran and by raising individual cases of concern. This serves to keep pressure on the Iranian government for its failure to adhere to the international human rights standards it has signed up to, and lends support to those in Iran who are bravely working hard for all Iranians to have access to their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

72. Iranian human rights defenders tell us that international attention does have an impact on the situation on the ground. In addition to offering them moral support by showing that their efforts and the difficult circumstances they are facing are not being ignored, it has also contributed to positive developments in individual cases such as the postponement of juvenile executions to allow time for family mediation, and the revocation of stoning sentences.
73. To this end, the Government, along with our EU partners and international human rights organisations, continues to monitor the human rights situation in Iran closely and to take a strong public line when blatant human rights abuses occur. We consistently raise our concerns in public statements and in private meetings with the Iranian government, and will continue to urge Iran to co-operate and engage with the international community to address the range of human rights concerns we have. The Government reiterates its commitment to a broad policy approach towards Iran within which human rights remains a key concern.
- 21. We conclude that despite improvements in security, the human rights situation in Iraq remains very difficult. We believe that the deteriorating human rights situation faced by women in many parts of Iraq is unacceptable, and we recommend that the Government should use all its leverage to press the Iraqi Government to ensure women are afforded security and the legal equality provided for in the Iraqi constitution. (Paragraph 128)**
74. The government shares the Committee's concern that women are not yet able to live their lives in full security and are not yet afforded the equality provided for in the Iraqi constitution. But we believe that progress is being made.
75. Owing to a quota system, twenty-five percent of the members of the Iraqi Parliament are women and they play an active role in parliamentary activity. They have established an informal cross-party alliance to pursue women's issues – the first cross-party movement of its kind in the Iraqi Council of Representatives. Although quota systems are never an ideal solution, we will encourage Iraqi authorities and parties to continue to take necessary measures to promote female representation in elected bodies in Iraq.
76. So-called 'honour killings', and other forms of violence against women, remain a major concern in Iraq. Societal and cultural factors make such violence a difficult issue to tackle. We believe however that the Iraqi authorities are increasingly committed to addressing it. In Basra, the area with which we are most familiar, violence against women has been much reduced this year. According to Iraqi Police Service records, in the last quarter of 2007, 26 women were murdered; in the first quarter of 2008, the equivalent figure was 10; and between 1 April and 15 July 4 women were murdered. We assess that key factors in this positive trend are the strong public commitment made in late 2007 by General Jalil, the then-head of the Iraqi Police Service in Basra, to tackling violence against women; and the wider improvements in security in Basra since April as a result of the Iraqi-led Operation Charge of the Knights.

77. We will continue to support Iraqi efforts to tackle ‘honour’ crimes and violence against women more generally through programmes to improve the capacity of the Iraqi Police Service and judiciary to investigate and prosecute such crimes, and to raise wider awareness of human rights and women’s rights in particular. The Government and the Prime Minister’s Special Envoy on Human Rights in Iraq, the Rt Hon Ann Clwyd MP, will continue to press senior members of the Iraqi Government on a wide range of human rights issues, including women’s rights.
- 22. We conclude that the Government and the international community must do much more to help Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries. We recommend that the Government should provide bilateral financial assistance to help Syria and Jordan cope with their refugee burden. We welcome the Government’s resettlement programme for some of its Iraqi employees, but we are concerned that former employees and their families perversely need to face the dangers involved in leaving Iraq to become refugees in neighbouring countries before being able to apply for the Gateway programme. We recommend that the Government should allow its eligible former employees to apply for relocation to the United Kingdom without first having to register as a refugee. (Paragraph 132)**
78. We share the Committee’s concerns over the plight of Iraqis displaced in neighbouring countries. The Government is supporting the delivery of emergency relief and protection efforts through contributions to international humanitarian agencies such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross.
79. The Committee recommended that the Government provides bilateral assistance to Jordan and Syria. We believe a co-ordinated international response with the Iraqis in the lead is the best approach. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees remains the UN agency with the largest programme and capacity to respond to the needs of externally displaced Iraqis. So far this year we have donated \$6 million to their Supplementary Appeal for these people.
80. We contributed \$5 million to the UN Consolidated Appeal for Iraq launched in February 2008. We also contribute indirectly to Jordan and Syria through the European Commission’s programme, which has focussed on strengthening the Syrian healthcare system in areas heavily populated by displaced Iraqis, and on increasing the capacity of the Jordanian education sector to accommodate those displaced from Iraq.
81. We welcome the Government of Iraq’s announcement of \$195 million in support of displaced Iraqis returning to Iraq, but we will continue to lobby the Government of Iraq to step up its assistance to the humanitarian effort.

