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OFFICIAL REPORT

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Questions	
School Curriculum: First Aid Training and Home Nursing	419
Environmental Land Management Schemes	421
Children and Young People in Care: Accommodation.....	424
Uyghurs in Xinjiang	427
EU-UK Partnership Council.....	431
Retained European Union Law	434
European Union: Border Control Checks	437
Emissions Reduction (Local Authorities in London) Bill [HL]	
<i>First Reading</i>	440
Tributes	441
International Development Strategy	
<i>Motion to Take Note</i>	444
School Openings: January 2022	
<i>Commons Urgent Question</i>	480
Ajax Noise and Vibration Review	
<i>Statement</i>	484
Integrated Rail Plan: Northern Powerhouse Area	
<i>Question for Short Debate</i>	494
Prisons Strategy	
<i>Statement</i>	509
Bosnia-Herzegovina	
<i>Motion to Take Note</i>	519
FCDO Staffing	
<i>Commons Urgent Question</i>	544
Delivering Justice for Victims	
<i>Statement</i>	547

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The following abbreviations are used to show a Member's party affiliation:

Abbreviation	Party/Group
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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House of Lords

Thursday 16 December 2021

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Liverpool.

School Curriculum: First Aid Training and Home Nursing Question

11.06 am

Asked by **Baroness Rawlings**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to include (1) first aid training, and (2) home nursing, as core parts of the school curriculum.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Baroness Barran) (Con): My Lords, we know that first aid and good care saves lives. Schools are now required to teach first aid as part of statutory health education. Pupils are taught how to deal with common injuries, call the emergency services, administer CPR and understand the purpose of defibrillators. Schools have the flexibility to deliver content that meets the needs of their pupils, such as learning about caring for others.

Baroness Rawlings (Con): My Lords, I thank the Minister for her Answer. I asked one of the most experienced paramedics in Norfolk what he thought would save most lives in the National Health Service in his field. His answer was: "Please include teaching standard cardiopulmonary resuscitation—CPR—in the school curriculum, especially as you can no longer give the kiss of life, along with basic first aid and home nursing classes". However, could these classes be taught not just once a term but every week? UK ambulances attend 60,000 calls every year, with many calls made through a lack of basic knowledge. A degree of serious teaching, as evidence shows, saves three times as many lives and would save the National Health Service millions of pounds. Can the Minister take this to her department as a project for 2022?

Baroness Barran (Con): As I said in response to my noble friend's main Question, all state-funded schools are required to teach first aid and the curriculum includes CPR. We have also recently issued implementation guidance to schools, which says that they should decide the most appropriate method of teaching. Many use excellent charities to help them implement that training.

Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab): My Lords, I am sorry to say this, because I know the noble Baroness raised this Question in good faith, but it is unhelpful because it deflects from the pressing need for the national curriculum to be rescued from the confines imposed upon it by the English baccalaureate. The EBacc comprises the subjects most sought after by Russell group universities; it does not cater for young people who want to pursue the arts and creative subjects, such as design and technology, drama or music. Does

the Minister have any concerns about young people being force-fed subjects that may not be in their best interests, and is it now the time to think about adding a sixth pillar to the EBacc?

Baroness Barran (Con): I hear the noble Lord's level of concern, but the EBacc gives pupils the foundational skills and knowledge they need to pursue a very wide variety of careers. As he and I debated over many hours during the skills Bill, there are also lots of opportunities in both T-levels and BTECs to pursue a range of other careers.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (CB): My Lords, I chaired the Sub-Committee on Allergy in 2007, which recommended adrenaline autoinjectors in schools, which are now available. Can the Minister confirm whether teenagers—a third of whom with allergies are known often not to carry their adrenaline injectors with them—and the risk of bleeding out from stab injuries to them are specifically targeted in first-aid teaching in senior schools?

Baroness Barran (Con): If I may, I will write to the noble Baroness with more detail, but the spirit of the guidance is certainly that schools have an element of discretion, and rightly so, in what they include in their curriculum. However, she will be aware that we are doing a great deal of work in relation to stab injuries and violent crime.

The Lord Privy Seal (Baroness Evans of Bowes Park) (Con): My Lords, the noble Baroness, Lady Harris of Richmond, wishes to speak virtually. I think this is a convenient point for me to call her.

Baroness Harris of Richmond (LD) [V]: My Lords, I watched primary schoolchildren get involved in these classes some years ago and saw CPR being taught in a secondary school. To what year groups do the Government intend to teach these excellent skills? It is all right doing it just for seniors, but what about primary schoolchildren as well?

Baroness Barran (Con): The noble Baroness is absolutely right, and the curriculum is also included in all primary schools in an age-appropriate manner.

Lord Lingfield (Con): My Lords, would my noble friend agree that one of the best ways of teaching first aid in schools is through the Combined Cadet Force? The Government's school cadet expansion programme has a target of 60,000 young people participating by next year. Can my noble friend tell us how far along the road we are with that? I remind your Lordships of my charitable interest as chairman of the Cadet Vocational Qualifications Organisation.

Baroness Barran (Con): My noble friend is right to bring attention to the CCF and the great work that it does. But I am sure he would agree that there are a number of other organisations, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the National Citizen Service, that also focus on equipping young people with a range of skills, including first aid. I will write to my noble friend with an update on recruit numbers.

Lord Berkeley of Knighton (CB): My Lords, I wonder if I could draw two answers together by asking the Minister if she agrees that, apart from the important health benefits already mentioned, there is a social dividend in what is being suggested? As with playing an instrument, as we have just heard, or drama, the self-esteem resulting from an acquired discipline and the ability to help others promotes social cohesion and friendliness.

Baroness Barran (Con): I agree with the noble Lord. The curriculum supports the development of a range of essential behaviours and life skills promoting confidence, team working, emotional well-being, compassion and resilience.

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Lab): My Lords, first aid and CPR are not available in the curriculum in Northern Ireland. To address this, my colleague in the Northern Ireland Assembly has brought forward a Private Member's Bill to introduce CPR as part of the curriculum and have it available in all types of schools. Will the Minister use her great offices when meeting ministerial colleagues in the devolved Administrations to encourage them down this route as a safety measure and part of good curriculum education?

Baroness Barran (Con): I am delighted to reassure the noble Baroness on that account and to share that with my ministerial colleagues in the department.

Lord McColl of Dulwich (Con): My Lords, it has been mentioned that the kiss of life is no longer part of CPR because of Covid, but in fact it was given up before that because it was recognised that there was enough oxygen in the blood. The great thing is to get the circulation going as the essential part of CPR.

Baroness Barran (Con): I thank my noble friend for that very helpful technical clarification.

Baroness Benjamin (LD): My Lords, many children of black and Asian descent suffer from sickle cell. Will the noble Baroness consider getting schools to talk about sickle cell and teach children, when a child in their class has a crisis, about what they are going through?

Baroness Barran (Con): I am delighted to share that with colleagues in the department and confirm that that is happening.

Environmental Land Management Schemes *Question*

11.15 am

Tabled by Baroness Scott of Needham Market

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the answer by Lord Benyon on 27 May (HL Deb, col. 1097), when they will publish details of how new Environmental Land Management schemes will deliver the "very clear access commitment, backed by funding", to which the Minister referred.

Lord Addington (LD): My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in the name of my noble friend, and at her request.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord Benyon) (Con): My Lords, I declare my farming interests as set out in the register. The Government remain committed to investing in access. On 2 December the Secretary of State confirmed that we will

"continue to pay for heritage, access and engagement through our existing schemes and we will consider how to maintain investment in these areas as part of future schemes".—[*Official Report*, Commons, 2/12/21; col. 40WS.]

This includes environmental land management schemes. Our ongoing commitment is visible through other funds, including the nature for climate fund and the farming and protected landscapes programme, among others.

Lord Addington (LD): I thank the Minister for that reply. Does he agree that unless you have effective co-ordination between making more footpaths and greater access to the countryside available within the existing structure, and things like public transport, you are going to underutilise any possible benefit? Would the Minister cast his eye over one of the recommendations made in the report entitled *A national plan for sport, health and wellbeing*? I was a member of the committee that produced it, and in it we suggest that the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities—not a very snappy title—should undertake this work to make sure there is a cross-government approach.

Lord Benyon (Con): The noble Lord is absolutely right: we can provide all the footpaths and access we want, but it is about getting people out there to use them and demystifying the natural environment for some people. I was interested in that report, as it produced the rather worrying finding that physical activity levels in the UK have significantly declined, in part as a result of Covid. Much more can be done to join this up and it is absolutely a job across government, not just for one department.

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con): My Lords, may I raise access of a different kind, in connection with the ELMS: access for tenants and how we can encourage and incentivise longer tenancy agreements? Will the Minister use his good offices to interact with the Treasury to ensure that the tax changes needed for this purpose can be made in time, before the ELMS come into effect?

Lord Benyon (Con): I thank my noble friend. There are ongoing discussions with the Treasury on a variety of different aspects of agricultural transition and reform, not least our exit scheme. But we also want to encourage a length of tenure which encourages people to invest in a wide variety of different activities in the countryside, including access.

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, I declare my interest as president of the Rural Coalition. Can the Minister confirm that the funds allocated for the implementation of the Glover review are totally separate from the funds allocated for ELMS?

Lord Benyon (Con): The right reverend Prelate raises a very good point. For example, we have put some money into the farming in protected landscapes scheme, which many different access groups are using to work with farmers and organisations like national parks and AONBs to get greater access. We absolutely intend that these are part of the environmental land management schemes, but that other funding streams can be accessed as well.

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville (LD): My Lords, on 2 December the Minister wrote to your Lordships giving an update on the transition from CAP. The annex indicated that 70 applications have been received for trials on landscape recovery. Could the Minister give an update on how these are going and whether any include access to the countryside?

Lord Benyon (Con): A wide variety of different activities are being looked at as part of the tests and trials. Our announcement on local nature recovery and landscape recovery will be made next year. We are working with the test-and-trials farmers and land managers to ensure that access is part of this, as well as the very important work we need to do to reverse the declines in species.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): In reply to an earlier question, the Minister used the phrase “ongoing discussions with the Treasury”, a phrase beloved by civil servants and Ministers. Can the Minister tell us when he expects these ongoing discussions to be concluded, and how they are going to be reported to Parliament?

Lord Benyon (Con): I shall certainly keep the House informed about this. My discussions with the Treasury are very fruitful in this area. The noble Lord seems sceptical of that, perhaps, but I assure him that there is a cross-government intention to provide better security for farmers in future and that schemes such as our exit scheme have the right tax framework to make them a good incentive—but also that the other aspects that we are talking about here, such as access and getting more people out in the countryside, are understood. The work that I have been doing with my noble friend Lord Agnew has been really important in trying to make sure that we get more people into the countryside.

Lord Hamilton of Epsom (Con): My Lords, I refer the House to my minimal interests in agriculture. Does my noble friend not think that there is an inevitable conflict between rewilding and public access, because nobody actually wants to walk through countryside that is covered in stinging nettles and brambles?

Lord Benyon (Con): I am not sure that I agree with my noble friend. What people want in our countryside is variety. Rewilding Britain, the charity promoting rewilding, has an ambition of 5% of the UK to be rewilded by the end of this century, which seems a perfectly achievable figure. The work that we have to do in the farmed environment, as well, is really important—so I do not think that he can make a sweeping statement like that.

Baroness Hayman of Ullock (Lab): My Lords, as the Minister knows, financial support for improving public access to the countryside is a key commitment of the new regime in the Agriculture Act. I would be interested to hear his response to the many rambling and walking groups that are expressing anger and frustration at the moment that the department is not prioritising access to the countryside.

Lord Benyon (Con): I was disappointed by the response of the Ramblers Association, an organisation for which I have a great regard. As set out in a Written Ministerial Statement of 2 December:

“We will also continue to pay for heritage, access and engagement through our existing schemes and we will consider how to maintain investment in these areas as part of future schemes.”—[*Official Report*, Commons, 2/12/21; col. 437WS.]

What we were talking about was the sustainable farming incentive, which is only one of three schemes. Of course, there are many other examples, such as the £500 million nature for climate fund and the £124 million announced for the net-zero community forests. I could go on, but I would incur the wrath of the House if I did.

Lord McLoughlin (Con): My Lords, the Minister has just raised a number of schemes available to the public. I welcome the Government’s general direction but will my noble friend be careful to ensure that they do not overcomplicate those schemes and make them too complicated for people to have access to them?

Lord Benyon (Con): My noble friend is absolutely right. One reason why we have done this iterative process, with tests and trials and piloting these different schemes, is because we want to make sure that they are brought in in as effective a way as possible. We have already reduced, with the sustainable farming incentive, the amount of guidance to make it as simple and clear as possible. Farmers should not be paying land agents huge amounts of money to do those schemes; they can do it themselves.

Lord Lexden (Con): My Lords, in this season of good will, should we not congratulate my noble friend the Minister on his wonderful passion for the countryside and express the hope that he is able in the new year to extend that passion ever more widely?

Lord Benyon (Con): I do not know what I can say in answer to such a generous question, expect to say a very happy Christmas to my noble friend and everybody else.

Children and Young People in Care: Accommodation Question

11.24 am

Asked by Lord Laming

To ask Her Majesty’s Government what steps they are taking to ensure that children and young people in care are placed in safe and appropriate accommodation.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Baroness Barran) (Con): My Lords, all children in care deserve to live in homes that meet their needs and keep them safe; that is why we are reforming unregulated provision for children aged 16 and 17 and have banned the placement of under-16s. This week, we have announced that we will invest over £140 million to introduce mandatory national standards and Ofsted registration. We are also investing £259 million to maintain and build more places in open and secure children's homes.

Lord Laming (CB): My Lords, I am very grateful indeed to the Minister for that helpful Answer. As the House knows, no child is taken into care without there being clear evidence of the child's safety being severely at risk. Indeed, some of us, or I guess all of us, wish that some local authorities had acted more quickly in respect of recent terrible cases. The Minister knows that the Competition and Markets Authority recently highlighted in its report the number of children who are still being placed in unregulated and inappropriate accommodation. Can the Minister kindly expand on what steps are being taken to rectify this worrying situation?

Baroness Barran (Con): I thank the noble Lord for his question, and echo his sentiment, and the sentiment of the House, in relation to the two recent cases to which I think he was referring.

In relation to the CMA report, the department is extremely grateful to the CMA, which is addressing fundamental and important issues. We believe that the steps that we have announced this week will make an important difference in securing the safety of 16 and 17 year-olds in particular. The investment that we are making in open and secure children's homes will also help to boost supply—but we are waiting for the full report to give our official response.

Lord Young of Cookham (Con): My Lords, my noble friend will know that this year a record number of unaccompanied minors have arrived in this country seeking asylum, and many have been placed in hotels, with minimal supervision, making them vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. What arrangements are the Government making to make sure that these vulnerable children get the support that they need?

Baroness Barran (Con): Earlier this week, the national transfer scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, to whom my noble friend refers, was made mandatory for local authorities. As a result of that change, the majority of local authorities will be required to accept transfers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children into their care. We believe that this will provide those very vulnerable children with the care and support that my noble friend rightly says they need.

Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab): My Lords, on this day 30 years ago, the Government made a pledge to the United Nations that they would honour the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which contains comprehensive state obligations towards children. Yesterday's announcement, referred to by the Minister,

on national standards for unregulated supported accommodation for 16 and 17 year-olds was, sadly, a further sign that this Government have reneged on that pledge. Instead of making those establishments follow the quality standards for children's homes, Ministers are pressing ahead with an alternative, rudimentary set of standards, which are devoid of any requirement to provide care to children. How can it possibly be acceptable for children to be in the care of the state and not receive any care where they live?

Baroness Barran (Con): I understand why the noble Lord asks the question, and I am grateful for the opportunity to try to clarify the point. There are children with a foster placement or a placement in a children's home, which cater for the vast majority of children in care, whose placements have broken down multiple times or who have come very late age-wise into the care system, who live in semi-independent living, which aims to give them the skills that they will need later in life. I hope that the noble Lord will acknowledge the important step that is being made with the introduction of these standards and the powers that it will give Ofsted to make sure that we give children that care.

Baroness Hussein-Ece (LD): My Lords, 75% of children's residential care homes are run by private firms, making huge profits, and the average placement now is around £4,000 a week. In spite of this, many London boroughs are having to place vulnerable children hundreds of miles away, outside the city and away from their homes and friends. I came across a case just recently in which a north London borough has to pay hundreds and hundreds of pounds in taxi fares to bring children and young people back into the borough to receive appropriate educational support. These are children who have severe mental health problems. What is being done to mitigate this? Surely it cannot be right to send vulnerable children out of the borough—hundreds of miles away—and then to have to bus them back again for them to get the support that they need. Surely that is a terrible waste of funding.

Baroness Barran (Con): The noble Baroness will be aware that the majority of looked-after children, 74% as at March 2021, were located 20 miles or less from their home, which is a slight increase on 2020. Only 6% of children are placed more than 20 miles away from their home.

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (Lab): My Lords, is it not clear from the questions to the Minister that we are dealing with a broken system that is letting children down? Will the Government think really deeply about this and seek ways to make sure that care is not the only alternative for children who are vulnerable? If more families get the right support at the right time, fewer children will end up at the risk they are at today—we know this from those places where effective early intervention is taking place across the age ranges, where they have been able to hold stable the number of such children or even reduce them. When will the Government switch their perspective and go for early intervention?

Baroness Barran (Con): With respect to the noble Baroness and to the House, these children were originally let down within their own homes, sadly. That is the tragedy, which I know she knows very well. She will also be aware that the Government have announced a really ambitious plan, in terms of family hubs, with a great focus on the first 1,000 days of a child's life—she and I have discussed the importance of that in previous conversations. It is not an either/or choice: there will be children who need support and intervention earlier on, and we are committed to doing both well.

Lord Bird (CB): Is this the place to talk about a very big issue—pardon the pun—which is the fact that the flow of children out of care into homelessness and on into the prison system is still carrying on to such an extent that probably 25% of the people I work with in and around homelessness and 25% of people in prison have come from a care background?

Baroness Barran (Con): I thank the noble Lord for the unique perspective and experience that he brings to this question. He is right, and that is why, together with the Department for Levelling Up, the Department for Education published guidance last year to make sure there are common standards for supported accommodation for young people aged 18 and over. That is an important basis, as the noble Lord understands well, but we are committed to providing additional support also.

Lord Lexden (Con): Do the Government remain committed to helping those children in care who would benefit from a boarding education to obtain places in our excellent state and independent boarding schools, through their boarding school partnerships unit at the DfE? Is it not clear that children in care suited to a boarding education obtain good results in our national examinations? Are the Government supporting charities, such as the Royal National Children's SpringBoard Foundation, which are working with boarding schools and local authorities to increase the number of places for children in care, mindful always that many children will not benefit from or be suited to a boarding school education?

Baroness Barran (Con): The Government recognise the opportunity offered by both the state boarding and the independent sector to provide good outcomes for children in care. I am extremely pleased to report to my noble friend that the first cohort of 28 children commenced boarding placements this September as a result of the Royal National Children's SpringBoard Foundation's work on creating a national network of schools.

Uighurs in Xinjiang *Question*

11.34 am

Asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the conclusion of the Uyghur Tribunal on 9 December that a genocide is underway against Uyghurs in Xinjiang; and what steps they intend to take in response.

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper, and in doing so declare that I am a patron of the Coalition for Genocide Response and vice-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Uyghurs.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, we have followed the Uyghur Tribunal's work and are studying its conclusions carefully. I welcome the tribunal's contribution to international understanding of the deeply disturbing situation in Xinjiang. The UK has led international efforts to hold China to account at the UN, imposed sanctions and announced measures to help UK organisations avoid complicity in human rights violations. We will continue to work with our partners to increase pressure on China to change its behaviour.