82. Ultimately, improved security within Iraq is the key to stemming the displacement of Iraqis within both Iraq and the region, and in allowing those displaced to return to their homes. We remain committed to supporting the efforts of the Iraqi government and Iraqi Security Forces to improve security, and welcome recent significant progress in this respect.
83. The Government does not accept the Committee's recommendation that former locally-employed staff (under the terms of the assistance scheme, those employed before 8 August 2007) should be able to apply for resettlement direct from Iraq. The Gateway programme represents a well-established mechanism for resettling vulnerable individuals in the UK and for making sure that the appropriate level of support is in place for them once they are here. In addition, there are various practical obstacles to operating a direct resettlement programme for former staff in Iraq, many of whom have relocated since their employment with the British Government.
- 23. We agree with the Minister that some of Israel's actions against the Palestinians have been disproportionate and we conclude that Israeli policies towards the population of the Gaza Strip as a whole have been a form of collective punishment. We recommend that the Government should urge Israel in the strongest possible terms to desist from activities that violate international law. We further conclude that the Government is absolutely correct to condemn all forms of violence committed by Palestinians against the Israeli population. We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government should provide an assessment as to what policy options are available to prevent the indiscriminate firing of rockets into Israel. We repeat our condemnation of violence between Palestinians, and we welcome the Government's provision of significant financial support to the Palestinian Authority. (Paragraph 144)**
84. The Government has publicly called for a change in Israeli policies and agrees with the Committee's recommendation to urge Israel to desist from actions that violate international law. The Government has consistently called for Israel to respect international law, both in public statements and through private meetings, and will continue to do so. The Government has been similarly vocal in condemning violence committed by Palestinians against the Israeli population.
85. The Government welcomes the Gaza ceasefire, and commends the efforts of the Egyptian Government on this issue. While this has had a positive impact, the situation in Gaza remains serious. The Government is gravely concerned about the humanitarian impact of restrictions on Gaza, particularly on the most vulnerable sections of the population and will continue to raise its concerns with the Government of Israel. This ceasefire has significantly reduced the number of rocket attacks from Gaza, making an assessment of how to stop rocket fire into Israel unnecessary at the time of writing.

86. The Government will also continue to support Egyptian efforts to improve the situation by dealing with outstanding issues, including: an end to arms smuggling, the release of Gilad Shalit, and the easing of restrictions on humanitarian supplies, commercial goods and people through the Gaza crossings.
- 24. We conclude that the human rights situation in North Korea is extremely grave. We will consider the country's human rights abuses, and the response of the British Government, in detail in our Report on Global Security: Japan and Korea. (Paragraph 148)**
87. The Government agrees that the human rights situation in North Korea is extremely grave and looks forward to working with the Committee on its forthcoming report.
- 25. We conclude that there are serious and wide-ranging human rights abuses in Pakistan. We further conclude that the FCO report should have been more critical of the imposition of the state of emergency, in particular by considering whether it was introduced to prevent the judiciary from considering the validity of President Musharraf's re-election. We unreservedly condemn the assassination of Benazir Bhutto and we welcome the relatively free parliamentary elections in February 2008. We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government should set out more clearly what steps it is taking to support women's rights and other international human rights norms in Pakistan. (Paragraph 155)**
88. The Government shares the Committee's view that there are serious human rights concerns in Pakistan. We continue to encourage the Government of Pakistan to guarantee the human rights of all Pakistani citizens, in accordance with international standards, through regular multilateral and bilateral representations.
89. There has been some progress with political rights associated with the lifting of the State of Emergency, including former President Musharraf stepping down as Chief of Army Staff, the release of political detainees and the removal of some media restrictions. The Government welcomes the Committee's view of the February 2008 elections which the EU Election Observation Mission (which the Government fully supported and participated in) described as "competitive despite significant problems". This led to the formation of a government that reflected the will of the Pakistani people.