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord for his, as ever, helpful reply. Does he agree that International Court of Justice jurisprudence is clear on when a state has an obligation to prevent genocide? It is, and I quote:

“the instant that the State learns of ... a serious risk“

of genocide. Given that the Uyghur Tribunal, led by Sir Geoffrey Nice QC, who prosecuted Slobodan Milošević, has conducted easily the most comprehensive examination of the Uyghur crisis, having reviewed hundreds of thousands of pages of evidence and declared in a very tightly drawn judgment there to be a genocide, will the Minister, instead of perhaps telling the House again that genocide determination is a matter for courts, tell us whether the Government have performed the required assessment under the genocide convention of whether Uyghurs are at serious risk of genocide and, if not, whether they will now do so?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, the noble Lord will know my response. Obviously, the British Government's position on genocide and the declaration of genocide has not changed, but I believe that the tribunal—he will know this from our own exchanges—has again provided what I would describe as the most harrowing evidence of what has happened and continues to happen in Xinjiang, and we are looking at that very carefully.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, what contact have the Government had with Sir Geoffrey and the tribunal? Have there been official meetings? If not, will my noble friend undertake to ensure that he meets Sir Geoffrey at an early date?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, I can assure my noble friend that we have met Sir Geoffrey Nice—indeed, I have met him on several occasions over various reports and work he does. Our officials followed the tribunal very closely and engaged directly with Sir Geoffrey Nice.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, the Minister says that we have led the way, and I certainly appreciate the actions of the United Kingdom's

[LORD COLLINS OF Highbury]

Government. He has also stressed before that sanctions really become effective when we act in concert with our allies, so can he explain why the United States is able to sanction more people and a broader range of people to stop this genocide than the United Kingdom? Why can we not match the actions of the United States on this important issue?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, I agree with the noble Lord that it is important to work with our allies: the US is one, as are other countries. When we did act together—indeed, we acted with 29 other countries with the sanctions we announced in March—that sent the clearest possible signal. Of course, I am very mindful that the United States has further sanctioned additional individuals, and we will continue to look at the situation on sanctions, but I cannot speculate any further.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, the Government have accepted that the human rights abuses against these people is carried out on an industrial scale, but in response to a question I asked the Minister on 23 March, he confirmed that no preferential access arrangements for Chinese trade to the UK and access to our financial services have been suspended or notified to be suspended. One of those would allow a state entity in Xinjiang to own more than 50% of a UK pension fund, so why have the Government not even signalled their intent to suspend any preferential access to Chinese finance companies to the British market?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, first, I welcome the noble Lord back and we will catch up on his travels. On 8 December, my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for International Trade announced, via a WMS, a package of measures to update the UK's export control regime. This included an enhancement to our military end use control that will allow the Government to better address threats to national security and human rights and completes the review of export controls as they apply also to Xinjiang that was announced to Parliament. The point he makes on financial services is a specific point and I will continue to engage with him on that issue, but we are sending quite specific signals and the announcement made on 8 December is a good example of that.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (CB): My Lords, I understand that the BBC has film evidence of the atrocities that have been addressed in the Uyghur Tribunal, but has been reluctant to show the programmes to date, having set the evidential test so unrealistically high that it cannot be met. Will the Minister ask for these films at least to be available for a private viewing to inform parliamentarians, so that people may be better informed in their own thinking and have another source of information?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, I will certainly reflect on and take back that suggestion. I often see the written details of reports which come through, some of which are quite detailed, and they are harrowing—I use the word deliberately. I can only

imagine what some of these pictures would depict, but I will certainly reflect on what the noble Baroness has said.

Lord Hayward (Con): My Lords, I think the vast majority of the population welcomes the Government's decision to diplomatically boycott the Olympics along with other countries, but do they really believe that Coca-Cola and other major multinational corporations should be sponsoring the Beijing Olympics and thereby indicating support for a Government who are willing to commit the atrocities to which the noble Lord, Lord Alton, referred?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, as someone who worked in the private sector, I think it is important that companies look at the responsibility of their own actions. I am sure they will take note of the decision not just of the UK but of other countries to announce that diplomatic boycott.

Lord Shinkwin (Con): My Lords, these findings clearly have major implications for businesses' ESG policies. When do the Government plan to follow the lead of the US and produce an investment ban list of firms known to be exercising or participating in the worst human rights abuses?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, presenting specific lists is always a challenge, though I hear what my noble friend has said. Certainly, the announcement of my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for International Trade reflects our continued concern in looking at this very carefully and systematically. Equally, I feel that companies, as I just said to my noble friend Lord Hayward, need to reflect on their actions and the business they are conducting.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, given the importance that the FCDO has attached, for example in the Trade Bill debates, to securing unrestricted access to Xinjiang for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, what steps has it taken to support her in seeking that access? What progress has been made since this was last discussed in Parliament, which I believe was in March?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, we championed that proposal and suggestion; it was in my meeting with Michelle Bachelet that we proposed that directly to her. We have been very supportive. She has been challenged by the Covid crisis, which has prevented her travelling. I know that she has agreed in principle and we will continue to make the case, as we have since March, that the first step—I know the noble Lord, Lord Collins, is seized of this—must be for Michelle Bachelet, in her capacity as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, to be given rights of access to Xinjiang.

Lord Polak (Con): My Lords, turning a blind eye or looking the other way is no answer; we know that from history. We know what is going on and I welcome the Government's announcement of the diplomatic and

political boycott of the Winter Olympics, but that should just be the start. Do the Minister and the department have a list of activities through which we can keep the pressure on the Chinese Government?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, I totally agree with my noble friend. I assure him, as he will know all too well from our conversations, that it is not a question of turning a blind eye. We are very clear-eyed in our relationship with China; we accept that it makes some important contributions on the global stage, particularly on climate change, but all options remain on the table in what we are considering. As I have said, we have exercised leadership at the UN and resorted to exercising sanctions as and when necessary.

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, what assessment have Her Majesty’s Government made of kitemarking products which originate in Xinjiang province so that people can be informed that they may be produced by slave labour? That would help the economy take action in this important area, where we face such atrocities.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, the right reverend Prelate makes an important point on supply chains, ensuring that the sourcing of particular products is clearly identified. This was a matter specific to supply chains which we discussed during the recent G7 meeting of Ministers. I will certainly write to him on his point about identifying products from specific sources.

EU–UK Partnership Council *Question*

11.45 am

Asked by Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town

To ask the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office (Lord Frost) what is the agenda for the next meeting of the EU–UK Partnership Council, and when that meeting will take place.

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Lord Frost) (Con): My Lords, we have not yet agreed a date for the next meeting of the Partnership Council. The trade and co-operation agreement requires the council to meet once a year, unless otherwise agreed by the co-chairs. This condition has been met with the Partnership Council’s meeting on 9 June to begin the process of implementing the TCA’s governance structures. All TCA specialised committees are now scheduled to meet before the end of this year.

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Lab): As someone who may be nominated to be on the PPA overseeing the Partnership Council, I hope it will meet a little more frequently and with a little more content. The TCA included a declaration on the UK’s participation in EU programmes such as Horizon; it was agreed in principle but there was no time to finalise it before the

agreement was signed. The issue was to go to the appropriate specialised committee for action “at the earliest opportunity”. A year on, nothing has happened on Horizon. Can the Minister ensure, even if the Partnership Council is not meeting, that the other committees he mentioned meet and get on with this so that we can participate in Horizon, which is so important for all our researchers?

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, I very much agree with the thrust of the question of the noble Baroness. I think it is well known that we have wanted to get the Horizon arrangements up and running for some time; it is a matter of great disappointment that we have still not managed to do so. It is not 100% clear why, but that is the situation. However, the good news is that we have now agreed that there will be a meeting of the relevant specialised committee before the end of this year, provisionally on 21 December. I hope that might mark a change in the approach being taken and enable us to move this forward.

The Earl of Kinnoull (CB): My Lords, the very first of those declarations made that day concerned financial services. There was an agreement that, by March 2021, an MoU would be concluded to get regulatory framework co-operation. That has not happened, although there were some technical discussions. Will this declaration feature on a future agenda for the Partnership Council, as it is certainly important? Until that MoU has been done, the EU will not assess us for the various equivalence decisions that are so vital to the City. China has 14 equivalence decisions, Mexico has 13 and we currently have two, which are time-limited.

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, the noble Earl is right that there is a provision to agree an MoU. Indeed, there were discussions at the start of this year provisionally to agree that text. Those discussions have paused, again for reasons that we are not 100% clear about, although we can speculate. Naturally, we hope it will be possible to pick them up and move this forward, given that, as the noble Earl knows, some of the equivalence decisions are now imminent if not quite yet urgent.

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con): My Lords, in addition to the Horizon programme, which is causing some concern, my noble friend will be aware of the ongoing anxiety about the REACH programme. For those who have been affected by the fact that the unilateral UK REACH programme is not as comprehensive but is proving more expensive than the EU REACH programme to which all were subscribed before, what representations can be made to the EU-UK Partnership Council in this regard?

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, obviously we have inherited the REACH programme in the retained EU law that came on to the statute books and in the TCA. It is something we keep under close review, and it is certainly true that the costs of reregistering through REACH are considerable. We keep under close review the possibilities of trying to streamline and reduce them.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB): My Lords, would the Minister not agree that a slightly more proactive approach to holding meetings with the TCA might be better than simply standing at the Dispatch Box and saying that we have fulfilled the minimum requirement under law? Would he perhaps answer the part of the Question from the noble Baroness, Lady Hayter, that related to matters which might be discussed at such a future meeting? Has he given consideration, for example, to raising the issue of performing artists so that the work that the Government are doing bilaterally is supplemented by work with the EU where the EU has competence in these matters—for example, with cabotage?

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, the Partnership Council is, of course, the highest body of the governance structure created by the TCA, and as such it does not need to meet very frequently. That is why the treaty commitment is to once a year. However, the specialised committees are important and look through the detail, and those have been running since June. As I said, all of those will shortly have met. So the governance structures are working well. We obviously have been giving thought to the agenda of the Partnership Council; it will no doubt take the issues that are of highest priority at that point. We touched on the question of touring artists at the 9 June meeting, and I imagine that we will do so again at the next meeting.

Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Campbell-Savours, wishes to speak virtually. I think this is a convenient point for me to call him.

Lord Campbell-Savours (Lab) [V]: My Lords, could we seek to place on the council agenda the whole issue of French threats to blockade channel ports, transport arrangements and compromised channel fishing rights? Can the Minister raise at such a meeting that it might be prudent for the United Kingdom to start moving cross-channel, roll-on roll-off trade to Belgian ports? We cannot go on under constant threats from France to block our European trade routes, because British jobs are at stake—and I say that as someone who loves France.

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, I share the noble Lord's opinion about France, and it is therefore all the more regrettable that France made threats against us earlier this year as a result of the ongoing disputes on fishing. I am very glad that those threats were withdrawn, and actually we have been able to continue the fishing discussions on a relatively constructive basis and bring them more or less to a conclusion recently. I think those threats would have been a breach of the treaty and therefore would have been something that it would have been necessary to raise at the Partnership Council—but I hope that we will not be in that situation when the Partnership Council meets.

Baroness Foster of Oxtou (Con): My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend on the Government's engagement with the fora set up for the trade and co-operation and withdrawal agreements. Does he agree with me that if the EU is willing to show the same spirit of constructive engagement and flexibility

required, the problems concerning the Northern Ireland protocol could be speedily resolved, enabling both the EU and the UK to benefit from a more constructive and long-lasting relationship as neighbours and trading partners?

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, I of course very much agree with my noble friend's question, and she is right to refer to the spirit of constructiveness. It is natural that the disputes catch attention, but it is worth dwelling on the fact that a huge amount of business in this very wide-ranging trade and co-operation agreement is carrying on satisfactorily. I hope that the same spirit might be shown in the ongoing discussions on the Northern Ireland protocol, which no doubt we will touch on.

Baroness Chapman of Darlington (Lab): My Lords, the key word in my noble friend's Question is “partnership”. Both our economy and our place in the world will be stronger if disputes can be resolved amicably. Some commentators have likened the Minister's negotiating strategy to puffing out his chest for weeks or months before finally getting down to the serious business of achieving consensus. On the issue of Northern Ireland, will he assure us that he is not intending to use the issue of the supply of medicines to the people of Northern Ireland as leverage in his negotiations?

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, there has been a lot of discussion of my negotiating strategy over the last two and a half years. The fact that we achieved the broadest, most wide-ranging and most comprehensive trade and co-operation agreement ever reached is testimony to my wish to achieve partnership with the EU. On the issue of medicines, we continue to be in discussion with the EU on this subject, and I will talk again to Maroš Šefčovič tomorrow. I am not convinced that we are going to reach agreement on it by the end of the year, but we will try. Of course, it is a national priority that medicines should be available in Northern Ireland, as they are everywhere else in the UK.

Retained European Union Law

Question

11.55 am

Asked by **Baroness Ludford**

To ask the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office (Lord Frost), further to his Written Statement on 9 December (HLWS445), how Her Majesty's Government will consult Parliament in their reviews of (1) the substance of retained European Union law, and (2) the status of retained European Union law in United Kingdom law.

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Lord Frost) (Con): My Lords, the Written Ministerial Statement referred to sets out full details of the two reviews of retained EU law. I and other responsible Ministers are of course ready to engage with Parliament in an appropriate way—for example, directly with this House, with interested Select Committees and with noble and learned Lords who have a particular interest in this question. Of course, we wish to establish proposals

which are likely to be acceptable to the largest possible number of parliamentarians while achieving our policy aims.

Baroness Ludford (LD): My Lords, Parliament agreed with the Government that a snapshot of EU law at the point of exit should be onshored into UK law in the 2018 and 2020 withdrawal Acts. This was for the sake of continuity, certainty and stability for manufacturers and service providers, and thus the economy, throughout the UK, including Northern Ireland, beyond the protocol. A mere nine months on, the Minister expressed his desire—in what seems a highly ideological and unnecessary move when all the practical issues of financial services, Horizon, and so on are unresolved—not only to take a wrecking ball to the settlement but to do so in a way which takes back control for the Executive such as to represent, in the words of EU law expert Professor Catherine Barnard,

“a full takeover by Whitehall of Westminster”.

The announced intention is only to “incorporate Parliament’s views”, which is not good enough. I thus ask the Minister now for a commitment not only to involve Parliament fully in the review but then to make any changes via primary legislation and not Henry VIII powers.

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, the noble Baroness is of course right in saying that retained EU law was brought on to our statute book for reasons of convenience and a smooth transition. It does not mean that it can never change; indeed, it must change, because that is how we get the benefits of reform and change after leaving the European Union. That is the process we intend to begin. As I have said before, I do not think that it makes sense for rules which never had proper scrutiny in this House to require full dress processes to remove them. The way they were incorporated was not normal in terms of parliamentary procedure, and therefore we should look at other ways of dealing with the consequences.

Lord Adonis (Lab): My Lords, in the spirit of good will, could I wish the Minister a very happy Christmas? When he reads *A Christmas Carol*, who does he like most? Is it the ghost of Christmas past, when he was a huge enthusiast for the European Union? Is it the ghost of Christmas present, when, like Mr Scrooge, he carries his own low temperature always about with him? Or is it—I hope—the ghost of Christmas future, when we rejoin the European Union and he can buy all his nieces and nephews glorious presents in the single market and customs union?

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord for his good will, and I extend good will to all Members of this House. If I am forced into a false choice, it will be Christmas future, because I believe that our future outside the European Union is a great one. I must say that I have not noticed any difficulty in access to products from the European Union, and our exports to the European Union are continuing well. I am sure we will prosper on that basis.

Lord Moylan (Con): My Lords, does my noble friend agree as a matter of principle that in this pandemic, government support for business should be

distributed equitably throughout the United Kingdom, and that it really is not appropriate that the Government should need to go off and ask a foreign power for permission to do that with regard to Northern Ireland?

Lord Frost (Con): I very much agree with my noble friend. It is of course a problem that, even though we have agreed new subsidy control provisions in the TCA—and of course we are bringing our own Subsidy Control Bill through Parliament—we are still working with the arrangements that were agreed in 2019 as regards state aid in Northern Ireland. It is excessively complex and difficult for companies in Northern Ireland to deal with these two regimes, and it does not make sense for us not to be able to support businesses in Northern Ireland in the recovery from Covid as we can everywhere else in the UK. I hope we can find solutions as we take forward the discussions on the protocol.

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Lab): My Lords, central to this question is the principle of democracy. The Minister is having ongoing discussions and negotiations with the European Union. Maybe he would like to tell the House today about those discussions in terms of addressing the democratic deficit in the protocol and how Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly will be able to have decision-making authority in relation to EU legislation and all other matters.

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, obviously we are in the middle of a negotiation that continues to cover a wide range of issues, including the democratic deficit that the noble Baroness mentions. Unfortunately, we are not likely to complete those discussions this year; I expect that they will run into next year. However, it would not be a good solution to give the Northern Ireland Assembly or Executive decision-making roles in the European Union. The UK is not a member of the European Union, and therefore it would not be right or appropriate to try to resolve these questions in that way.

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD): My Lords, the Minister may remember that one of the studies in preparation for the single market demonstrated that the UK, before the single market, tended to take US regulations as the standard for British regulations under a sort of extraterritorial jurisdiction. The business media now tells us that the world is moving towards three focuses of regulation: American, Chinese and European. Do we intend to add a fourth, which would be purely national, to the great disadvantage of exporters within Britain, or do we intend to return to incorporating American regulations as British, perhaps without fully consulting Parliament on the unsatisfactory compromises we have to make?

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, regulatory freedom is one of the advantages of Brexit, not one of the disadvantages. We now have a choice as to whether we proceed nationally in regulations and standards, if we wish to get ahead of other international bodies and organisations, or whether we wish to track other organisations’ rules. US regulations, European Union

[LORD FROST]
regulations, others' regulations or national ones may be the best ones for this country in future, but we have the ability to make that choice now, and that is one of the advantages of Brexit.

Lord Empey (UUP): My Lords, it is fair to say that the relationship between the EU and the UK has become very complicated, and that has been added to by the arrangements with the protocol. Would my noble friend be prepared to publish an organogram that would set out for us what all these committees are and who populates them, so that we have some grasp of the relationships between the EU and the UK, including the very complicated committee structure under the protocol?

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, I would be very happy to publish such an organogram—I think we will need an A2 or maybe an A1 piece of paper to get it all on. But it is still a lot less complicated than it was when we were a member of the European Union, and the arrangements still fit within the norms of a trade agreement. I appreciate that they are complex, and I am happy to try to make that as clear as we can in public.

Lord Grocott (Lab): On the crucial issue of democratic accountability and proper scrutiny of legislation and the legislative process, which I am sure we all want to see enhanced, will the Minister, with his experience, care to compare the degree of scrutiny and democratic accountability that exists in respect of laws that were made in Brussels and the degree of scrutiny and democratic accountability that exists in respect of legislative processes in this Parliament?

Lord Frost (Con): The noble Lord makes an extremely good point. It is obviously possible and has been the case for a regulation with direct effect to be agreed in Brussels, perhaps despite us having voted against it, and for that regulation then to become the law of this country without further ado, despite the best efforts of the scrutiny committees in both this House and the other place. There is no ability to amend such rules. It is right in a democracy that Parliament should be able to set the rules by which we live, and that is a principle that we will try to take forward.

European Union: Border Control Checks

Question

12.06 pm

Asked by Lord Purvis of Tweed

To ask the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office (Lord Frost) what plans Her Majesty's Government have, if any, to extend easements to border control checks on goods from the European Union on 1 January 2022.

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Lord Frost) (Con): My Lords, the Government are fully prepared for the introduction of border import controls and, as

previously announced, will introduce these controls on 1 January for EU goods coming from mainland Europe. However, in order to create the best possible environment for negotiations on the protocol and to avoid complexity and uncertainty, I announced yesterday, on 15 December, that the current arrangements for goods coming from the island of Ireland will be extended on a provisional basis.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, in an earlier answer the Minister said that he had noticed no difficulties in securing trade with the European Union. But the cross-party European Affairs Committee report on trade in goods with the EU, published today, found that small businesses and agri-food sectors have been hardest hit by the changes of the TCA, resulting in GB exports becoming “slower, less competitive, and more costly.”

The committee calls for an urgent SPS agreement with the EU. When the Minister is discussing this with the vice-president tomorrow, will he signal that an urgent SPS agreement with the EU is a priority, to support our small business and agri-food sectors that have been so hard hit?

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, I have had the opportunity to look briefly at the report that is referred to, which as always is an extremely comprehensive and worthwhile assessment of the state of play. We have never denied that there are new processes that need to be followed by UK exporters, but experience over the year is that UK business has come to grips with them very successfully and we have brought in, for example, our new export support service to help support smaller companies. On the question of an SPS equivalence arrangement, we asked last year for the TCA to include an equivalence process. That was not possible and, as far as we know, still is not possible, but obviously it would help if the EU was willing to look at that again and move forward.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): Further to the Question from the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, he and I are both members of the committee that reported today. Part of the recommendations is a warning that there is likely to be further Brexit disruption in the new year as these controls are phased in. The Minister has indicated that he made a statement yesterday, but will he spell out exactly what the attitude of the Government will be? That will be crucial to whether these rules will cause further disruption, particularly to small and medium enterprises.

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, as I said, businesses have already shown a great capacity to adapt to new rules; people will need to adjust to them. The controls coming into force in January are UK controls, so we can handle them in a sensible and pragmatic way as they come in. We are in close touch with key border industry players and have been running online events such as webinars with companies. We talk constantly to border industry bodies and hauliers both in the UK and in the EU, and we have published explanatory material and so on. We are doing the best we can, and it is our belief that companies and bodies are engaging well with this and that the controls will be introduced successfully.

The Earl of Kinnoull (CB): On SMEs in the EU and the UK, our thoughts were twofold. First, the Brexit support fund was not fully spent because it had rather narrow confines. Secondly, does the Minister agree that the Brexit support fund and similar things should be redoubled to help our SMEs and that our old friends the trade specialised committees under the TCA should be fired up and meeting to try to ameliorate matters for SMEs both in the EU and in the UK?

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, the Brexit support fund was indeed not fully used, which suggested to us that it was not the best means of providing support to companies. That is why we have brought in the export support service, which I hope will grow and become more focused in time—in particular to help SMEs, which obviously have most difficulty in dealing with the new arrangements.

The noble Lord is obviously correct to say that this is business for the trade specialised committees, and when we have particular evidence of difficulties, we will certainly raise them in those fora.

Lord Dodds of Duncairn (DUP): My Lords, in the week that the Government have announced, for very understandable reasons, that they will extend free, unfettered access for firms from the Irish Republic—part of the EU—to the UK market, is it too much to hope that British firms sending goods to the other part of the United Kingdom in Northern Ireland might also benefit from free, unfettered access? Surely that is not too much to ask, and can the Minister tell us when we are likely to see that?

Lord Frost (Con): The noble Lord makes an extremely good point. If I may dwell on it for a moment, it is obviously true that the legal framework for Northern Ireland and Ireland goods coming to Great Britain is different because of the unfettered access commitment. In practice, at the moment, it is not always possible to distinguish between the two categories of goods, but that will change in future and we will need a definitive solution to this question. Of course, the degree of pragmatism that we show in future to Irish goods coming to Great Britain will be related to the degree of pragmatism and flexibility that the EU shows in allowing goods to move freely around all parts of the UK.

Lord Tugendhat (Con): My Lord, in the light of the questions and answers about Northern Ireland, did the Minister see the report in the *Financial Times* last week that the most rapidly growing region in the United Kingdom is in fact Northern Ireland? Does this not show that, whatever the problems surrounding the protocol, Northern Ireland is doing extremely well at present from being part of the United Kingdom and part of the EU?

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, I am not sure that I share the characterisation that Northern Ireland is both part of the United Kingdom and part of the EU. It is certainly in a somewhat different position as regards goods trade. Northern Ireland is a very successful part of the United Kingdom, has some great companies and has a very bright future. I am very happy that, as

the *FT* article noted, it has grown well. Nevertheless, the burdens of the protocol are significant and will probably grow over time, so we need to find a solution.

Baroness Chapman of Darlington (Lab): My Lords, this continued failure to reach a stable agreement with the EU is expensive for business and the UK taxpayer. We have one set of checks that were postponed back in September, another waived in December and others that are still due to come into force. The Government are spending £360 million on trader support, £150 million on digital agri-food certification and IT systems and £50 million on checking facilities. What is the Minister's assessment of how much of this money we would get back should he trigger Article 16?

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, I think it is reasonable that we should bring in controls as we see fit, in a staged and controlled way over time, so that companies have time to adjust to them. That staging means that the process is spread over a year or two, but that is reasonable and makes life as easy as it can be for businesses both exporting and importing.

The noble Baroness is correct to refer to the substantial sums we have spent on implementing the Northern Ireland protocol. That demonstrates that the accusation sometimes made against us that we are not interested in implementing the protocol is not correct. We have spent a lot of money in an attempt to mitigate the burdens, but there are obviously simpler ways of mitigating the burdens than requiring every good moving to Northern Ireland to go through a customs process and paying the heavy costs of that—and it is those new solutions that I hope we can find in the coming months.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): My Lords, I thank my noble friend for all he has done in very difficult circumstances this year. What positive news can we expect on EU and UK matters in the years ahead?

Lord Frost (Con): My Lords, I think we are ending the year on a positive note. We have had a year's experience of running the Trade and Co-operation Agreement; we have the governance arrangements in place; all the disasters predicted about threats, problems and the collapse of trade—one set of difficulties after another—have not materialised and we end the year in a good place. It is my hope that we will have a constantly improving and very friendly and warm relationship with our EU neighbours, based on free trade and friendly co-operation. That is where we want to get to, and that is where, I am sure, the Government will be taking things forward next year.

Emissions Reduction (Local Authorities in London) Bill [HL]

First Reading

12.17 pm

Lord Tope (LD): My Lords, I declare my interest as co-president of London Councils and a vice-president of the Local Government Association.

[LORD TOPE]

A Bill to enable London Borough Councils and the Common Council of the City of London to achieve reductions in airborne emissions from specified plant in their areas and to make provision for the Secretary of State to set emission limits for such plant; to provide for fixed penalty notices in specified circumstances; and for connected purposes.

The Bill was introduced by Lord Tope, read a first time and ordered to be printed.

Tributes

Announcement

12.18 pm

Lord Ashton of Hyde (Con): My Lords, before we depart for the Recess, it is traditional for the usual channels to take an opportunity to pay particular tribute to those members of staff who have left the House after long and distinguished service. I know I speak for the whole House in saying that we are hugely grateful to all the staff of the House for the work they have done this year, in some of the most challenging times we can remember.

We have all witnessed how hard they have worked in these unprecedented times, involving multiple changes to the working environment. Their resilience, innovation and patience have enabled the House to carry out its functions virtually, in person and in a combination of both, to the highest of standards.

First, I will say a few words about Helena Valencia Cruz, a long-standing early morning housekeeper, who sadly passed away in May while still in the service of the House. Helena worked on many of our floors since 2007 and always took pride in her job, ensuring that everything she did was of the highest quality. Helena will be particularly remembered for her flexibility during the pandemic and maintenance of high-quality work across the House of Lords at such a crucial time.

Nigel Sully, the former director of human resources, retired at the end of last year. In his time at the House of Lords, Nigel transformed and modernised the human resources function. He was the first professional HR director for the House. He also played a pivotal role in the Covid-19 response from day one of the first lockdown, leading the change to remote working. Nigel is remembered by his colleagues as being passionate about making the House an inclusive place for all who work here. He has continued to combine that passion with his other love as a member of the Inclusion Advisory Group at the Wiltshire Football Association and as a county-level football referee.

Barbara Rougvie was an early-morning housekeeping team leader who retired in January after working in the House for 24 years. She was responsible for cleaning many of the offices on the Principal Floors, including mine. She was exceptionally committed to her work and will be remembered especially for her care of her team and their work to ensure that they were safe during the Covid restrictions.

Lastly, I thank the officials and special advisers in the Government Whips Office for their dedication to supporting me and the whole House through all the

changes over the last year. They have done so with great calmness and almost never-ending humour. I particularly thank Victoria Warren, Ben Burgess and Anishaa Aubeeluck, who sadly left the office in the course of this year, although I am pleased to say that they have not gone far—Victoria and Ben to the House of Commons and Anishaa to DCMS. Their legacy in the Government Whips Office will remain for a long time.

I wish them, the staff and Members of the House a healthy and peaceful Recess and a very happy Christmas.

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op): My Lords, I join the Government Chief Whip in paying tribute to all the staff of the House. We are all grateful for their service in the most challenging of times.

I pay particular tribute to three members of staff. Abiodun Aina was a housekeeper in the book team. Abi started work in the Victoria Tower in January 2012. She was a conscientious worker who cleaned the books, parchments, bookshelves and floors on the 12 floors of repositories. Abi was a team player who, during Covid, would change her shift pattern and help the early housekeeping team to complete their sanitising duties. Sadly, Abi passed away in July this year.

Caroline Bradford and Gill Reding retired from Hansard earlier this year. Caroline joined the Hansard team a decade ago. When she applied for her reporter post, she was asked in the interview what she thought her role was. She replied that she saw herself partly as everyone's mother and partly as the class clown. This made the interview panel laugh. She got the job and in the following decade was true to her word. The office is a quieter place without her, and her warmth and energy are sorely missed. We hope that her retirement has not been too full of grandmotherly babysitting duties and that she has plenty of time to enjoy herself.

Gill retired from the Hansard team after more than 30 years' service. Through her humour, the outstanding quality of her work and the open, honest and respectful way in which she related to everyone, she earned the respect of the whole Hansard team. Her whispered comments at the Hansard table will be sorely missed—although now it will be easier to keep a straight face when sitting there. The whole Hansard team wish her and her husband Jonathan well and the very best for her retirement.

I also join the Government Chief Whip in paying tribute to the staff in the Whips Office. They are always respectful when dealing with me and my colleagues in the Labour group, and we thank them very much for that. I worked closely with Victoria and Ben over many years. They are missed and we wish them well in their new roles.

I also thank all the staff who work in the Labour Whips Office. They managed to keep me on my feet and briefed, as well as all my colleagues. We would not be able to do our jobs without them. We thank them very much.

It is always a privilege to be in this House, and we would not be here if it were not for all the staff who serve us in every job they do. We thank them all and wish them and all Members here a happy and peaceful Christmas, and a good and happy new year.

Lord Stoneham of Droxford (LD): My Lords, I join in the tributes to all the staff who have kept us going this year, which has been exceptionally difficult. I would like to pay tribute to three members of staff.

I start with Pat Young, someone important to Peers. For 10 years she was the Members' finance clerk, well known to Peers for courtesy, good service, efficiency and a very happy nature. We are missing her greatly, particularly at the moment. She had special skills and a love for shopping. She was always able to find things for her colleagues, particularly those difficult-to-find and popular items. She worked quickly and had an extraordinary sense of humour, which was possibly necessary when dealing with us. She has retired to spend time with her family and grandchildren, support Chelsea Football Club and enjoy holidays in the sunshine.

Martin Lake joined the House in November 1998 as part of a new deal placement introduced by the new Labour Government at the time. He worked in the House for 23 years, being part of the Black Rod's Department and there at the start of the new Department of Facilities. He became a principal attendant in April 2012, reaching the top of the attendants' tree. He was very professional and always very well respected by his team and Peers.

Belinda Franzmann retired as a Hansard reporter this year after 34 years' service. She had an endless capacity for hard work and, over the years, must have reported many thousands of speeches with a characteristic passion for language. She was regarded as a very supportive and valued colleague who everybody in the Hansard department misses. They wish her well on her retirement. We wish all three and all the other members of staff who have retired in the past year well in a happy and healthy retirement.

I also join in the thanks to the Government Whips Office, particularly to Ben and Victoria who have moved on to greater things in the Commons. We wish them well and have greatly appreciated all the support and help they have given us. I also thank my office team and, more importantly, all staff members who have supported us through what has been a very difficult year.

On behalf of our group, I wish everybody a very happy Christmas and, hopefully, a much easier year ahead.

Lord Judge (CB): My Lords, I want to highlight three members of staff who are retiring.

Patronilha Ramos came to this country from Cape Verde in 1979 and worked in the National Health Service before she came to the House of Lords 15 years ago. Since then, she has worked predominantly in the River Room. Indeed, she was one of the first members of staff to work in the River Restaurant in its current location next to the Lords Terrace. She was a well-liked and respected member of the Catering and Retail Services team. Reports on her say she was a very positive person who was regarded as a loyal and hard worker. Just in case noble Lords all think that is dull, she could also be the life and soul of the party. Her ambition on retirement is to spend some quality time with her grandson, as well as visiting her 92 year-old mother in Cape Verde. Great-granny will have a lovely time when she goes.

Sally Nicholas was a Members' finance clerk. She is remembered for her special talent as a walking thesaurus and dictionary, which is a wonderful attribute. I wish I had that myself. She worked here for 14 years. Her bright and sunny disposition was evidenced by her habit, which must on occasions have been slightly disconcerting, of bursting into song while still at work and bringing cheer to the office by finding an appropriate song for any occasion and conversation. If anybody wishes to start singing now, I will defer to them. No? I will not defer, then. She was also characterised with that great quality, which so many members of our staff have, of staggering quickly—staggering under the burden but getting on with it.

The only thing I can say against her, which I will, is that she is a supporter of Chelsea Football Club. As a Leicester City supporter myself, we have in common a liking for a blue jersey. She will be greatly missed by her colleagues in the finance team but they know that she will enjoy her retirement—even if she is following Chelsea.

Donald McPherson was a kitchen porter for 11 years. He started working with us in 2010 and will finish tomorrow, on 17 December. He has worked in all of the Lords catering departments and is described by his colleagues as a man of a very friendly disposition who is always willing to help the team, and will be much missed.

I join in the general recognition, already paid by all the Whips, to the staff throughout the House, including those whom we will see, I hope, on 5 January when we come back. They have had a rough time but they have done wonderfully well. I thank them particularly for their patience in dealing with Members of this House who have occasionally failed to realise what huge pressures they have been working under.

I also thank the retiring people in the Chief Whip's Office—indeed, in all the Whips' offices. I do so with great pleasure because, sitting where I do, I realise how much of the business that goes on in this House and the ease with which it does, at least most of the time, is the result of careful work along that Corridor. I also hasten to point out on behalf of the Cross Benches that we do not have any Whips. We do not need them: we have Kate Long, who is worth anybody's office. I thank her and everybody who has helped.

International Development Strategy

Motion to Take Note

12.31 pm

Moved by Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale

That this House takes note of the plans by Her Majesty's Government to announce a new international development strategy for the United Kingdom in 2022.

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab): My Lords, I am grateful for this opportunity. I draw attention to my entry in the Lords register.

This week, across the United Kingdom, families of all faiths have been worrying about how they will manage to spend the holiday season, beginning next

[LORD MCCONNELL OF GLENSCORRODALE]
 week, with their families and, perhaps, their friends. However, my thoughts have been drawn constantly this week to those millions of people around the world for whom daily life is so unbearable and the future so threatening that, whatever small luxuries they might enjoy this holiday season, they are looking forward to 2022 with dread. Wherever they come from, those who are hungry and worried, who have been displaced and who are experiencing extreme weather events or conflict and violence, will look at the Christmas period as a time when those relentless pressures continue and are not abated.

This year, that is perhaps more true in Afghanistan than anywhere else, given the events of recent months. Not only is there drought, a vaccination rate below 10% and 2 million people in the country currently hungry as a result of this year's events, it is reckoned that perhaps as many as 1 million children under five could die in 2022 if emergency assistance is not available. Yesterday, the Disasters Emergency Committee launched an appeal for Afghanistan. I urge Members of your Lordships' House to support it this Christmas and think about those in much less fortunate circumstances than us.

This is a rare opportunity to debate a strategy that has not yet been published. I therefore very much welcome this opportunity and am grateful to be able to lead the debate. I thank the Minister for attending and for what I am sure will be an interesting summation of the debate. I also thank him for his work this year in ensuring that COP 26 focused not only on climate change but on moving the emergency of our natural resource depletion up the agenda and putting biodiversity at the centre of the debate in a way that had not been the case at previous climate summits.

I thank noble Lords for speaking in the debate but I am sure that we all miss Frank Judd, who would of course have contributed today had he been with us at the end of this year, as he was last Christmas. I hope that his regular call to think about the interdependence of our world will be at the forefront of our minds in our contributions today. I made my first contribution in your Lordships' House on 8 July 2010, speaking just after Lord Judd. At that time—it was a debate on international development—I referred to “signs of hope”. In my summation, I said:

“Let us build on them and help to build a safer and more prosperous world for us all.”—[*Official Report*, 8/7/10; col. 360.]
 That seems like a very long time ago.

In the years following that debate, the new Government appeared as enthusiastic as the previous one about international development and making a positive contribution overseas, with the establishment of the Building Stability Overseas Strategy, which evolved over the years into the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, and the commitment to 50% of ODA going to fragile and conflict-affected states. The commitment given by the previous Government to spend 0.7% of GNI on official development assistance was also enacted during that period.

The emerging consensus, which was perhaps stronger than it had ever been in our country, was that the UK's role as a development superpower was a key part of our soft power around the world and not just a moral

obligation—it is a moral obligation, of course; I will always insist that that is the primary purpose of the contribution that we make—but it was also in our own self-interest in building a better and safer world for all. Even in 2019, after all the division of the previous two or three years and that very divisive election campaign, there was still some consensus between the parties and their manifestos. The party that won that election, of course, had firm manifesto commitments to increase spending on girls' education, end malaria and maintain the commitment to 0.7% of our GNI being spent on official development assistance.

How different 2021 has been. In a year when our call to action should have been much stronger than ever before, with so many around the world suffering from vaccine inequality and the economic, educational and health challenges of lockdowns, we were the only leading nation in the world to cut our official development assistance. In a year when millions of youngsters missed out on school and millions of girls will not return to school, we cut the funding that we were going to give to girls' education. In a year when we led the climate summit in Glasgow and had a responsibility to show an example to the rest of the world, we fell short on transitional funding for the countries that will suffer most from climate change and will now potentially suffer most in the transition to a greener future. This year, we have seen the migration and displacement of people go to their highest levels ever. We have seen the number of people around the world in extreme poverty go up, rather than down, for the first time in a generation. We continue to see vaccine inequality causing difficulties and problems in every part of the world.

Since 2010 and that speech I made in my first month in your Lordships' House, I have tried very hard to work on a cross-party basis on international development and conflict issues, and to build friendships and collaborations across this House and another place to ensure that we take this agenda forward. I have tried to be optimistic at all times—even at the end of 2021, when I believe that the Government have made so many mistakes in this area of policy. I will try to be optimistic again today because the integrated review gave a commitment to a new international development strategy. It said that we would continue as a country to be a world leader on development. It said that we would restate our commitment to poverty eradication. It said that we would align our development spending and work with the Paris Agreement. It said that we would continue to work to achieve the SDGs by 2030. I welcome those commitments; I want to see them at the heart of this new strategy.

Today, I do not want to talk about how much is in the budget or how we spend the money; that is, the mechanics of delivery. I want to concentrate and what and why. This review should be an opportunity to review some of the inexplicable decisions that were made in 2021, such as the decision to almost completely clear out all UK funding for mine clearance around the world, which was just shameful. It should also be an opportunity to reinforce bilateral programmes again and give our ambassadors the sort of clout they could have had with an FCDO that was on the front foot rather than the back foot.

As the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, recently suggested in your Lordships' House, it should set out a plan to work towards 0.7% being back in place, not just as a hope, an aspiration or a surprise in some budget in two or three years' time, but as a step-by-step rebuild of the capacity and the spending. Also, much more importantly, it should set out priorities and a strategy. The objective and purpose of that strategy should be our contribution to the international effort to eradicate extreme poverty. That is the primary purpose of our official development assistance. The primary purpose of international development work should be to leave no one behind.