90. The Government also shares the Committee's condemnation of the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. The Foreign Secretary called this, "an attack against those committed to democracy in Pakistan" in a speech to the House of Commons on 7 January. The Government disagrees with the Committee's conclusion that the FCO Report should have been more critical of the imposition of the state of emergency. The Report made clear that the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and other ministers raised their concerns with the Government of Pakistan at the highest levels and repeatedly urged President Musharraf to restore constitutional order. We consistently stressed the importance of an independent judiciary and called for all those detained to be either charged with a crime or released from custody. The Report also documents the actions taken by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to suspend Pakistan from the Commonwealth, which we fully endorsed.
91. We welcomed the decision taken by the Government of Pakistan in April to ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and to sign the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the Convention against Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. We continue to encourage the Government of Pakistan to implement these instruments and incorporate them into national legislation. During Pakistan's session under the Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council in May, the UK delegation highlighted the need to ensure that legislation also complies with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
92. There is a serious need to promote and protect women's rights in Pakistan. To address this, our High Commission in Islamabad supports projects that help to protect women's rights and improve access to justice, for example:
- supporting community-based lawyer-activists who represent women in cases of forced marriage, domestic violence and other crimes;
 - encouraging the creation of a lawyers' network of human rights advocates with prominent women advocates;
 - improving investigative journalism in Pakistan to encourage impartial reporting on political, electoral and human rights issues;
 - and raising awareness and teaching of human rights, including women's rights, in schools.

93. The report also describes the work of the Department for International Development (DFID) in Pakistan. This is framed by the 2006 UK/Pakistan Development Partnership Arrangement, a ten-year joint vision based on a shared resolve to reduce poverty, address corruption, improve coordination between donors and respect international human rights obligations. DFID is doubling its assistance to Pakistan to £480 million during 2008-2011. DFID is also working to help Pakistan achieve the Millennium Development Goals, which will deliver better access to employment and economic development, health and education for women.
- 26. We conclude that the Russian parliamentary and Presidential elections demonstrated democratic deficiencies and were a missed opportunity for the advancement of democracy in Russia. We recommend that the Government, both bilaterally and using the mechanisms of the EU, OSCE and the Council of Europe, should continue to emphasise to Russia that its media and NGO restrictions are steps in the wrong direction. We further recommend that the Government should encourage President Medvedev to honour the pledges he has made to uphold the rule of law. (Paragraph 160)**
94. The Government shares the Committee's concerns about the Russian parliamentary and Presidential elections. While we appreciate that the elections took place in a calm and peaceful atmosphere, we along with the EU and international observers registered concern over democratic deficiencies including restrictions on media access and the disproportionate response to opposition demonstrations. The Government strongly supported statements from the EU and international observers registering their concerns regarding the elections, and joined them in expressing concern about the harassment of opposition parties and non-governmental organisations. We will continue to urge Russia to work constructively with the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in future years in order to ensure expert, independent, international election monitoring.
95. The Government agrees that the restrictions Russian media and non-governmental organisations face, as well as other infringements of human rights, are steps in the wrong direction. With the support of the EU and other partners we will not hesitate to take firm and united action against human rights abuses in Russia. We discuss a wide range of human rights issues with Russia every six months through the EU-Russia Human Rights consultation, the next round is due to be held in October 2008. Our annual bilateral human rights dialogue is a further opportunity to express our concerns, and the next meeting is scheduled to take place this autumn.