There is, of course, a role for the UK and others to contribute to immediate emergency humanitarian needs and, of course, we build into these strategies environmental considerations, the need for economic growth to sustain development, and the need for better governance and security, but poverty reduction is the moral purpose of development and the best way to ensure that our interests are met in the long-term, as well as the interests of those who suffer extreme poverty.

I suggest three key priorities for this strategy, which we hope will be published in the new year. First, it should be crystal clear throughout that we align our development spending and our work with the Paris Agreement and now, of course, with the agreements that were reached in Glasgow, and that we support the continuing UK COP 26 presidency by ensuring that we are working in a joined-up way between our development work and our work towards a greener and more environmentally friendly world. We should not be substituting development spending for the spending on the other initiatives that the Government should be pursuing in the UK's role as president of COP 26. We should focus our development spending on supporting just transitions and mitigating the impacts, and on disaster resilience in the meantime for those countries that suffer the most from extreme weather events and climate change.

The second priority that should run right through the strategy is a focus on girls and women. The new Foreign Secretary has already mentioned economic development as a key priority, and of course we want to see economic growth in the developing world that sustains development over the longer term. Women's economic empowerment, bringing women to the centre, will be by far the best investment for the long term to secure sustainable economic development. Alongside that, equal access to health, human rights, and the freedom to enjoy a childhood without being married early or having your body abused are fundamental, as is the need for girls' education, not just in primary school but right through secondary school and into further and higher education. Education is the great liberator. I think that the Prime Minister understands this and believes it. I implore him to turn it into action and funding, and to deliver more than just the words of the commitment.

The third area, which the Government have had a reasonably good record on over the last decade, is the commitment to conflict-affected and fragile states; I sincerely hope that that will be at the heart of the new strategy. Support for peacebuilding and conflict

prevention has been the hallmark of UK development work for two decades. In that debate in 2010, I said that

"development is the mortar of peace."—[*Official Report*, 8/7/10; col. 360.]

Development and peace are completely interlinked. Nelson Mandela said that you cannot get peace without development and you cannot get development without peace. We see today in Ethiopia how quickly incredible levels of development can fall apart when conflict re-emerges. We see in Afghanistan that without governance and stability, and without trust in institutions and a functioning democracy, how people's lives can be turned around in a matter of months.

We must retain our commitment to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. I would like to see the strategy reaffirm the commitment to 50% of the budget going to those states and these projects and development initiatives, putting democracy, human rights, trust in institutions and the rule of law, fighting injustice and protecting security at the heart of our development work. It is long-term, tough work, working with people—not "to" people or "about" people. This work is vital and makes such a difference. We have a ready-made framework for these priorities and for our development work if, as the G7 said in Cornwall back in June, we are serious about launching a drive towards what was then called the "build back better" world—a slightly strange title for a new initiative but welcome in its positivity.

The sustainable development goals agreed in 2015, which the UK played such a role in agreeing, pulling together and then promoting, address the key social needs of the world. They address the economic growth and security that are required to deliver those needs, and they address the foundations of a better-protected planet and of peace and security that will ensure that will ensure that development can be consistent and sustainable. The integrated review said that achieving the SDGs by 2030 remained a UK commitment. In the words of the Prime Minister at the last election, it is a ready-made framework for sustainable development and for building back a better world. I hope that those goals are embraced as part of this strategy.

In conclusion, I refer to the speech made by the new Foreign Secretary earlier this month at Chatham House, where she laid out her priorities. She talked in that speech of a "network of liberty", of putting freedom, in economic and political terms, at the heart of the UK's vision in the world. Liberty comes in many forms. You cannot trade if you do not have anything to trade. Freedom from oppression, fear and violence is important, but the freedom which allows people to go to school, to earn money, to have a job, to see opportunities and to take them up—these are the freedoms which will change the world. Just as I said in 2010 that development is the mortar of peace, I believe that development is the enabler of freedom. I hope that the new Foreign Secretary remembers that when she agrees this international development strategy.

We can all do better than we did in 2021 as we go into 2022. We should clearly resolve this Christmas and into the new year that 2022 will be very different from the 12 months that we are leaving behind. I beg to move.

12.47 pm

Baroness Sugg (Con): My Lords, I look forward to the publication of the international development strategy. A lot has changed in the UK since the previous strategy was published in 2015. Some of that change has been caused by factors beyond our direct control, such as the Covid pandemic, crises from Afghanistan to Ethiopia, and the impacts of extreme weather and climate change around the world. However, some of that change has been due to decisions made by this Government: the merger of the FCO and DfID, and the move from our commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on international development, while we have been assured is temporary. I look forward to that returning.

I do not want to dwell on this but will make one point on vaccines. The events of recent weeks have shown that we must redouble our efforts. As well as causing millions of deaths around the world, Covid is putting at risk the gains that we have made on development in recent decades. Counting our funding for vaccines within the self-imposed ceiling of 0.5% will inevitably hamper our efforts to help the rest of the world—and, therefore, ourselves—to deal with the virus and the variants that we will continue to see emerge from unvaccinated populations. There is little better investment that we can make at the moment. I strongly encourage the Government to think again and to fund global vaccination efforts over and above that 0.5% so that we can do more. The economic case, even if we look solely at the UK, could not be clearer.

There was little on development in the integrated review, so I look forward to the strategy fleshing out the details. In an attempt to be constructive, I acknowledge that the merger may bring some benefits, if the strategy recognises that development genuinely sits at the heart of the new department, as we have been repeatedly reassured. I hope that a new international development strategy, a new framework, will give a new impetus and direction of travel to the department, and involve the traditional diplomatic expertise from what was the FCO alongside the development expertise from what was DfID.

This strategy must lay the groundwork for rebuilding back to 0.7%, so it is critical that we get it right. While our work in international development is firmly in our national interest, I hope that we do not lose sight of the belief that tackling the world's biggest challenges is a reason in itself. The strategy must recognise the continued need to work to end extreme poverty, to leave no one behind and to achieve the sustainable development goals ably championed by the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, whom I thank for tabling this debate.

I hope that the new international development strategy has women and girls at its centre. I have been very pleased to hear the Foreign Secretary repeatedly say that her focus will be on women and girls, and I look forward to seeing the detail of what that means. It is certainly needed: global progress on gender equality is under threat, and the welcome advancements of recent decades are at risk, with the coronavirus pandemic and its secondary impacts disproportionately affecting women and girls. We are seeing a shadow pandemic of gender-based violence. Women remain economically restricted in many regions and, in some countries such as Afghanistan, their rights are being radically rolled back.

Ultimately, I would like to see the UK adopt a fully integrated feminist foreign policy. I believe that this approach is the best way for the UK to enable women and girls to flourish. This in turn helps achieve sustainable peace, build our allies' economic strengths, reduce poverty and support our national interest.

But, today, we are discussing the development strategy, so let us start there with a genuine feminist development policy. I have three suggestions for that, first on crisis response. Supporting gender equality around the world is one of the best investments the UK can make to help mitigate the impact of the pandemic, violent conflict and the climate crisis. The UK can improve the delivery of UK aid by using feminist principles to ensure that women and girls are included at every level of decision-making and that more resources are channelled directly to women-led organisations.

Secondly, the UK should lead the way to recovery from the pandemic by implementing the strong recommendations from the G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council. We will improve the pace and sustainability of economic growth if we adopt gender equality as a guiding principle for all economic recovery programmes.

Finally, sexual and reproductive health has sadly seen its funding cut by 85%. I declare my interest as co-chair of the APPG on Population, Development and Reproductive Health. Ensuring that women and girls can access vital health services and are able to make their own reproductive choices is critical to ending preventable maternal, newborn and child deaths. It is also essential to enabling all girls to receive a quality education to help them prosper, achieve their potential and contribute to economic growth in their countries.

Through the development strategy, the Government have a real opportunity to re-establish themselves as a leading supporter of the rights of women and girls to have control over their bodies and lives. The UK SRHR Network is calling for a commitment to spend an average of £500 million per year on sexual and reproductive health, which is only 4% of the UK aid budget and that is the same proportion as a year ago. That would make a critical contribution to supporting access to modern methods of contraception for the 218 million women and girls who want to avoid a pregnancy, and would help end the hundreds of thousands of maternal deaths and the millions of unsafe abortions we see every year.

I have just two questions for my noble friend the Minister on women and girls. First, will the Government publish the equalities impact assessment relating to the UK aid cuts? That has now been shared with the High Court as part of a recent legal case and, after nine months, I would welcome an answer on whether the Government will publish it. Secondly, I accept that we are waiting for the details on the announcement of the restoration of funding to women and girls to pre-cuts levels, but we should at least be told which year will be used as a benchmark for this.

The pandemic has impressed on us all that we are interconnected, and that the UK's peace and prosperity cannot be secured unless progress on gender equality is made across the world. The international development strategy can and should help us achieve this.

12.53 pm

Lord Sikka (Lab): My Lords, I draw attention to two issues that relate to the alleviation of poverty, social justice, human rights, and trade and development. First, the Pandora papers, the Panama papers, the Paradise papers and many others provide abundant evidence of global tax abuses, which deprive countries, especially poorer countries, of vital tax revenues. Those leaks highlight the role of accountants, lawyers and finance experts based in the UK, Crown dependencies and overseas territories, but the Government are yet to investigate, fine or prosecute any of the big accounting firms involved in those abuses. I hope the Minister can tell us whether any prosecutions are in the pipeline and, if not, why not.

The OECD also estimates that African countries lose at least \$50 billion in taxes due to corporate tax abuses, which is more than the aid they receive. The Government can help to curb these predatory practices by imposing trade sanctions on tax havens, including Crown dependencies and overseas territories, for facilitating this global looting. They can also embrace transparency by ensuring that country-by-country reporting evidence is made public and by requiring large companies to publish their tax returns. That can again help developing countries.

Secondly, can the Minister please examine the negative impact of stabilisation clauses imposed on poorer countries through foreign direct investment agreements? Many of these are brokered by the Government themselves. The FDI agreements are often between unequals and, in many cases, the corporations are financially and politically more powerful than the host countries. I have seen some agreements that are over 300 pages long and written in dense legal language. Most are not publicly available, as corporations insist on that, making it difficult for anybody in those poorer countries to seek redress for abuses.

Stabilisation clauses are widely used by transnational corporations to manage non-commercial risks by stabilising or freezing the terms and conditions of a project. In effect, the project becomes a state within a state, with its own laws and rules. These clauses generally guarantee for the investors, who are mostly in the western world, that the domestic laws affecting the investment will remain unchanged or frozen during the entire life of the project, which can be 50 to 100 years.

In many cases, such clauses exempt the investing company from local taxes, customs duties and other charges that local industry has to pay. One survey of 88 FDI contracts noted that

“the stabilization clauses in non-OECD countries are more likely than those in OECD countries to limit the application of new social and environmental laws to the investments”.

The clauses either do not allow new laws to apply to the project or force host Governments to compensate investors for compliance with new laws, which might be for a cleaner environment, cleaner water, better wages or better pensions. Corporations are supposed to be compensated by poorer countries.

Stabilisation clauses are usually accompanied by arrangements for arbitration. However, the arbitration is through business panels located in Washington DC,

Paris or London, which are empowered to make what are often called “final and irrevocable” decisions. Local people, who have never had sight of these agreements, have to ask foreign panels to adjudicate and they rarely succeed in bringing corporations to book.

One consequence of these arrangements is that local courts, lawyers and institutions of government do not develop the capacity to adjudicate on disputes. The enjoyment of human rights requires the state to develop appropriate regulation, enforcement and investigative systems. It cannot easily tackle discrimination at work, and gender and minority rights, without developing appropriate systems of corporate governance, law enforcement and a capacity to investigate suspect practices. However, the opt-outs guaranteed by stabilisation clauses and supported by the Government do not enable host countries to develop regulatory capacity, or the ability to monitor corporate activity, identify transgressors and meet their human rights obligations.

I ask the Minister to consider including the following items in the government strategy. First, the strategy should ensure that all FDI agreements by UK-based companies are made publicly available. Secondly, all FDI agreements must pass the human rights test. Thirdly, the UK Government must not broker any FDI agreement that constrains the power and right of host Governments to levy taxes and apply new laws to foreign investment.

12.59 pm

Lord Oates (LD): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale, on securing this important debate. In common with other noble Lords, I await the Government’s strategy with interest, although on my part, I am afraid, with little expectation. I will focus my remarks on three particular areas that, among others, need to be central to any development assistance strategy: first, strengthening health services; secondly, combating climate change; and, thirdly, underpinning democracy and the rule of law.

Strengthening health services must be a key focus of our strategy. The Government’s decision to slash the aid budget—and here I pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, for her commitment and integrity on this issue—was not only morally wrong but has proved detrimental to the health and well-being of our own citizens. Omicron is teaching us a hard lesson, but it is one that should have been obvious from the start: it is no good pulling up the drawbridges and putting the national interest before the interest of others because, in a global pandemic, the global interest is the national interest. The rich world cannot discharge its duty to protect its own citizens until it also discharges its duty to protect all the world. It is a parable for our times.

On Tuesday, the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, told the House that

“we are only as safe as everyone else is.”—[*Official Report*, 14/12/21; col. 135.]

So why are the Government making us all less safe by the savage cuts we are inflicting on aid budgets and the huge economic damage we are doing, and have done, to developing economies by the travel bans, now, happily, abandoned? It is no good the Government saying one thing while they do the exact opposite.

[LORD OATES]

As the Government develop their aid strategy, they must learn from this pandemic, because it is unlikely to be the last. They must work with G7 partners and other allies to help strengthen health services in low-income countries. The cuts are catastrophic to that process—over 50% in the case in many countries across Africa.

But it is not just on this perhaps self-interested aspect of health that the cuts are impacting. Funding to the UN family planning agency, as we heard from the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, has been cut by 85%. The ACCESS programme and the women's integrated sexual health programme have been cancelled, with projected cuts to family planning in 2021-22 estimated at over £132 million. The Foreign Secretary says that the Government are committed to prioritising women and girls, but once again their actions indicate the contrary. Cuts to sexual and reproductive health programmes not only undermine the health of women and girls but lead to unplanned and unwanted pregnancies, driving population growth, putting further pressure on resources and accelerating climate and ecological damage.

That brings me to the second plank in any strategy, which must be how we address climate change. Low-income countries are on the front line against climate change, despite being the least responsible for it. We have a solemn duty to use our aid budget to help those countries decarbonise their economies so that they can develop and grow without inflicting further climate and ecological damage to themselves and other countries. It is no good the Government telling us that they are increasing climate finance while slashing the overall aid budget. Low-income countries are not stupid: a cut in funding is a cut in funding, however it is distributed across different pots of money.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, underpinning democracy and the rule of law must be at the heart of our aid strategy, because without good governance there is little prospect of aid achieving its long-term success, and without the rule of law individuals cannot live in the security and freedom that they have a right to deserve, and economies cannot prosper. Again, however, the Government say one thing and do another.

Yesterday, the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, said in his response to a question about supporting Zambia's democracy:

"The noble Lord talks about Zambia, and of course we have worked very closely with other key partners in ensuring that democracy not only prevails but is sustained."—[*Official Report*, 15/12/21; col. 300.]

Yet the aid budget sends the opposite signal. Zambia, a country that in August saw free elections that resulted in an orderly transfer of power, will see its aid budget slashed by 58.6%—more than any other country in the southern Africa region. Malawi, whose judges acted without fear or favour to uphold the rule of law and defend democracy in 2020, receives the second-largest cut, at 51.5%. Meanwhile, Zimbabwe, a country I care about deeply but whose autocratic, quasi-military Government have looted the country, oppressed its people and ruined its economy, receives the smallest aid cut, and continues to receive more in aid than Zambia and Malawi combined. Can the Minister tell us what signal he thinks that sends to democrats on one hand and to dictators on the other?

Let me be clear: I do not want vital humanitarian aid to be cut to anyone, and I am appalled that mine clearance work in Zimbabwe has been halted, particularly given that those mines were planted by the former racist Rhodesian forces. But I want us to signal clearly that we will stand with democracies by providing enhanced and practical support to those countries that uphold democratic norms and the rule of law. We are doing the opposite.

1.06 pm

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, during the Cross-Bench debate in April on the reduction in UK development aid, the Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Goldsmith, told us

"I am determined ... that we return to 0.7% as quickly as we can".—[*Official Report*, 28/4/21; col. GC 558.]

In thanking the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, for initiating today's debate, I agree with him that the sooner we can restore funding for initiatives such as girls education, cut by 25%, and humanitarian preparedness for famine, the better.

In addition to hard-edged aid, UK funding does other extraordinary things, with, for instance, BBC World Service audiences reaching 364 million people—up 13 million people last year. I hope the Minister can tell us when the World Service, a global force for good, is likely to receive confirmation of its funding figures for 2022 onwards, and whether it will be sufficient to ensure that the World Service can continue to build on the success of World 2020 programmes and further expand its global reach.

In every context, secure and sustained funding is crucial to the credibility we have in sustaining of our relationships, a point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, on many occasions. But so is the way we use the money. I will never forget seeing the bombed remains of a clinic, a school and the homes of villagers I visited in South Sudan during the civil war, which claimed 2 million lives. Along with lost lives, millions of pounds of development aid was destroyed by Khartoum's aerial bombardment of what were its own citizens. Now independent, South Sudan still struggles against all the odds to recover from that unspeakable violence.

Conflict destroys development, so a primary objective of our new development strategy must be to prevent and resolve conflict. Conflict also drives displacement, contributing to the 82.4 million people displaced worldwide, 42% of whom are children and 32% of whom are refugees—an issue the House will debate on a Cross-Bench Motion on 6 January. How are we using the £400 million earmarked by the FCDO to promote conflict management and resolution? What progress has been made in developing recently created FCDO initiatives for conflict mediation and stability, and in co-ordinating all conflict work right across government?

I will give some specific examples of the urgency of this task. I co-chair the All-Party Group on Eritrea. We have held a series of meetings and hearings on the conflict in Tigray. This conflict erupted a year ago and has resulted in thousands murdered, injured and subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment, and thousands subjected to sexual violence as a weapon of war. The exact numbers are not known and will not be until

a comprehensive and independent investigation is conducted. In northern Ethiopia alone, more than 7 million people now need humanitarian assistance. In Tigray, more than 5 million people need food and an estimated 400,000 people are living in famine-like conditions. Assistance there is hindered by the ongoing inability to move cash, fuel and supplies into the region. No aid trucks have reached Mekelle amid continued airstrikes. This catastrophe is manmade. Only today the Africa Minister, Vicky Ford, wrote to me to say that the situation in Tigray is catastrophic.

Tomorrow, the United Nations Human Rights Council will host its 33rd special session, which will focus on the human rights situation in Tigray and consider a mechanism for monitoring and investigating human rights violations in the country. The mechanism would preserve evidence of those atrocities and, where possible, identify those responsible—a crucial step towards justice and accountability—but I am told that a lack of funding may delay its establishment. I implore the Minister to investigate this, consider making a UK contribution towards the mechanism and encourage other states to do so.

To stop the flow of refugees, we must focus on the push factors of war, conflict, persecution and instability. As a trustee of the Arise Foundation, I have seen the interplay between trafficking and modern slavery and the mass movement of people. The 10 countries on the global slavery index with the highest prevalence of modern slavery and exploitation are in the top 50 fragile states, from Afghanistan to the Central African Republic. This conflict has disfigured life.

Let us take Nigeria, which has a flourishing domestic and international trade in human trafficking, from so-called baby factories to forced labour and sexual exploitation. It faces an array of complex challenges, from food insecurity and political instability to what many believe to be a developing genocide in the north, where an estimated 2.7 million internally displaced people are living in camps. More than half the population live on less than \$1.90 a day, with millions facing acute medical needs, including 30% of the global cases of malaria and more than 20% of the deaths. As many leave their homes in search of a promised life, who can blame them? Over the past decade, we have given Nigeria £2 billion in aid, but too little of it has tackled the root causes of violence and built resilience and safety at local level.

In 2019, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact found that DfID did not fully support the long-term health of the civil society sector in its funding and partnership practices. That must change. We need long-term relationships with trusted parties, which will often be small, local institutions, often those within faith traditions. The integrated review invited focus on initiatives that produce

“the greatest life-changing impact in the long-term.”

The new strategy must surely address this issue.

Finally, a new development strategy should also combat the malign influence of the CCP as it subverts international institutions, including the Commonwealth, and uses belt and road to further its military interests, especially in Africa. If the Government address some of these things and those initiatives receive commensurate funding, they will deserve our support.

1.12 pm

Lord Balfe (Con): My Lords, I shall begin with two points that I do not think anyone will disagree with. First, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, on obtaining this debate and, secondly, I reaffirm my support, which I think is widely reflected in the House, for 0.7% of GNI to be used as overseas aid. That is probably where I end the consensus.

I know this debate is about the Government announcing a new international development strategy. I hope that the word “new” will be kept to the fore, because I have thought for quite a long time that there are many things in our development strategy that could be bettered. One of them is that, as the brief says, we need a globally focused UK to maintain its commitment to Africa while increasing development efforts in the Indo-Pacific—but I think we have to look at what we spend the money on.

I have made many visits to aid projects. Some aid projects funded and excellently run by British NGOs are doing little more than running perpetual food banks. We should have the Trussell Trust out there. I recall one project I visited in India which was teaching women how to cook. I thought it was a very good thing that a number of mainly English people—I think there was one Scottish person—were teaching Indian women how to cook rice. Of course, they were doing something more serious and were looking at nutrition, babies and the like, but they were only scratching surfaces. They were not really dealing with problems. I often reflect on the statement that we had years ago on aid agency posters: “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for life.” We need to do far more to help people to develop.

If we are to integrate aid and have an international development strategy, it would not be a bad idea to have a closer look at arms sales. Look at the amount of destruction in the world—which aid is often there to try to get around—that is being caused by arms, often from British factories and very often from western factories. We go in, we bomb the place to bits and then we have an aid programme to build it up, presumably to get into shape for the next bombing. Forty years ago, I was involved with Ethiopia. We really thought that we were curing the problems of Ethiopia and that Band Aid, Geldof and all the initiatives that were run, principally in the 1980s and early 1990s, were going to rebuild a new Ethiopia, but it is back to where it was, and that must surely in part be caused by a failure of our aid projects.

I suggest that we should have two principal approaches in our aid projects. First, we need to look very carefully at the Chinese belt and road initiative with a view to us having set initiatives where we put money into projects that are good for the development of the country but that we see through as projects. Forty years ago, I worked for the Crown Agents; it was quite close to here. It used to set up projects in what were then the colonies to help get them ready for independence. Clearly, we are a long way on from there, but the principle of us looking at a project, sending the engineers, costing the project and either finding or lending the money was quite sound, and many of the institutions, such as the Nigerian railway system, which was built

[LORD BALFE]

by the Crown Agents, have stood the test of time extremely well. We need to look at our own belt and road initiative.

Secondly, there is soft power. I very much take the points made by the noble Lord, Lord Alton, about the BBC. The BBC World Service is one of the great triumphs of British soft power. I am told that it is listened to by around 456 million people in the world. Its Arabic audience alone is more than 40 million people. This is an area where we can get over our values and get them over in a way that is acceptable, because the World Service is probably one of the finest neutral broadcasters in the world. By neutral, I mean that you do not turn it on and say, “We are going to find out what the Brits want today”. It is a genuine news service. I also say to the Minister: stop cutting the FCO budget. To move the FCO into increasingly grim surroundings is not a good idea. I ask the Minister to look at maintaining and, indeed, increasing the FCO budget. Those are a couple of points to think about.

1.18 pm

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, I too pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, for obtaining this really important debate and for his passionate and informed introduction, which set the scene so well for us.

The omicron variant is a powerful and topical reminder that there is only one world and only one human race. There are people around who want to make out the case that our concern for international development is an additional cost, something added on the side. Actually, when we truly grasp what it is about, it is a real win-win for us. Apart from it being morally right, it will make economic sense for us as well as helping us address many issues. For example, helping other countries to flourish and thrive will increase their health systems, address things such as the pandemic we currently face and even begin to address some of the issues of economic migrants, so it is vital for us.

The noble Lord, Lord McConnell, rightly pointed out that the endgame is to try to end poverty and move beyond it. That is right, but how are we going to do it? First, the immediate pressing issue is addressing the pandemic. Some might say that we are talking about a long-term strategy. Students of pandemics tell us that it typically takes five, six or seven years as a disease works its way through populations, and we are not even in year three yet—we have not even completed two years. This is going to be going on for some while, so it is vital that we address this issue. That touches on a number of the issues that people have already raised, such as doing what we can to help provide vaccines, trying to licence vaccine production in other countries and indeed, as we were talking about earlier this week, overcoming vaccine hesitancy. I will not say any more about that but we in the Anglican Communion are seeking to work with our overseas links, providing teaching materials in local languages, led by local community leaders, to try to overcome vaccine hesitancy.

In the longer term we need to invest in democracy and the rule of law. Many of the problems that we face, which the noble Lords, Lord Alton and Lord Balfe,

have mentioned, have come about because of conflict and poverty and because there is no investment whereby people are committed to making their own country thrive and flourish. As the noble Lord, Lord Sikka, pointed out, sometimes this is because of endemic corruption. So, in the long run these things are vital to any strategy we have for leading the world by example. It is vital that we continue to stump up and provide observers at elections, and that we seek to work for the international rule of law.

Equally important is the issue of fair trade. If countries can develop their economies they will be able to provide for their own people, which would address a whole range of the issues that now confront us. The establishment of fair trade, the democratic imperative and the rule of law relate deeply to some of the other issues that a number of noble Lords have mentioned today. For example, in a world of fake news where people are simply being misled, the BBC World Service is vital. Personally, I am sorry that we seem to have lost so many of our libraries in some parts of the country. Certainly, when I was travelling in the 1980s and 1990s around remote parts of Africa, you would find people travelling in in order to read the British press. Nowadays the equivalent would be to get on the internet. These are things that make a tangible difference to our future.

Equally important is education. One of the things that this new global Britain can compete in is education. I find it extraordinary that we seem to be making it more difficult for people to come here; that ought to be one of our major engagements. Not only are we able to train people, and it is a win-win when they come here, but many of them then go back to their own countries and they will be the key people—the doctors, the politicians—making a real difference in their own communities. Any international development strategy ought to look holistically at how we develop some of the things we are brilliant at, and which we ought to be celebrating and building on. We are not going to be able to compete in many aspects of manufacturing, because they are costly, but we can contribute hugely to education, not least by training more doctors, for example, so that other countries can deal with the terrible pandemic that is ahead of us. I also echo what the noble Lord, Lord Balfe, said a few moments ago about cuts to the FCDO and the lack of investment in languages; at this time, we need to invest in these things.

Those are some of the issues that we need to navigate through the Covid pandemic if we are to develop our historic role in the world and play our part in building a stronger, calmer, more just and more peaceful world.

1.25 pm

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger (Con): My Lords, I draw the attention of the House to my interests. I too congratulate the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, on having secured this debate today and introducing it with his usual expertise.

Last Friday was Human Rights Day, a day to celebrate the anniversary of the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to celebrate our shared humanity. It reminds us why international development is so important—helping to address extreme

poverty, encouraging human rights and promoting democratic and peaceful societies—and how vital the sustainable development goals are, with their ethos of leaving no one behind.

At a time when the world is under such strain through Covid and climate change, it is deeply regrettable that the UK decided to reduce its contribution from 0.7% of GDP to 0.5%, and I look forward to aid being restored to 0.7% as soon as possible. However, we should not forget what those aid cuts have meant to those on the ground. The International Rescue Committee tells me that between 2017 and 2021 the FCDO decreased funding for one of its flagship Syria projects by 75%. This resulted in cutting support for the operation of 20 health facilities, impacting some 76,000 individuals. Their livelihood centres had to close, and cuts to programmes there affected over 36,000 people across northern Syria, over half of them women and most of them living below the poverty line. Some 10 million people may lose access to WASH programmes in this year alone.

I welcome the Government's announcement of a new international development strategy for next year and the Foreign Secretary's announcement of her commitment to putting women and girls at the heart of UK foreign policy, including reversing aid cuts to programmes targeting women and girls. As she rightly said, the UK's

“core agenda of promoting freedom and democracy cannot happen without freedom for women.”

Covid has exacerbated existing gender inequalities, pushing women's rights backwards. Women are losing jobs faster in the pandemic due to being in more insecure work; for example, in Africa 90% of women work in the informal economy. The UK's present focus on girls' education could not succeed without also addressing other issues, including combating the violence that many women face; ensuring healthcare, sexual health and reproductive rights; promoting economic empowerment; improving women's meaningful participation in the public and political spheres; and funding women's rights organisations.

I am also delighted to hear of the Foreign Secretary's commitment to the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative and the announcement of a summit next year. The PSVI was always going to be a marathon, not a sprint, and we need to keep building on the work already undertaken to ensure that sexual violence in conflict becomes a red line that should never be crossed.

The brutal takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban is such an unnecessary catastrophe. After 20 years of work there, not to mention the lives lost of our courageous military, the many who have sustained life-changing injuries and the billions of pounds spent on aid, it is a tragedy to see the country slipping backwards. I am also somewhat mystified by the US, which keeps talking about how Afghanistan must not become a haven for terrorism when one of the world's most wanted terrorists, Sirajuddin Haqqani, is now the Afghan Minister of the Interior. Although the Taliban says that it has formed a Government, it has no experience of actually governing and has been committing brutal atrocities. So it is not surprising that a terrible humanitarian crisis is unfolding there, with many starving, and terrible reports of some women having to sell their babies to feed the rest

of their families. I welcome the announcements of aid going in, but we must make sure that it is delivered to the grass roots through the UN and the NGOs. How do we ensure that it reaches the most vulnerable—those fearful and in hiding, the widows who can no longer go out on their own, the young men fearful of being seized to be recruited into the Taliban, the young girls fearful of being snatched to become brides for fighters?

I also hope that my noble friend the Minister can assure me that funding will be restarted for educational projects such as Leave No Girl Behind, community-based education and, of course, health projects. One of the successes of the last 20 years was the empowerment of women in Afghanistan. It went from a situation in 2001 where there were hardly any girls in schools to one where its brave women had come forward to take their place in society as politicians, doctors, teachers and army officers. But now the country has reverted, with not a woman in any senior position and the majority of girls denied access to secondary schools.

Women's networks and organisations have played an important role in Afghanistan. I hope that we will continue to fund them in this difficult time. Who can forget the harrowing scenes in the summer at Kabul airport? I congratulate the Government on getting out 15,000 people in such a short time. Many of the high-profile women have had to leave, which has been traumatic for them. They find themselves in a strange country with no job and no means of supporting themselves. This is very hard.

Perhaps the Minister can tell me: why are we talking only to the men in Afghanistan about the future? The women who have had to leave wish to participate and have their voices heard about the future of their country. We must not desert them now; we have a moral duty to help them and ensure that they are at the table in a practical way. Can financial support be found for them so that they can organise and lobby too, for the future of their country? I look forward to the new international development strategy and hope that we can continue to support the most marginalised in the world in these difficult times.

1.31 pm

Baroness Greengross (CB): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, for securing this important debate today, the last sitting day of 2021. As this year draws to a close, the Government are being criticised for many of their policies and decisions. As a Cross-Bencher, I do not want to indulge in party-political point-scoring but the decision of the Government to reduce foreign aid spending from 0.7%, as recommended by the United Nations, down to 0.5% has been one of their worst actions to date.

The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, has promised that this decrease is a temporary measure due to the pressures on spending caused by the pandemic. One can sympathise with the Government having to make difficult spending decisions at this time, but that is not the right decision to have made. The Government's announcement of a new international development strategy in 2022 is welcome. This country must reset its priorities on the international stage, and it is an opportunity to restore Britain's reputation and show that we are, once again, leaders in this area.

[BARONESS GREENGROSS]

One of the Government's development priorities is global health security; specifically, to position the UK at the forefront of the international response to Covid-19. In June, the Prime Minister promised that the UK Government would join other G7 countries in using surplus vaccines to immunise the whole world. In September, at a summit chaired by President Biden, a December target of 40% vaccination was set for the 92 poorest countries. Three months on, there is little chance of this target being met in at least 82 of those nations.

According to WHO figures, the UK has delivered only 11% of the vaccines that it had earlier promised to the developing world, with the European Union doing marginally better by delivering 19% of what it promised, and the US 25%. WHO figures show that in Zimbabwe, only 25% of the population have received their first Covid-19 vaccine and only 19% have had both doses. In Namibia, only 14% have received their first vaccine and 12% both doses. It is little wonder that Covid-19 has continued to spread and mutate, meaning that we are now having to respond to the omicron variant.

To quote former Prime Minister Gordon Brown "our failure to put vaccines into the arms of people in the developing world is now coming back to haunt us".

Instead of cutting the overseas development assistance budget, the money could at least have been redeployed to improve vaccination rates in the world's poorest nations. We should have done so not just for global humanitarian reasons but because slowing the spread and mutation of Covid-19 internationally would have reduced pressure on the NHS and helped to keep the population of this country safe.

The other point I would like to make is on the Government's support for the Leave No One Behind pledge, committing themselves to strengthening the inclusion of older people and people with disabilities in development strategy. Yesterday, the Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, responded to my Written Question asking whether the Government's new international development strategy will include specific recognition of the contributions, rights, and needs of older women and men by saying:

"The forthcoming International Development Strategy will establish an ambitious vision informed by the new global context, aligned with our strategic development goals and demonstrate how the UK plans to remain a global leader on development. The forthcoming refreshes of the Disability Inclusion Strategy and Strategic Vision for Gender Equality will retain a life cycle approach to deliver transformative change for all".

That commitment is reassuring, as the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's ministerial portfolios no longer publicly include reference to inclusive societies. Can the Minister please confirm that the Government are not deprioritising the inclusion agenda and how they will ensure that the implementation of this strategy specifically includes groups at risk of marginalisation, such as older people?

Also, given the Government's previous commitments to include ageing as an important factor in the former Department for International Development's efforts to tackle extreme poverty, how will they ensure that the rights and needs of people of all ages, including older people, are included? Will the international

development strategy be explicit about poverty reduction, ensuring that those older people who are left furthest behind are included?

The international development strategy is, as the Minister said in his written response to me yesterday, an opportunity to

"establish an ambitious vision informed by the new global context". This country must show global leadership on international development; the new strategy is an opportunity for us to do much better than we have up to now. I look forward to the Minister's response.

1.38 pm

Lord Desai (Non-Affl): My Lords, I must declare that for much of my academic life, I studied development and have written a lot about it. I did a lot of work on human development. Coming from India, I have also been observing over the last 60 years the course of development aid.

While I am very impressed by the idealism shown by speakers today, and I thank the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, for introducing his debate, I am afraid I do not take part in the idea that foreign aid, development aid or overseas development aid—whatever you want to call it—actually does very much of what it is claimed to do. Ultimately, I am glad that DfID has become part of the Foreign Office, because development aid is an arm of diplomacy. The noble Lord, Lord Balfe, and the right reverend Prelate talked about soft power and it is about that. You are buying soft power; that is why we give money away.

After all, if we want to cure poverty, there is a lot of poverty at home. There are food banks here; our pensions are the lowest in Europe. Of course, you could say that our poor are not really poor—the real poor are out there. But if you look at what has eliminated poverty in Asia, by and large, in China, India, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan, it was industrialisation, which was helped a lot by the entry of foreign capital. This is a professional observation; I am not making these things up. We deindustrialised and Asia industrialised—that is the simple story of the 1970s and 1980s.

When it comes to poverty reduction, if we really believe that foreign aid is for poverty reduction, we should give money to the poor—find where the poor are and give cash to them. I remember saying this in your Lordships' House about 15 years ago, when the noble Baroness, Lady Amos, was the Minister for DfID. At the time, \$50 billion was spent on overseas aid, and I said that we should give \$50 to each poor person, and that is it—that would do more to cure poverty than anything I know of. Of course, we do not do that; we have a very elaborate model of what poverty is and what we want to eliminate.

As we have observed this afternoon, very sincerely, all sorts of things can be related to poverty—political unrest, gender discrimination and all sorts of other things, which I do not want to repeat. One has to have a clear argument as to how the many things we do are actually going to reduce poverty. In the very nice paper produced by the Library, I see that in the ODA allocations by thematic areas for 2021-22, 40% of the money goes on two items: "programmes with cross-cutting themes", whatever that means, and

"Arm's-length bodies, international subscriptions and other fixed costs".

Those two items take £3 billion out of the £8 billion. I really do not know what they do, but they must do something. How much money goes on hiring consultants who tell us why teaching women cooking in India actually reduces poverty in India? I am sure that there is a lovely consultation paper that would tell us how to do that.

I am sorry to be a *Daily Mail*-like person here this afternoon, but after 60 years of studying foreign aid I am no longer starry-eyed about it. I would like the Government at some stage to do some thinking about whether money going abroad actually reduces poverty or whether it just encourages lots of NGOs. Secondly, is a pound spent abroad good enough, or should we spend it at home, because we have food banks, gender discrimination, disability problems and low pensions? Universal credit has just been cut in this country. What is all the money for? After 60 years of foreign aid, should we not leave our arrogance behind and say, “It is not really up to us to go out and cure poverty there, which we don’t even know anything about”? Give it a break.

1.44 pm

Viscount Eccles (Con): My Lords, it is quite a challenge to follow the noble Lord, Lord Desai. He used to sit opposite me, but now he is in the middle.

I come out of the CDC stable, which has been variously known as the Colonial Development Corporation and the Commonwealth Development Corporation, and now is known as the CDC Group. It used to be funded, in my day, by loan capital, on which we paid interest before we repaid the loans; we even paid corporation tax. The CDC Group is a limited liability company owned by us and controlled by the FCDO. It does not pay its shareholders any dividends, does not have to pay for loan capital, and it does not pay corporation tax. So one thing you can say about the strategy that has been followed is that life is a good deal easier than it was in my day.

I am very grateful to the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, for inviting us to think about strategy, which is a long-term business. I follow the noble Lord, Lord Alton, on the matter of conflict resolution in the document that we are all looking forward to as a strategic document. I hope that it will not duck some of the hard questions about conflict resolution. I shall raise only one. On the Commonwealth member Cameroon, is there going to be some hard information in this strategy about our contribution to resolving the quite unnecessary conflicts there?

In thinking about long-term strategy, another thing that should not be ducked, which is of course related to all the points that have been made about women’s education and life chances in this debate, is population. It is a very difficult subject. The birth rate in western Europe is now around 1.5 babies per fertile woman; in sub-Saharan Africa, it is about 4.5 babies—actually 4.7, I think—which is three times as many. Whereas the population of western Europe is now not estimated to grow very much more, the population in sub-Saharan Africa is predicted to double by 2050. All I want to say about that is that, in any strategic document, it is an amazing challenge: what are we actually going to do about it as a practical matter?

There are some signs—and I, like the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, am basically an optimist. The world’s peak population was predicted to get to 13 billion some 20 years ago, when predictions were being made. I think that we all agree that the world’s population is putting too much pressure on Mother Nature, hence the way that climate change and biodiversity loss have gone up the agenda. It seems to me that any strategic document cannot duck the issue of man’s pressure on Mother Nature. It must be in some way dealt with, or at least commented on. Silence will not do.

Now the world’s peak population is predicted to be about 9.8 billion, and then to go down a bit, so the world’s fertility rates are falling—and they are falling even in sub-Saharan Africa. The question is whether we welcome that. In the *Times* newspaper this morning there was an article about Italy that said it had its lowest recorded fertility rate for a very long time. The question is whether Italy should welcome that, or whether it should be in despair because it is not going to have enough young people to support old people like me. These are difficult decisions.