96. As well as emphasising the importance of resolving these matters in discussions with the new Russian administration, the Government supports a number of Russian non-governmental organisations through project work, providing funds through the Strategic Programme Fund, the Conflict Prevention Pool and the Bilateral Programme Budget. These funds have supported projects which aim to strengthen professional media, widen public participation in political processes, as well as others aiming to tackle xenophobia and religious and ethnic discrimination. We welcome President Medvedev's commitment to the rule of law in Russia and will continue to press for positive steps from Russia on human rights.
- 27. We conclude that the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia is one of the worst in the world. The Government's stated policy of assisting with gradual reform is simply not adequate in the face of the dramatically increased use of the death penalty and the continued repression of women's rights. We accept there is a balance to be struck in any relationship with a strategic ally, but we do not see how the Government's current policies are presenting sufficient incentives to the Saudi regime to curtail its most severe abuses. We recommend that the "Two Kingdoms Dialogue" should explicitly address issues such as the death penalty, and, as last year, we recommend that this dialogue should have measurable and time-limited objectives. We understand the Government's reasoning in not making such objectives public knowledge. However, we recommend that if the Government believes that these objectives should be kept private, the Foreign Secretary should write to us in confidence when he responds to this Report to outline what progress has been made. (Paragraph 167)**
97. The Government shares the concern of the committee regarding the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia. Whilst reform in Saudi Arabia is not at the pace at which we would like to see, recent announcements on the reform of judiciary are significant and should be welcomed. These changes will improve access to the judicial system, including for women. Our Embassy in Riyadh is in the process of identifying ways in which the UK can assist in these reforms.
98. The Government disagrees that our policy of assisting with gradual reform is not adequate. Sustainable reform cannot be forced upon a country. Saudi Arabia has to balance the reform process between the conservative majority and the liberal reformers. We raise our concerns regularly, including at Ministerial level, most recently during visits by Dr Kim Howells and the Foreign Secretary in 2008.
99. The Two Kingdoms Dialogue was established in 2005 to provide a forum for the two countries to discuss issues where we faced shared challenges including human rights and reform. Ahead of every conference both sides agree which topics will be discussed and the expected outcomes. The 2007 conference produced a number of outcomes, including joint work on:

- countering the messages from extremists and promoting shared and positive values
 - ensuring that young people have the necessary skills to enter the competitive market place.
 - developing projects to share expertise and promote capacity building in broadcasting, culture and arts through visits and courses.
 - meeting the aspirations of young people in order to address the common challenges including discrimination and social inequality.
100. Our Embassy in Riyadh has begun the negotiations for the next conference. It is exploring themes around education, good governance, the role of women, human rights and civil society. Themes need to be agreed with the Saudis. We will, as in previous years, work towards tangible outcomes. However, we cannot insist that the death penalty is discussed as part of this conference. The Government is opposed to the death penalty in all circumstances. Working towards the universal abolition of the death penalty forms part of the FCO's public service agreement.
101. In June 2008, the EU Human Rights Expert Group was established to formalise human rights dialogue with the Saudi Authorities. The group has so far discussed elections and the participation of women; support and promotion of human rights defenders, and freedom of religion.
- 28. We conclude that the FCO's report fails to pay sufficient attention to the severe human rights crisis in Somalia. We are particularly concerned by the absence of any mention of alleged abuses carried out by Ethiopian troops in the country. Strong denials by the Ethiopian Government are not sufficient cause for omitting these allegations. We recommend that the Government should ensure human rights are central to its approach in Somalia, and we further recommend that it is included as a major country of concern in next year's report. (Paragraph 174)**