Finally, I welcome some of the things our new Foreign Secretary has done in preparation for this strategy. CDC, which is going to change its name, will be empowered to go back to work in many small and medium-income countries in which we have worked for most of our 73 years: the Caribbean, Papua New Guinea and so on. In small and medium countries—Malawi, for example—the economic opportunities are not very great, but unless you can develop the private sector those economies will not prosper, and CDC is an extremely good vehicle to achieve that development.

1.50 pm

Lord Londesborough (CB): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, for bringing this important and very timely debate to the House. I will focus on two key issues: first, the longer-term impact of the Government’s decision to slash overseas aid by 30%, and secondly, the insufficient allocation of aid to Covid and global health. These two issues are of course connected.

With respect to reducing our contributions from 0.7% to 0.5% of GNI, many of us on all sides of the House have stated how unjust and poorly timed this measure is. It cuts our aid by almost £4 billion per annum, not just this year but for another two to three years by the Chancellor’s own estimates, and I fear probably beyond that. Why beyond? Because we may fail to meet the Chancellor’s two fiscal tests to restore the 0.7% contribution: that the UK is running a current budget surplus and that the ratio of underlying debt to GDP is falling. The Chancellor hopes to meet these tests by fiscal year 2024-25. But it was already a close call on both counts when they were announced six months ago. The OBR has since admitted to “modest headroom” on the debt target, which could be wiped out by the 1% lower growth or rising interest rates.

Since then, we have seen a slowing of GDP growth, we learned yesterday of a jump in inflation to 5.1%, and there is the rising menace of the omicron variant, all of which put government finances under further strain. Our overseas aid could be depressed for as many years as the Chancellor doggedly clings to these fiscal tests.

[LORD LONDESBOROUGH]

I therefore ask the Minister: in light of the changing economic landscape, do the Government have any plans to reconsider these fiscal tests? Such uncertainty over our aid budget clearly undermines our international strategy and the aim for the UK to be one of the world's leading development players—let alone our bid to become “global Britain”.

This brings me to my second point. If ever there was a need for the UK to step up and show some sorely needed leadership, it is in the area of global health. The noble Lord, Lord McConnell, referenced the moral case for addressing vaccine inequality, as well as the economic case mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg. The FCDO's spend allocation for Covid-19 and global health for this year stands at just £1.3 billion. This includes our commitment to the WHO and COVAX, and the donation of 100 million vaccines—although we learned two days ago that only 16 million have been delivered so far. You can argue, as I do, that our contribution to fighting the global pandemic should not be coming out of the annual aid budget at all, especially in its newly diminished state. In the face of the world's worst health crisis for 100 years, the sum of £1.3 billion sends out a feeble signal to the rest of the world, especially to our fellow members of the G7.

Omicron is a stark reminder that we need to vaccinate the world, and quickly. There are 5 billion adults to vaccinate—6 billion if that includes those aged over 15—and they may need three or even four doses each. Richer nations may therefore need to donate more than 10 billion doses a year, yet COVAX's target this year is 2 billion doses and only 600 million of those have so far been delivered. Here we are in the UK, with 80% of us already double-vaccinated, now scrambling madly for our boosters to protect us against a variant that emerged from a continent where the single dose vaccination rate is less than 12%. Where will the next variant come from? It is very likely to be from another country with high population density, poverty, poor healthcare and low vaccination rates.

Turning to the economic argument, the cost of the pandemic's damage to the world's economy is approaching \$10 trillion, while the cost of vaccinating the world is estimated at \$50 billion to \$100 billion. Such a cost would represent history's greatest bargain, so why has there been such a gulf in world leadership? Where are the G7, OECD, IMF and others on this issue—or are we going to continue to leave it to COVAX and the WHO? The UK's approach is symptomatic of the problem: we are aiming to contribute just 100 million doses from an emasculated aid budget. As the fifth largest economy in the world, the UK should be leading by example. A £5 billion contribution to help finance 1 billion vaccines would be nearer the mark; Japan, Germany, France and Canada are contributing at similar levels, and the US considerably more.

Beyond the economic damage, the secondary impacts of Covid such as collapsing healthcare, gender-based violence and deepening poverty are the very areas that need our aid and assistance. But our contributions cannot keep up with demands if we do not help to protect the world from the pandemic. My second question to the Minister is this: what plans do the

Government have to radically review the UK's global health contributions as we approach the third year of a global pandemic?

1.57 pm

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, for securing this debate. I start from the point made by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans: that no one is safe until everyone is safe, as has been so acutely brought home by Covid. To be more specific, current science suggests that the omicron variant probably arose in someone who was immunocompromised and untreated for HIV. That demonstrates how the world's healthcare systems are crucial to the health of us all.

Even more broadly, no one is secure—we cannot be secure—until everyone in the world is. Our failed foreign policies, our role as one of the chief arms peddlers in the world and our refusal to accept the rightful desire of self-determination from peoples around the world has put the world, and us, in the position it is in today. I particularly commend the speech of the noble Lord, Lord Sikka. We have to stop being the world's chief enabler of corruption. This is a neocolonial continuation of the colonial exploitation that made so much of the world so poor.

I will address the comment of the noble Lord, Lord Desai, suggesting that it is not up to us to cure poverty. First of all, it is up to us to stop causing poverty through the actions of our institutions and our companies. It is surely up to us to repair some of the damage we have done and continue to do, both through overseas development assistance and through reparations. It is obvious that the need for the strategy we are all anxiously awaiting and previewing today is more acute in these times of straitened ODA budgets. It is estimated that this year, we are down to about £11 billion, from nearly £15 billion the year before.

Like other noble Lords, I am sure, I received a number of briefings from major institutions in the UK making entirely well-founded special pleadings. The noble Lords, Lord McConnell and Lord Oates, referred to the Mines Advisory Group and the fact that there has been a 75% cut in funding in that area, which is unconscionable. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists—picking up on points made by the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, on the slashing of funding for sexual and reproductive health—says that at least 5% of the budget should go to mother and baby health. Save the Children points out that our bilateral aid to Africa is at a 15-year low in real terms, and likely to fall below that of most of the G7. It asks—I would be interested in the Minister's comments on this—that poverty reduction be the chief aim of the strategy. Sightsavers makes a really important point about the need for disability-inclusive development.

In introducing all this, the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, said that it was not about the budget but about how we use it. I am afraid this must be about the budget, because we cannot meet even our most urgent, crucial priorities in the current framework. I believe the Minister would love to go back to the department and say, “More money for ODA”, but I realise the barrier he faces. I have a different proposal for him to

take back that is not just about more money. It does not come from me but from more than 50 Nobel laureates, who this week signed an open letter calling for a “peace dividend” campaign—for all countries to cut their military spending by just 2% a year for the next five years and put half the money into a UN fund to combat pandemics, the climate crisis and extreme poverty. To name a couple of the UK signatories, there is Sir Roger Penrose—UK mathematician, philosopher of science and physics laureate—and the biologist and Cambridge University professor Sir Venki Ramakrishnan. The Dalai Lama is also a signatory.

The proposers say that this fund could amount to \$1 trillion by 2030. To look at the numbers in this, UK defence spending is currently about £50 billion—given that figure, the NHS, which gets about £200 billion, is remarkably good value for money. Taking 2% from UK defence spending—£1 billion a year—would not be utterly transformative but it would go a long way, particularly in the priority areas that NGOs have been making such powerful representations to us about. It would mean a 10% increase in the budget. Green Party policy, I must say, is to have 1% of GDP—about £20 billion—for the official development assistance budget, which would meet most of the most urgent priorities.

I finish by stressing that all this is a relative drop in the ocean compared to the damage we continue to do every day. We must really look at our place in the world; we often hear that the Government wish to be world leading. Here is a very practical example, which I hope the Minister will at least take back and ask for a discussion about, of how we could be truly world leading in stepping up to the peace dividend. Perhaps this is outside the Minister’s hands, but every government Minister could ask themselves over this festive season what they could do to make the world a better place and make everybody in the UK securer and safer in 2022.

2.03 pm

Lord Loomba (CB): My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, for raising this important subject. I am heartened that the Government are considering the strategic implications of this country’s actions in the sphere of international development.

The skill and expertise with which so many programmes have been delivered by this country, in partnership with British NGOs, aid organisations and British business—including in educating girls and empowering people to contribute to their societies—are important factors in the esteem we enjoy, not least in Commonwealth countries, which are a cornerstone of our place in the world. In that context, many programmes, at the time of greatest need, have recently suffered from the temporary reduction in overseas development aid to 0.5%. I urge the Government to return to their commitment of 0.7% of GDP as soon as possible.

The stable environment we require to compete and succeed is best served by placing the United Nations sustainable development goals at the heart of our international development strategy, to support communities and countries in becoming stable and prosperous and to address the root causes as much as the symptoms of enforced migration. These goals—ending poverty and hunger, promoting well-being at all ages and ensuring

education and gender equality among them—provide the best platform for building partnerships with the international community on the basis of shared values and objectives.

Our wider strategic aims in free trade and geopolitical influence would be well served by reinforcing our reputation as an international development leader in areas such as gender equality, education and empowerment, where we have a proud record. I draw particular attention to the urgent need to address the plight of Covid widows, who have lost their means of support and are marginalised in many of the countries most acutely affected by the pandemic. At times such as these, our focus must be to shine a light on those who are most in need.

Covid is a crisis that has affected us all—rich and poor, north and south—and we know there are lessons to be learned about being prepared for the unexpected from the public health emergency in our own country. This also applies to international development and how well prepared we are to respond to humanitarian crises. This is an area where global Britain should make the best of the advantages it has in being able to respond swiftly on our own. I urge the Minister to make this potential advantage a strategic priority in the Government’s international development strategy, with the aim of making our systems and processes fit for nimble and agile responses in an increasingly unpredictable environment.

It is true that the work of the FCDO is integral to the UK’s role in international development, but it is not the only relevant department, when you consider global Covid-19 vaccine inequity or climate change. Can the Minister tell us how the international development strategy will create a coherent whole-of-government approach to international development and when it will be published?

2.08 pm

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, we have been repeatedly told by this Government that global Britain policy is a result of a fully integrated policy-making process, but the integrated review came after the FCO-DfID merger. It did not inform it. Spending decisions on co-operation and overseas assistance came, and will come, after a much-delayed development review that we still have not had, rather than being decided by policy choices. A law, built on consensus, to maintain our level of co-operation and support at 0.7% of GNI has now been replaced by an executive target of 0.5%, with annual decisions on its future.

This approach is now the ceiling, whereby vaccine support or girls’ education, as has been referred to in this debate, will not go over this executive target—so that means that other areas will be cut even more. Reverse-engineering policy to fit budgets is bad government and it is worse when it comes to international policy. The fact that we have new business later today on FCDO staffing cuts is telling in itself.

With others, I commend the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, for being so persistent in this House for the global goals and international development policy. His debate allows us to consider what should be in the next review, and we are grateful for it.

[LORD PURVIS OF TWEED]

We on these Benches support the calls we have heard in the debate from the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, for UK international assistance policy to take a feminist approach. I have spoken to my colleagues in our sister party in Canada about how the Canadian Liberal Government put forward the first feminist international assistance policy. It had strands within it directing future policy, but through this gender approach, under the titles of human dignity; for quality healthcare, nutrition and education; for growth that works for everyone; for environment and climate action, and climate finance to reduce barriers for women, particularly in the services sector and finance; for investments; for inclusive governance; and for peace and security, all directed through a gender lens and all forming a very strong international strategy. I and my party want the UK to be the lead country in the Development Assistance Committee on delivering a feminist international assistance policy.

I will not refer to “aid” in my contribution, I will refer to “co-operation”. I believe very strongly that we should have not an aid strategy but an international co-operation strategy, because we share the 17 ambitions in the global goals on an equal basis with every other country in the world within the UN. The question should be how we play our part, as one of the richest countries in the world, for those who are less developed to meet all those 17 ambitions. We carry out a voluntary national review, as other countries do, on the global goals. We are no better or worse than them as a country, even though Liz Truss tells us that we are the greatest country on earth. We share our priorities and therefore the global goals should underpin all this approach going forward.

There are other areas we should reflect on in the changing world since the last review, but also looking forward. That is the case with climate finance. If we fail on climate, there is no development. There should be a particular focus on urbanisation. A projected extra 2 billion people will live in cities by 2050. What comes after the 2030 agenda? The noble Viscount, Lord Eccles, raised a point about seeing Africa not as a development challenge but as a continent of opportunity. I will be meeting the noble Lord, Lord Grimstone, the Investment Minister, on the prospects of an African prosperity commission and I hope that the strategy genuinely is an integrated document—that it does not just say so but genuinely is—so that it brings trade policy within these areas too.

As my noble friend Lord Oates said, however, words are not actions, and we have to see the Government’s policies as a result of their actions, in many regards. Across that area, they are shameful, because, at a time of global pandemic, which has impacted the world’s poorest people the greatest, the Government have made the choice—it was not an obligation upon them—to cut support in many areas with a direct impact on the lives of women, in particular, and children and their life opportunities.

In her Chatham House speech, as was referred to, the Foreign Secretary—who, incidentally, did not mention poverty once—set what the Government’s international strategy would be going forward. She seemed to indicate that the key element of this will be our alternative

response to China. As International Trade Secretary, she saw trade with China grow at the fastest rate ever and we now have a £43 billion trade deficit, meaning that we are heavily dependent on imports. But she has refused, as a Trade Secretary and now as Foreign Secretary, to have a human rights policy integrated into our trade and reflected in a development strategy. So I hope the Minister can state categorically that the co-operation strategy will include key elements of human rights policy across all elements of our economic and trade policies.

What of the news today, which is breath-taking in its impact? Just a few days after the Foreign Secretary indicated that we would be looking for alternatives to finance, the UK has slashed its support to the International Development Association of the World Bank by 55%. This is a fund for the world’s poorest countries to receive AAA-rated funds and, in the replenishment this year, the UK has cut its contribution by \$1.8 billion. I remind the Minister that the UK has been the biggest single donor to the IDA and whereas, in this replenishment, France, Japan and the US have increased their pledges, none of them could offset the UK’s cuts. It means that the Foreign Secretary says one thing to our domestic media, while in the global forum there are cuts that will actively undermine this approach.

On girls and women, as the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, said, we have waited long for the impact assessment, and I hope the Minister will state today when we are to receive it. At a time of global pandemic, when vaccine nationalism, as my noble friend said, does not work, the UK is slashing support for health systems around the world. Unbelievably, we have seen vaccines and medicines destroyed because we have prevented the health systems being able to distribute them to those most in need.

On conflict, as the noble Lord indicated, last week I was in north Iraq meeting Yazidi leaders. They told me quite heart-rending stories of how they feel they are now a forgotten population, with 280,000 IDPs still in camps, seeming to be forgotten, as the Lord, Lord Alton, indicated. I was reminded that when there was military action, the UK was raising this issue every week—there were Statements and elements of funding—but now on conflict prevention and peace-building we are silent. Why have we cut support for development for these people in Iraq in totality from £50 million in 2020-21 to just £3 million in 2023-24? Please give us an explanation as to why the Government have done that.

In my last moment, I appeal to the Minister to reflect on his answer to me when I raised the point about the massive jump that may come in 2024, if we are to return to 0.7%, of an extra £5.2 billion allocated. He said, “It’s not going to happen overnight, there’s ample time to prepare”—but none of the Treasury statements give any indication that there will be a smooth transition back to 0.7%. Every statement from the Treasury says that we will review it annually and, if next year’s figures meet their fiscal targets, we will then grow to £5.2 billion in one year, which will be impossible to programme and deliver sensibly. So I appeal to the Minister again: would it not make much more sense, if we are to return to the legal target of 0.7%, to do it in a staged manner, so we do not reverse-engineer all the

problems we have created but start from this strategy now, with proper looking forward, so we can operate in a much better way? In that way we will be a better partner—and a more reliable one also.

2.19 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I too congratulate my noble friend not only on initiating this debate but on his excellent cross-party work on the APPG for the SDGs. I also reflect on his words about Frank Judd, because I know that, had Lord Judd been here, he would have stressed, absolutely, the interdependence of our world.

In her recent speech on the network of liberty, the Foreign Secretary said she would be launching the new development strategy in the new year; I have heard that that is likely to be in March. Of course, that strategy was promised in the Government's integrated review, which was published in March of this year. In the words of my noble friend Lord McConnell, the review reflected the work of all British Governments over a period of 20 years, reflecting, as he has repeatedly said, a cross-party consensus about trying to bring together in a coherent and strategic fashion the three Ds: development, defence and diplomacy. We have to deal with the root causes of conflict and instability. That is why defence, diplomacy and development have to go hand in hand.

The Foreign Secretary says that efforts to build a network of liberty must be firmly anchored in human rights and civic freedoms, both of which play a crucial role in the promotion of democracy and freedom globally. Being a force for good in the world means always taking a stand against injustices, human rights abuses and suffering, even when it is inconvenient to do so. We must strengthen our ties with civil society too. There was little of substance on this in the integrated review, which I hope will be corrected in the development strategy. Women's organisations, charities, faith groups, trade unions and other organised communities have all demonstrated their role in defending democracy and human rights. When nations fail in their most important task of providing safety, security and freedom for their people, it is always civil society that leaps first to their defence.

Being a force for good in the world also means putting forward a vision for a more secure and prosperous future, delivering on the UN's global goals and fulfilling our commitment to the world's poorest and most vulnerable—not leaving anyone behind, as noble Lords have said. In answer to the noble Lord, Lord Desai—it was also mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Purvis—the SDGs are universal. They are not us preaching to others but apply here, to all of us, and that is why they are so important in terms of the strategy for the future.

I too pay tribute to David Cameron. His leadership on the SDGs was vital, building on the leadership of Gordon Brown in the millennium development goals. Sadly, that leadership has been missing from this Government. The 2030 agenda if achieved will end extreme poverty, hunger and gender-based violence and ensure that every individual has access to rights, including safe drinking water, quality education and clean energy. A strategy involving diplomacy, defence

and development does not need a big department. Rather, it needs a commitment to work across Whitehall. We need a champion for the sustainable development goals in the Cabinet. Of course, the work of the FCDO is integral to the UK's role in international development but, as we have heard in this debate, it is not the only department, particularly when it comes to issues such as global Covid-19 vaccine inequality or climate change. I hope that the Minister will set out further detail on how the international development strategy will create a coherent, whole-government approach to international development.

As the noble Lords, Lord Oates and Lord Purvis, said, the Government's words must be matched by their actions. How can we champion human rights while selling arms to Saudi Arabia, which has contributed to creating the world's most desperate humanitarian situation? How can we aspire to be a world leader in international development while breaking our legal commitment to 0.7%? Here I also pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Sugg, for her leadership on this issue and for building a cross-party coalition so that we return to 0.7% as quickly as possible. I hope the Minister will set out in more detail exactly what the timeframe is for that return. To maintain our enormous influence on the world stage and be a moral force for good, we must be consistent in our approach. The Government need to end the contradictions and inconsistency between their words and actions, and that starts with supporting once again the principles of sustainable development.

The global health, climate and humanitarian crises should result in more attention being given to the critical role that development plays in tackling global challenges. The global refugee crisis requires a joined-up strategic approach. As the noble Lord, Lord Alton, said, the best way to help those people is to ensure that they can have a better life in the countries from which they originate. International development is key to unlocking many of the other strategic and diplomatic aims of the FCDO.

As my noble friend said—and I know that a lot of NGOs have focused on this—there are four key areas that we need a clear focus on. We need a clear articulation of the United Kingdom's global leadership role, a cross-government approach to responding to humanitarian and peacebuilding activities, a plan to ensure that economic systems do not perpetuate poverty, and a clear commitment to ensure vaccine equality.

We have heard in this debate about the cuts that have reduced the United Kingdom's ability to have an impact in reducing global poverty and achieving the SDGs. It is an absolutely terrible situation, as noble Lords have mentioned. I will focus on Africa. Currently, the FCDO's bilateral aid budget to countries in Africa is at a 15-year low. Many of the world's poorest countries are on the African continent. I hope the Minister can confirm that the international development strategy will reaffirm the United Kingdom's commitment to Africa and increase aid to the continent in real terms.

We have heard reference in this debate to the CDC, which will become the BII—the Foreign Secretary also referred to it—with a new strategy and a new five-year plan. No one can pretend that the SDGs can be

[LORD COLLINS OF HIGHBURY]

delivered by Governments alone; I mentioned civil society, but of course the private sector is also integral to that. I hope that the new strategy by the CDC or BII will be subject to a full parliamentary debate and that we have the opportunity to scrutinise the huge investments that that body will be making.

Our commitment to the world's poorest and most vulnerable also means spending on the right aid projects, which means supporting multipliers such as nutrition, clean water and education, which have myriad development benefits, most importantly for women and girls. I made a point this week about the Nutrition for Growth summit, which took place earlier this month. I was hugely disappointed that our leadership role on nutrition was not matched by a pledge at that summit. I understand and appreciate the FCDO's commitment to adopting the OECD policy marker, but there is much more work to be done. I hope that the Minister will be able to reaffirm the UK's role as a global leader in nutrition by committing to good-value initiatives that end preventable deaths and empower women and girls.

2.29 pm

The Minister of State, Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park) (Con): My Lords, I am very grateful to the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, for tabling this debate and for his continued interest in the international development strategy. He made an enormously powerful introduction, and I am grateful for his kind words about some of the successes at the COP 26 conference just a couple of weeks ago.

The international development strategy will be the first statement of the UK's approach to development since the creation of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. It will bring together our diplomatic and development expertise with trade and other levers, including our leading UK institutions and civil society, enabling us to set a high level of ambition.

The strategy will take forward our commitments in the integrated review, which set out that the UK is one of the world's leading development actors, committed to the global fight against poverty and absolutely committed to achieving the sustainable development goals by 2030. In line with the integrated review, the strategy will have a time horizon to 2030 and beyond. We will focus our development efforts not only on the needs that exist today or that could arise from crises but on those areas where we can have the greatest life-changing impact in the long term. In answer to the noble Lord, Lord Collins, I say that it will be published next spring, and I am pleased to provide an overview of the Government's current thinking in this debate.

Reflecting our integrated review, published in March, the strategy will respond to the trends shaping today's international geopolitical context. I am keen to reassure the noble Lord, Lord Alton, that this includes China's increasing assertiveness and the critical importance of the Indo-Pacific region. It also includes the ideological competition between freedom-loving democracies and autocratic regimes. It encompasses transnational challenges, such as Covid-19, climate change and

environmental degradation, which deeply affect vulnerable and developing countries and require global combined action.

Many of these trends are felt more acutely in developing countries. The drivers of poverty and instability—such as institutional fragility, conflict and climate change—are increasingly complex and interconnected. Indeed, these issues often have the most devastating impact on the most vulnerable, while threatening global stability and prosperity for everyone.

Against this backdrop, the integrated review makes it clear that the UK will remain a major development player. With this strategy we will work to reduce poverty, tackle climate change and address humanitarian crises, while bringing more countries into the orbit of democratic, free-enterprise economies. As the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans and a number of other speakers pointed out, this is not an add-on to the rest of the business of government or a box-ticking exercise; this is absolutely critical. The work of the FCDO on development is fundamentally right but also fundamentally in our own interests. One only need consider climate change, which is clearly the defining international challenge of our lifetimes.

As set out in the integrated review, tackling climate change and biodiversity loss is the Government's number one international priority over the next decade. As COP 26 presidents, only last month we brought the world together to finalise and build on the Paris Agreement. Although clearly there remains a big gap between where we are today and where we need to be, there can be no doubt that we narrowed that gap considerably further than anyone had anticipated or predicted, and we have indeed kept alive the possibility of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees. We saw significant and meaningful progress with net-zero commitments in the final negotiated text, which was agreed by all 197 parties. Indeed, we now have net-zero commitments for over 90% of the world's economy—up from 30% just two years ago, when the UK took on the COP 26 presidency.

There is a clear recognition that we cannot tackle climate change—or, indeed, a whole range of other issues, including the sustainable development goals—without massively increasing our efforts to protect and restore nature. Of course, that is true of climate change, but also of poverty. The noble Lord, Lord Balfe, mentioned Ethiopia. There are all kinds of complex causes that have driven Ethiopia back into the dire state that it now finds itself in. But one of those causes, undoubtedly, is pressure on the environment. For example, increasing desertification and acute water insecurity are both fundamentally environmental problems that need addressing.

We know that the commitments secured at COP will count for nothing unless we continue to ramp up ambition and until those promises are kept. I absolutely assure the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, that that is our priority this year. Our presidency did not end with the conference; it ends as we hand over to Egypt. While we hold the presidency, we will absolutely use every tool at our disposal to ensure that we can give meaning to the commitments made at COP.

Through the international development strategy, the UK will continue to ensure that our development offer helps to accelerate an orderly and inclusive global transition to a nature-positive, net-zero future, and we

will continue to work with countries to enable the most vulnerable to adapt to climate change and reverse biodiversity loss. I am absolutely thrilled that the noble Lord called on the Government to align their whole ODA portfolio with our Paris commitments in his opening remarks. I strongly agree; indeed, that is a commitment the Government have already made. But I am very keen for us to go further and align our entire ODA portfolio not just with our Paris commitments but with nature. As part of our presidency over the next few months, I will be doing what I can to encourage other donor countries to do the same. Globally, ODA is about £140 billion a year. Tragically, a lot of our interventions on aid have been made at the expense of the environment, and therefore, I argue, at the expense of the long-term security, peace and prosperity of the people whose poverty we are supposed to be addressing.

The noble Baroness, Lady Bennett, made the point eloquently, as ever, and passionately that it is not just about new money or ODA. It is also about ceasing wherever we can to be enablers—I think that was her term—of destruction. There is no doubt that even if we were to double our aid commitment and all donor countries were to do the same, it would still be a drop in the ocean in terms of what is needed, not least to tackle climate change and environmental degradation.

In addition to our aid programmes, we need to do what we can to force an alignment between the finance sector and the objectives we are discussing today. We made progress on that at COP, not just in relation to Paris goals but in relation to nature. Financial institutions presiding over nearly \$9 trillion of investments and assets committed to align with nature, and we will do what we can to hold them to that and increase that number in the coming months.

As we work to deliver sustainable growth and promote British expertise and influence, we will lean on our revamped development finance institution, British International Investment. This will deliver reliable, honest and transparent finance. It will support countries to export, trade and address the challenges that hinder investment, jobs and green growth, all the while creating new opportunities here at home. It will bring in billions in climate financing for projects such as solar power, sustainable transport and disaster-resilient infrastructure over the next five years.

Of course, no country can be truly free or prosperous without unlocking the potential of women and girls. That is a point that has been made extremely persuasively and eloquently by many speakers today. Tackling gender equality is a core part of the Government's mission, and it absolutely remains so. The integrated review confirms this commitment, specifically working with women's rights organisations to tackle the discrimination, violence and inequality that hold women back.

As the noble Lord, Lord McConnell, my noble friend Lady Sugg and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans have all pointed out, education is likely the single smartest investment we can make if we want to fight poverty, address climate change and save lives. We will absolutely continue to help countries to invest in strong education systems. At the same time, I reassure the noble Baroness, Lady Greengross, that we are not deprioritising in any way the inclusion agenda, particularly for older people, which she mentioned.

We will continue our world-leading work to empower women and eradicate violence against them. In response to the noble Baroness, Lady Hodgson, I say that we will support sexual and reproductive health rights and work to end the barbaric practice of female genital mutilation.

In addition to our focus on women and girls, we are committed to promoting open and inclusive societies which respect human rights by tackling discrimination, with a particular focus on disability and LGBT rights, and breaking down the barriers to achieving equality and opportunity for all.

I agree with the comments made by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans about the value of encouraging foreign students to come and learn here in the UK, for all the reasons he said, not least that those students are likely to return to wherever they come from in the world with a natural friendship with this country and bridges on which we will be able to continue to form partnerships.

The noble Viscount, Lord Eccles, raised the issue of population. I certainly do not seek to downplay that issue; I do not think that anyone in government does. Clearly, numbers matter. The only thing I would say is that, in terms of the impact on Mother Nature, as the noble Viscount called it, the bigger issue is per capita consumption. If he considers that the environmental impact of the average Rwandan is around 40 times smaller than that of the average person living in this country, consumption clearly must be a key part of it. I also argue that our investment in and prioritisation of women and girls, particularly regarding reproductive autonomy, will be absolutely central if we want to tackle the issue of population. It is the only proven solution to the issue that the noble Viscount rightly raised.

Like a number of noble Lords, the noble Viscount mentioned Afghanistan in this context. Ministers and officials have met Afghan women regularly to inform our engagement on the future of that country. We believe that Afghanistan needs inclusive politics that properly represent the country; I acknowledge that that is clearly a long way from where Afghanistan currently finds itself.

While we support countries' long-term growth, we must also, as many noble Lords have said, play our part as a global citizen, responding to crises and their causes; this point was made extremely forcefully by my noble friend Lady Sugg, the noble Baroness, Lady Greengross, and the noble Lord, Lord Londesborough. Ending Covid-19 and boosting future health security is, naturally, a top priority. We will continue our work to ensure that vaccines are available to those who need them. This includes our £548 million of funding for the COVAX advance market commitment, delivering more than 516 million vaccines to low and middle-income countries.

We will also continue work to enhance health systems around the world. It is vital to get jabs in arms, save lives and prevent future crises. For example, our support for Nepal's health system has already helped to halve the rate of maternal mortality in 10 years and bring in an early warning system for disease outbreaks. This will be coupled with ongoing life-saving support for the world's most vulnerable people, such as our support for humanitarian appeals in Somalia and South Sudan.

[LORD GOLDSMITH OF RICHMOND PARK]

Indeed, amid rising global humanitarian need, the UK remains one of the world's top bilateral donors to some of the world's largest humanitarian crises. The UK will use our position as a principled and effective humanitarian donor and a strong partner in the international humanitarian system to prioritise effective humanitarian assistance for those in greatest need and protect civilians, refugees and marginalised people. We must also work to prevent conflict and violence erupting in the first place, so we will continue to focus on building law enforcement and justice institutions that promote peace and stability.

I will briefly respond to the comments made by the noble Lord, Lord Oates, which were echoed by others, about mines. The Global Mine Action Programme—GMAP3—is due to begin next year. It will involve landmine clearance and education to help affected communities keep safe, as well as capacity development for national authorities to help them address the issue in their own countries. Although I cannot provide details at this point, they will be provided soon.

We will continue to bolster our defences against terrorists, cybercriminals and money launderers, supporting capacity building in forensics and investigations.

In all this, we remain steadfast in our absolute focus on tackling poverty through promoting economic growth and employment opportunities. Of course, this also benefits the UK by creating new markets where UK businesses can trade and invest. I note the comments from the noble Lord, Lord Desai, on the ineffectiveness of some aid. Of course, some aid has been poorly invested over time; an enormous amount has been invested. Equally, though, the proof of the effectiveness of investing in, for example, girls' and women's education, or some of the environmental initiatives that I have seen closely at first hand, is demonstrated beyond any doubt in the impact they have. For example, areas in the world that are hit by unfortunately ever more frequent storms have been visibly and measurably protected as a consequence of repairs to mangroves and corals. You can literally see that, for the communities that still have either old or regenerated mangroves compared with those that do not and rely on concrete defences, the difference in protection is night and day. That is one example of where investment has proven itself to be effective, but there are many others.

In responding to new challenges, we will consider not just what we work on but where. We will focus our investment and expertise where we can make the most difference, achieving maximum impact and value for money. We recognise that some of the issues we care about most, such as climate change, particularly affect some of our most vulnerable development partners. Our approach will therefore be different in different countries, tailored to local needs and taking account of the fact that, as countries become more prosperous, they are better able to manage their development.

As has been noted, we will extend our development reach, tilting towards the Indo-Pacific—that powerhouse of the world's future economy—and staying strong in Africa, where there are so many challenges and opportunities. This will be reflected in the strategy, of course. We remain completely committed to working with our partners in Africa to meet their goals. As well

as humanitarian support, UK aid is helping to deliver the vaccines that are needed, educate girls, reduce crime, improve economic growth and development, and help countries in relation to their environmental challenges.

We will also continue to work with key countries and regions on specific issues. This includes tackling the root causes of instability in the Middle East and north Africa; protecting our planet's natural resources in areas of incalculable importance, such as the Amazon and the Congo Basin; addressing drivers of conflict in the western Balkans; and supporting good governance and resilience to crises in our overseas territories.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): The Minister said that the forward plan for north Africa will be in conflict prevention. The Government have cut all bilateral programme support for all of north Africa for the next three years. How do those two things match?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): As I said to the noble Lord, Lord Collins, the strategic importance of Africa, and of north Africa, will be reflected in the international development strategy.

In the remaining few minutes—I do not have that long—I want to address the important points made by the noble Lord, Lord Sikka. I will not be able to answer them in detail, partly because I do not have time but partly because his questions about prosecutions fall with colleagues in HMT. It is their issue, so I will ask them for a written response to the noble Lord's questions. I apologise for that.

The noble Lord, Lord Purvis, pointed to cuts to multilateral development banks; I think he mentioned the World Bank in particular. He is right that that is part of the strategy, but it is not an overall or meaningful cut in real terms. As a policy decision, we plan to direct more of our resources to specific countries and increase our bilateral investments. It is our view, with which the noble Lord is perfectly at liberty to disagree, that we get more value for money and greater flexibility, and can do more work, through those bilateral investments than we can through multilateral development banks, but we remain one of the biggest contributors to the multilateral system. There is plenty of room there for us to redirect some of that funding in a way that we think is strategic. We also expect to remain a major donor to the UN and other international organisations.

Despite the seismic impact of the pandemic on the UK and global economy, the UK will still spend more than £10 billion of ODA in 2021. I want to address the comments from a number of noble Lords, particularly the noble Lords, Lord Purvis and Lord Oates, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hodgson. Few people wanted to cut aid, and we want to return to where we were as soon as we possibly can, but we remain one of the largest overseas development assistance spenders in the world. Based on 2020 OECD data, the UK will be the third-largest ODA donor in the G7 as a percentage of GNI in 2021. We spend a greater percentage of our GNI on ODA than the US, Japan, Canada or Italy. We also have a clear pathway to return to 0.7%. I cannot give a date, but forecasts suggest that we are very likely to meet the criteria that have been set by 2024-25.

The strategy aims to be a development strategy rather than an aid spending strategy. It capitalises on the fact that all the levers for development impact—diplomacy, development, trade and security—are in our hands. The investment set out in the spending review, together with our development expertise and one of the largest overseas diplomatic networks in the world, will support this aim.

I want briefly to reassure the noble Lord, Lord Collins, who made an important point about the need to work closely with civil society. Engagement with partners has been absolutely key to the development of the strategy. We have engaged on every level, including through round-table events with Ministers, including me.

As well as what we deliver and where we deliver it, the strategy will set a new direction for how we work to achieve development goals. We will lean into the transformational power of technology, research, science and digital approaches as never before—for example, by supporting early warning systems that can anticipate humanitarian risks, from floods to air strikes, and save lives.

I note that the noble Viscount, Lord Eccles, described himself as coming from the “CDC stable”. That stable has been renamed yet again, I suspect since he wrote his speech, and is now British International Investment. It will be at the heart of our approach.

I am running out of time and there are certainly issues that I have not covered, for which I apologise. Despite the huge strides that have been made in advancing global development over recent decades, this Government are under no illusion about the scale and urgency of the challenge that remains before us. I thank noble Lords for their many insightful interventions today, as we continue to shape our strategy. We are determined that it will meet these challenges head-on, ensuring that free societies and democracies develop and thrive.

Finally, on the last sitting day of a difficult year, I echo the thanks expressed by Front-Benchers to members of staff, and add mine to my magnificent team. They have had a particularly tough year with the Environment Bill, helping to ensure that nature has been put at the heart—irreversibly—of the climate debate. I thank the team led so well by my private secretary Maddi, and I apologise for a difficult year to come.

2.51 pm

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale (Lab): My Lords, I thank the Minister for his response and the detailed way in which he has addressed the issues raised in the debate. Even where we disagree with him, I respect and appreciate his engagement. I look forward to that continuing in early 2022 as we move towards the launch of the strategy.

Like him, I am not going to delay everybody by going back over the arguments that have just been made, but I do welcome and am grateful for the contributions that were made around your Lordships’ Chamber in support of the priorities that I outlined in my introduction—of climate and net zero, of girls and women, and of conflict prevention and peacebuilding—which will be at the heart of this new international development strategy. I am particularly grateful to the noble Baronesses, Lady Hodgson and Lady Sugg, for

their eloquent advocacy of the importance of positioning girls and women at the heart of international development and change around the world.

In addition to thanking everybody who has spoken and taken the time to wait to make their contributions on this last day before the Christmas Recess, I will make two brief points before concluding. First, I strongly support the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Oates, about the inconsistency in some of the bilateral decision-making. It is inexplicable that countries such as Malawi and Zambia, which have had such democratic transformations over the last two years, were treated so badly when others were not. In Malawi, there is confusion and dismay over that decision. There is a deadly serious drugs crisis in Malawi’s health service at the moment which will cost hundreds, perhaps thousands, of lives in the new year. It was not caused by the UK aid decision, but it was not helped by it either. I hope that these decisions will be revisited and that a consistency of principle is applied to future bilateral programming.

Secondly, 37 years ago this month my good friend Jim Diamond, who has sadly passed away, had his first hit single as a solo singer with “I Should Have Known Better”. That should perhaps be a motto for the Government, after some of the decisions that were made this year. Jim went on the radio as the Band Aid single was launched and asked people not to buy his single any more, but to buy the Band Aid one instead. With 37 years of experience, we might now have some question marks over some of the lyrics of the Band Aid single, but at that point it marked a change in the debates in this country about our international relationships. That was happening at the same time as the old international battles of East and West were starting to come to an end, at the end of the 1980s. We were looking more at North and South, sustainable development, extreme poverty around the world and our contribution to tackling it.

This Christmas, as we talk about good will to all people and peace over these next days, I hope we remember that they are not just concepts and aspirations for Christmas but should apply all year round. Our compassion and determination to tackle these issues needs to go into 2022 and beyond with much more commitment, sensible decision-making, belief and ambition than we displayed in 2021. With that, I wish everybody a merry Christmas, a happy new year and a much better 12 months to come.

Motion agreed.

School Openings: January 2022

Commons Urgent Question

The following Answer to an Urgent Question was given in the House of Commons on Wednesday 15 December.

“The Government are committed to ensuring that schools open in January as normal. The classroom is the very best place for children’s and young people’s development, and we are incredibly grateful to teachers and all education staff for all they have done to maintain face-to-face learning. Protecting education continues to be our absolute priority.

[LORD MCCONNELL OF GLENSCORRODALE]

The Government have taken action to help manage the omicron variant, and the Prime Minister has already announced that we are turbocharging our Covid-19 booster programme to offer every adult in England a vaccine by the end of the year to protect people from it. We have set out clear plans for school openings in January, including on-site lateral flow testing for secondary school students on return; continued regular testing at home for the education and childcare sectors; and a comprehensive contingency framework to manage outbreaks.

As of 1 December, more than 95.2 million tests have been completed across all education settings, and the Government have made more than £100 million of funding available to education settings to support costs. Schools and education settings have a range of measures in place to manage Covid and to reduce transmission, including regular testing, additional hygiene practices, increasing ventilation, and procedures for managing confirmed cases.

From Tuesday 14 December, a new national daily testing of Covid contacts policy was introduced. That means that young people and fully vaccinated adults who are identified as a close contact of someone with Covid may take an NHS rapid lateral flow test every day for seven days and continue to attend their setting as normal unless they have a positive result.