102. The Government is grateful to the Committee for its conclusion on the human rights crisis in Somalia. We have made very clear to the Ethiopian government that, while we understand the reasons for their intervention, we believe their troops should withdraw from Somalia as soon as is possible. They themselves have said that they will do so. Meanwhile we continue to urge the Ethiopians to use only appropriate force, adhere to international humanitarian law and respect human rights. When allegations of human rights abuses are made, we call on the State concerned to investigate the allegations, gather evidence and pursue prosecution if it is appropriate to do so. In June 2008, Lord Malloch-Brown encouraged the Ethiopian government, through their Ambassador to London, to initiate such internal investigations of human rights abuses within the ranks of their armed forces. If breaches of international human rights law or humanitarian law are proved then we will condemn them unreservedly and expect those responsible to be held to account.
103. The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation that human rights should be central to its approach in Somalia, and that it is included as a major country of concern in next year's report. Unfortunately, given the complexity and the insecurity in Somalia, there is little opportunity to monitor the situation reliably or gather and verify facts or allegations of human rights abuse. Many in Somali society have been brutalised by years of violence. It is often individuals, who are not answerable to any particular group or commander, who carry out abuses on their own initiative. This makes it even more difficult to prevent further abuses and to bring those responsible to justice. What reporting there is, is often biased and may be exaggerated to exert influence on the international community.
104. The UK supported United Nations Security Council Resolution 1814, adopted on 15 May 2008, calling for the increased capacity for human rights monitoring by strengthening the presence of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Somalia, including a Human Rights Council Independent Expert.
- 29. We conclude that the human rights situation in Sudan remains of paramount concern. We are disappointed that the UN-African Union hybrid peacekeeping force for Darfur has yet to fully deploy. We welcome the Government's support for a political solution in Darfur and its financial assistance to the peacekeeping mission. We recommend that the Government should consider again whether it has any spare capacity to meet the need for helicopters or other equipment. We further recommend that the Government should provide the necessary diplomatic assistance to NGOs in their efforts to gain access into Sudan. (Paragraph 180)**

105. The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion that human rights in Sudan remain a major concern. We strongly support efforts to monitor and improve the application of human rights in Sudan and to end impunity for crimes committed in Darfur.
106. We share the Committee's concern at the slow deployment of the UN-African Union peacekeeping mission in Darfur (UNAMID). We are pressing all parties to facilitate the rapid full deployment of the peacekeeping mission, which is one of the most complex ever undertaken. The mission is mandated to consist of up to about 19,500 troops, 6,500 police, and 5,500 civilians. As of 1 August, UNAMID is around one-third deployed, and UN-AU Joint Special Representative Adada has told the UN Security Council that the mission will not be fully deployed before 2009.
107. UK helicopters and other key units are fully committed elsewhere, but we are working closely in support of the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations to lobby potential providers of critical enablers, including helicopters and engineers. We are supporting with £4 million the pre-deployment training and equipping of African troop-contributing countries, and we are assisting in training Bangladeshi police deploying to Darfur. The Government is also providing staff officers to UNAMID.
108. The Government welcomes the appointment on 30 June of a Chief Mediator for the Darfur political process, Djibril Bassolé, formerly Foreign Minister of Burkina Faso. We stand ready to support him in his efforts to reinvigorate the peace process. The Government is also giving £4 million funding and other support to African Union and UN, including for the Darfur Darfur Dialogue and Consultation – the mechanism for consulting civil society – and to support the African Union in communicating the political process to the people of Darfur.
109. We agree with the Committee's recommendation that the Government provide diplomatic assistance to non-governmental organisations over access in Sudan. Through our shared seat on the High Level Committee for humanitarian activities in Darfur, we, with others, successfully pressed the Government of Sudan to extend the Darfur Moratorium until 31 January 2009. This extension should enable the humanitarian community to continue to assist the 4.2 million people affected by conflict in Darfur. We continue to press for full humanitarian access for non-governmental organisations operating in Sudan, and for the Government of Sudan to abide by their commitments under the Joint Communiqué on Facilitation of Humanitarian Activities in Darfur and the Darfur Moratorium.

- 30. We conclude that the repression of civil liberties in Syria continues to give cause for concern. We recommend that the Government should ensure that human rights remains central to its, and the EU's, approach towards Damascus. We further recommend that the international community does not relax the pressure on Syria to improve its human rights record even if progress is achieved on other political and foreign policy fronts. (Paragraph 185)**
110. The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion that the civil liberties situation in Syria gives cause for concern. Since the beginning of 2008 there has been a worrying deterioration in the human rights situation with the detention and trial of a number of prominent activists. The British Embassy in Damascus, working with other EU missions, continues to press the Syrians to improve conditions in general as well as raising individual cases of concern. Members of EU missions, including the UK, regularly attend trials of human rights activists. A current example is the trial of the twelve Damascus Declaration detainees which started on 31 July 2008. In addition, during his recent visit to Damascus, Sir Peter Ricketts met human rights defenders to discuss areas where the Government may be able to help to improve the situation. Human rights will continue to form an important part of the Government's critical dialogue with Syria.
- 31. We conclude that Robert Mugabe's human rights record is utterly appalling. The first round of the Presidential election in March 2008 was deeply flawed, and the delay in announcing the results was unacceptable. We are concerned that South Africa appears to have maintained its patently ineffectual policy of "quiet diplomacy" with Zimbabwe, but we are encouraged that other regional states such as Zambia are beginning to speak out more forcefully against the brutality of the Mugabe regime. We conclude that the decision to remove Robert Mugabe's honorary knighthood was correct. We recommend that the Government should continue to urge regional states to take the diplomatic lead against Zimbabwe, and should not recognise any regime led by Mugabe. We further recommend that the Government should set out in its response to this Report what action is being taken against British businesses whose presence in Zimbabwe is helping to prop up the regime. (Paragraph 197)**
111. The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion on the appalling human rights record of Robert Mugabe and the deeply flawed elections held in Zimbabwe. Mugabe's regime created a climate of fear that denied the Zimbabwean people the opportunity to vote in free and fair elections. The Government condemns the use of violence against ordinary Zimbabweans in order to retain power.

112. The Government supports the recommendation of the Committee that regional states should take the diplomatic lead. Many African voices spoke out. As Zimbabwe's southern neighbour and the country most affected by the increasing outflow of economic migrants, South Africa is a key interlocutor, and President Mbeki has played an important role as mediator between the parties. The Government welcomes the prospect of a change in Zimbabwe, following the announcement of an agreement between Morgan Tsvangirai and Robert Mugabe and hopes this will be swiftly followed by real changes on the ground. The Zimbabwean people deserve a lasting democratic settlement that will bring reform, economic recovery and stability.
113. The UK, with support from other partners, has ensured that the poor governance and human rights abuses seen in Zimbabwe have been raised internationally. The UN Security Council discussions, and the UN Secretary General statement made it clear that the situation in Zimbabwe is of worldwide concern. Now a political settlement has been agreed, we will be monitoring the situation carefully. We urge the new administration to take action to ensure there is no return to the violence and intimidation of the past; that it works towards the restoration of the rule of law; repeals repressive legislation and demonstrates, through its actions, respect for internationally recognised standards of human rights.
114. With our European partners, we extended EU targeted measures against the regime as a means to increase pressure to move towards a solution. For the first time the EU agreed to freeze the assets in the EU of four companies that are owned by those persons on the EU visa ban list.
115. However, the Government has never supported a blanket ban on trade with Zimbabwe, which would hurt ordinary people who already endure appalling conditions. Evidence of change and commitment to reform on the ground will be the most important factor influencing the Government's position on sanctions.
116. The Government remains committed to the people of Zimbabwe. We are the second largest bilateral donor to Zimbabwe, giving around £49 million in 2007 and more than £200 million since 2000. We will continue to provide this essential humanitarian assistance and to encourage and work with the international community to support the people of Zimbabwe.



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