We also recommend that older students and staff wear face coverings in communal areas and we have supported education settings to improve ventilation. The Government committed to delivering 300,000 carbon dioxide monitors by the end of this term; we have already delivered more than 329,000, with more than 99% of eligible settings having received monitors.

Every child aged 12 and over is eligible to receive the vaccine. We encourage all children and parents to take up that offer as soon as possible, if they have not already. It is vital, though, that all of us, including parents, carers, teachers and everyone working in education, goes out as soon as they possibly can to get their booster jab to protect the NHS, our way of life and education.”

2.56 pm

Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab): My Lords, before I respond to the government response to the Question, I am sure I am not alone in my thoughts being dominated today by the absolutely horrific news from Tasmania. Five children in a primary school have died and many others were seriously injured on what should have been a day of joy, the last day of their school term. I speak for all noble Lords in saying that my thoughts are with the families involved in their unimaginable pain and anguish.

In responding to the Urgent Question in another place yesterday, the Minister for Skills said:

“The Government are committed to ensuring that schools open in January as normal.”—[*Official Report*, Commons, 15/12/21; col. 1061.]

We hope that is the case, but vaccination and ventilation are key to reducing the spread of Covid in schools and keeping children in the classroom in the new year. However, nationally less than half of 12 to 15 year-olds have had a vaccine and the weekly number of vaccines

has fallen by 80% since October. Staff, children and parents are on the brink of a third year of school disruption.

To minimise that, I ask the Minister if the Government will adopt Labour’s calls for a clear, targeted communications campaign to parents on the benefits of vaccination for children, together with access to pop-up and walk-in clinics, and the mobilisation of volunteers and retired clinicians to deliver it successfully.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Baroness Barran) (Con): With the leave of the House, I share the initial sentiments of the noble Lord opposite and send my condolences to all touched by the tragedy in Tasmania.

As my honourable friend in another place said, we will do everything in our power to keep schools open throughout January and beyond. All in this House acknowledge the great price that children have paid over the last two years. I hope the noble Lord acknowledges that there has been a very active communications plan about the importance of getting vaccinated and having a booster jab. We press on with that, but we are exploring every avenue. I am pleased to tell the House that over 350,000 CO₂ monitors have been delivered to schools—above our target of 300,000 before the end of term—and 99% of eligible settings now have that equipment.

Baroness Blackstone (Ind Lab): My Lords, it is not very often that I am able to get up and congratulate the Government on an Answer to an Urgent Question, but I do so today because it is absolutely right. As the Answer says:

“Protecting education continues to be our absolute priority.”—[*Official Report*, Commons, 15/12/21; col. 1061.]

What kind of communication strategy is being developed to provide parents with the reassurance they need and to tell them just how important it is that their children continue to go to school, given what we know about absence from school at an earlier stage in the pandemic? Could the Minister also tell the House what kind of encouragement is being given to schools and local authorities to keep extracurricular programmes going? These are so important for disadvantaged children.

Baroness Barran (Con): The noble Baroness is right. I thank her, and I will frame her acknowledgement of our progress in this area. The Secretary of State is absolutely clear about the importance of education, that we should do all in our power, and that the best place for children to be is in school.

On our communication campaign, we are targeting the whole nation for reasons the noble Baroness understands very well relating to vaccination and the importance, particularly given the transmissibility of the omicron variant, that all of us get boosted and jabbed. We are moving as quickly as possible with that.

On the wider issue of support, we are working very closely with schools and local authorities. We have offered them financial and practical support, particularly during the Christmas holidays, for some of the additional food and holiday clubs we offer through our schools.

Lord Addington (LD): My Lords, I associate myself with the sentiments of the noble Lord, Lord Watson, about the tragedy in Tasmania. Could the Minister give us some idea of the lessons the Government have learned from the last series of lockdowns, when schools were not there? What strategy will we implement? We know that if you happen to have a house with lots of digital conductivity and devices, you are fine. What capacity is there if children do have to spend time away from the classroom? We want to get kids into schools but we cannot always guarantee it. What are plans B, C or even alpha?

Baroness Barran (Con): I am not sure that the House would want me to go through all the plans, but the top line we have learned—I think we knew this before, but we know it more vividly now—is that the safest place for children is to be in school. On digital connection, we have distributed more than 1.35 million devices to ensure that children can be connected to education remotely, but we also funded the Oak National Academy, which is providing excellent online resources that can be used both in a classroom and at home.

Baroness Bull (CB): My Lords, given what we know about the crucial role that ventilation plays in the fight against the spread of Covid in classrooms, might the Government reconsider their commitment to fund the provision of air filtration devices only for SEND and AP schools, rather than all schools? Does she not agree that it should surely be a priority to ensure that all schools can access this crucial mechanism for protection, not just those that happen to have some budget spare?

Baroness Barran (Con): The noble Baroness's tone is a little harsh in saying "budget spare". We are talking about making sure our classrooms are safe for children, which is why we prioritise the distribution of devices to children with special educational needs and children in alternative provision. Indeed, beyond CO₂ monitors, we have disrupted 1,000 ventilation devices to those schools and launched a marketplace where schools can buy purification devices at the best prices.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab): My Lords, the Minister talked about students and we have also talked about parents. We have not yet talked about teachers. What are the Government doing to support school leaders at a time when the management of the fluctuating crisis we are all in is extremely difficult? Can she assure us that the messaging that goes to school leaders at this time is, as far as possible, encouraging and supportive but not accusatory?

Baroness Barran (Con): We have been extremely clear in our gratitude to school leaders for the extraordinary job they have done over the last couple of years. We have the workforce fund, which provides funding for supply teachers and has been extended until the spring half-term. We are endeavouring to communicate in the most constructive and positive way possible.

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (CB): Can the Government confirm that the additional funding being allocated to support education is also being distributed to the devolved Administrations to support children in school in the devolved nations of the UK?

Baroness Barran (Con): My understanding is that systems are already in place for achieving that.

Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-Affl): My Lords, this morning we discussed children in care. For them, the *in loco parentis* role of schools is especially important. We also mentioned the awful murder of young Arthur, and we know that teachers might well have picked up on the horrors he endured that social services missed. Will the Minister ensure that some communication is not just about vaccines but about the role schools play as community hubs of social solidarity for children, as well as in educating them? Will the Government also note the serious collateral damage when education policy organises everything around Covid, neglecting all those other negative impacts so vividly demonstrated in the Ofsted reports and the devastating stories of year 7 pupils?

Baroness Barran (Con): The noble Baroness is right. In our communication with schools and multi-academy trusts last week, we again pointed to the important role they play in identifying vulnerable children.

The Deputy Speaker (Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall) (Lab): My Lords, the time limit on this Question has expired.

Ajax Noise and Vibration Review

Statement

The following Statement was made in the House of Commons on Wednesday 15 December.

"With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a Statement to update the House on Ajax, which is an important capability and a vital step change in the way the British Army will operate on the future battlefield. It will provide ground-mounted reconnaissance, allowing the Army to understand the battlefield in all weathers, 24 hours a day.

As part of our £41 billion investment in Army equipment and support over the next 10 years, this modernisation is critical to address future threats. This is a vital investment, and the Defence Secretary and I have been deeply concerned about progress on this troubled project, which has been running for over 11 years since its commencement in March 2010. That is why we have been thoroughly focused on the project, why I insisted earlier this year that no declaration of initial operating capability would be made without ministerial involvement and why we asked the Permanent Secretary to commission a report from the Ministry of Defence's director of health, safety and environmental protection on the health and safety concerns raised by noise and vibration. I am today publishing that report, and placing a copy in the Library of the House and in the Vote Office.

[BARONESS McINTOSH OF HUDNALL]

Over the past 35 years, there have been some 13 formal reports on defence procurement; we know the foundations that can build success. Openness, good communication and collaboration within Defence and the ability to act as an informed and challenging customer are vital. This health and safety report has highlighted shortcomings that need to be addressed, not just in health and safety but more broadly. The review finds serious failings in the processes followed. The result was that personnel worked on a vehicle that had the potential to cause harm. The review finds that the failure was complex and systemic; that a culture exists of not treating safety as equally important as cost and time in the acquisition process; and that, from a cultural perspective, the Army did not believe it was potentially causing harm to people, especially from vibration, as it was tacitly expected that soldiers can and should endure such issues.

As I informed the House on 18 October, we have contacted all personnel identified as having worked on Ajax. Forty declined to be assessed for hearing but I am pleased to report that the vast majority of the remainder have returned to duty with no health impact. As of 9 December, 17 individuals remain under specialist out-patient care for their hearing, some of whom, again, are expected to return to duty with no health impact. Eleven individuals have had long-term restrictions on noise exposure recommended, potentially requiring a limitation in their military duties. Seven of them had pre-existing hearing issues prior to working on Ajax, but four did not.

In addition, four individuals who worked on Ajax have been discharged on health grounds, in some cases for reasons wholly unrelated to hearing loss. Although we cannot yet establish a definitive causal link, it is possible that Ajax may have contributed to the current hearing loss in a small number of individuals. It remains the case that no individuals have had long-term restrictions or been discharged as a result of vibration. However, assessment for both hand-transmitted and whole-body vibration takes time and requires specialist assessment, and these continue.

I will set out the key points from the review. General Dynamics UK is responsible for the design and build of the Ajax vehicles. The vehicles that it delivered for use in the trials had levels of noise and vibration that were higher than usually expected in tracked vehicles and have been proven to be above the statutory limit. That exposed our personnel to potential harm.

That exposure was not prevented by the Ministry of Defence due to a series of failures to act when concerns were raised by expert advisers and by soldiers operating in the vehicles. For example, an MoD safety notice in December 2018 said that design upgrades were required to reduce vibration, but this was not acted upon. MoD safety cases and safety management used GDUK calculations that were not independently assured, despite experts at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory advising that the calculations should not be relied on.

A report from the Defence Safety Authority in May 2020 identifying some of these issues and entitled *Serious Safety Concerns on Ajax* was retracted and not pursued, either by the DSA or by the project team in

Defence Equipment and Support. Multiple warnings from the DSTL and from the Armoured Trials and Development Unit, which was running the trials, were not actioned, even when the ATDU commanding officer questioned the approach as having the potential to expose soldiers to a known hazard, which he stated was not a defensible position.

Overall, the report makes 20 recommendations. The MoD accepts all those relating specifically to armoured vehicle procurements, the regulation of safety for land equipment and the broader approach to safety in defence. Recommendation 9 relates to avoiding the concurrent running of the demonstration and manufacture stages in future projects. That recommendation needs to be considered carefully to ensure that we capture the safety imperatives while not preventing sensible spiral development or, for example, the parallel construction of classes of warship. I will update the House on that, alongside recommendations 12 and 14, which also need consideration of how to best implement them, building on existing work on approvals and senior responsible owners.

I will also update the House on the project more broadly. We have a robust, firm-price contract for the delivery of 589 vehicles at a cost of £5.5 billion. We are ensuring that we protect our commercial position under the contract and will not accept a vehicle that is not fit for purpose. It remains impossible to share with the House 100% confidence that the programme will succeed or, if it does, the timing of achieving full operating capability. However, we are working closely with General Dynamics on noise and vibration and it is showing great commitment to resolving these issues. This very advanced fighting vehicle project employs 4,100 people in south Wales and across the UK. We all want it to succeed and deliver what the British Army requires.

The Millbrook trials to baseline the vehicle's characteristics have been completed and we expect to receive the conclusions shortly. In parallel, General Dynamics has been developing its theories and trialling design modifications to address vibration. We expect to receive its analysis in the new year, following which we will, if appropriate, undertake thorough testing of its proposed modifications to satisfy ourselves on their efficacy.

Part of our analysis is also looking at the performance of the headset used in Ajax. Although the noise profile on Ajax is noticeably different from that of other armoured vehicles, following tests on in-service headsets, we took in November a precautionary measure to limit temporarily the amount of time personnel operate while using them in other armoured fighting vehicles. Acoustic testing of our in-service headsets is under way at test facilities in the UK and overseas. We are also testing other headsets to establish whether they will meet our requirements and provide additional attenuation. Once this analysis is complete, we expect to be able to relax the temporary restrictions or implement appropriate mitigations. In the meantime, we remain able to maintain our operational commitments.

The work on Ajax has also highlighted the significant number of personnel across defence whose exposure to noise results in short- or long-term restrictions to their military duties. I have therefore asked the MoD

Permanent Secretary to look further at that issue to ensure that we are doing all we can to prevent avoidable hearing loss in our people.

In conclusion, the Ajax health and safety report makes for very difficult reading. It lays bare a deep malaise, which is cultural and results in systemic failures across our organisations. I am grateful to David King and his team for their work and grateful for the candour of many who contributed to the review. There are many working tirelessly to get Ajax back on track. We need to build on that candour and dedication and encourage all those involved in procurement programmes to speak up, identify problems and make clear where those responsible are failing. A culture in which individuals are encouraged not to elevate problems but only solutions through the chain of command may be admirable in other circumstances, but rarely in procurement. We need to support our people by resolving underlying cultural issues that risk making it harder to deliver the capabilities needed by our Armed Forces.

To take that forward, we are commissioning a senior legal figure to look more deeply at Ajax and to examine not just health and safety but the cultural and process flaws that it has highlighted. We will leave no stone unturned to learn those lessons. I encourage people to participate in the further review and will ensure they have the space to do so. Of course, if the review uncovers evidence of gross misconduct, those concerned will be held to account, but the primary purpose of this inquiry is to ensure that we address significant cultural failings. The terms of reference will be agreed with the reviewer and I will make them available to the House.

In summary, while we should not forget that General Dynamics UK is responsible for delivering a safe and effective vehicle, it is clear from the report that the customs and practices of the Army, Defence Equipment and Support, Defence Digital and the wider MoD resulted in a culture that prevented issues being addressed at an earlier point. We are committed to ensuring that measures are put in place to deliver these very complex programmes in a way that minimises the risk to our people while delivering the capability needed by the Armed Forces. I commend this Statement to the House.”

3.07 pm

Lord Coaker (Lab): My Lords, £3.2 billion has been spent, with only a couple of dozen of the Ajax tanks delivered out of an order for 589, all of which are supposed to be delivered by 2024 with a total cost of £5.5 billion. The Public Accounts Committee in the other place has called it a catastrophe. How has it come to this? It has to be the biggest defence procurement failure of the last decade, does it not?

Now we have a further damning review just published by the Government called the *Ajax Noise and Vibration Review*. It catalogues failure after failure of process, accountability and procedures. Some 310 soldiers were exposed to noise and vibration, with a small number discharged because of hearing loss. According to the review, senior Army officers and MoD officials knew of these problems for two years before any action was taken. How and why was that possible? Who knew? Did Ministers know?

The review’s conclusions are stark and extremely worrying, not only first and foremost for our soldiers but for what it means for a central part of our future military capability. I quote directly from the Government’s own report:

“Nothing in this Review detracts from the fact that GDUK has designed and built what MOD maintains is thus far a vehicle which is not fit for purpose and does not meet the contracted specification.”

What does the Minister have to say to that specific quote? The report concludes that

“from a cultural perspective, the Army did not believe it was potentially causing harm to people, especially from vibration, as it was tacitly expected that soldiers can and should endure such issues. Society and the law expect MOD to do better”.

Is the MoD doing better? What has changed? Who is being held to account? We cannot tell from the review what is actually happening.

One of my final quotes directly from the review is:

“Within the acquisition system, safety is not viewed as an equal partner to cost, schedule and military capability, and the culture in MOD does not currently ensure safety is considered within strategic decision-making.”

The word is “currently”. Does the Minister recognise that term—not 10 years ago but currently? What is urgently being done to change that culture? What steps are being taken? Are any other defence procurement projects subject to such a culture? Even during the Minister’s Statement yesterday in the other place, he talked of reports such as that from the Defence Safety Authority in May 2020 identifying some of these issues, entitled *Serious Safety Concerns on Ajax*, and then tells us that that was retracted and not pursued. Who retracted the report? Who decided not to pursue it? Where are they now? Have they been promoted? Have they been sacked? Was any Minister aware of it and, if not, why not? The Government’s response is to have announced that following this review they are to launch another review. To what purpose and timescale is that further review to operate?

This is deeply disturbing and unsatisfactory. Ajax is in limbo. A major military capability for this country is in real trouble. Are the Government sticking with Ajax or are they going to scrap it? What confidence can we have that they have a grip of the Ajax programme? Are we sure that there is no impact on the Army’s ability to deploy the planned strike brigade?

As the review concludes:

“To have confidence that the events covered in this report will not be repeated, culture change needs to be progressed.”

For the sake of our Armed Forces and the security of our country, it certainly needs to be. I am sure that we will all appreciate the remarks of the Minister in response to this serious and damning report.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, I can associate these Benches with many of the questions from the noble Lord. He rightly highlights the fact that many government assertions over recent years have not been matched with what we now learn from the review.

I agree with the Minister in the House of Commons when he indicated that he read the report with a deep sense of regret. If anything, he needs a degree of commendation for highlighting these issues. The problem

[LORD PURVIS OF TWEED]

had been that many of them had not been highlighted thus far, and we have had to rely on this review. As the noble Lord indicated, the review states that nothing in it

“detracts from the fact that GDUK has designed and built what MOD maintains is thus far a vehicle which is not fit for purpose and does not meet the contracted specification”.

The Minister replied that the key element of that was “thus far”, but he did not tell the House of Commons when he believed that these vehicles would be fit for purpose, and he did not say when they would meet the contracted specification. As the noble Lord indicated, the National Audit Office, in reviewing the procurement of MoD equipment, highlighted that the expenditure as of March 2021 had been £3.755 billion. How on earth can that amount, of a total of £5.5 billion, be committed when the review had indicated that these vehicles were not fit for purpose and would not meet the specification? If the Government’s position is that the vehicles will do so, when will that happen?

The NAO in paragraph 11 of its report highlighted part of the challenge as being the Government changing the specification. However, it said that that accounted for an 11 months’ delay to the programme. It highlighted more than 13 programmes with 254 months of delays in MoD procurement—an astonishing amount. Paragraph 5.11 indicated in relation to Her Majesty’s Treasury that:

“The assessment for the Ajax armoured vehicle (October 2020), stated the programme remained a VFM”—
value-for-money—

“solution despite slippage of entry into service from July 2020 to June 2021, with a worst-case scenario of slippage to December 2022.”

How can the Treasury claim that there is a continued value-for-money solution while this review indicated that the vehicles were not fit for purpose and did not meet the contracted specification? Will all the vehicles now be in operation for our servicemen and women by the time of the worst-case scenario of December 2022 or are the Government changing that position?

I should declare that I represented a military barracks in my former constituency and was in northern Iraq last week. I know well the great pressure that our Armed Forces personnel have had to endure over many years. The welfare of those individuals should of course be a paramount priority. The Minister in the Commons did not indicate any detail about how support will be provided to those affected, so if the noble Baroness could provide more details, I should be grateful.

My final question relates to a Statement that the Minister made to this House in March this year. When asked about procurement in the MoD, she said in relation to a question from my noble friend Lord Addington about overruns and expenditure increases:

“The scenario that the noble Lord envisages is unlikely to arise because from now on procurement will proceed on a very different basis from what we have known in the past.”—[*Official Report*, 24/3/21; col. 845.]

However, we had to rely on this report and the Minister in the Commons stating in his concluding remarks yesterday that the report

“lays bare a deep malaise, which is cultural and results in systemic failures across our organisations.”—[*Official Report*, Commons, 15/12/21; col. 1082.]

How on earth can those two areas be reconciled? Can that department be relied upon, even by commissioning a senior legal figure, to learn these lessons? Would it not be better if that legal figure responded to a different and external organisation to ensure that deep malaise and cultural and systemic failures are not repeated in the future?

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Baroness Goldie) (Con): My Lords, I, first, thank the noble Lords, Lord Coaker and Lord Purvis, for their observations and comments.

I pay tribute to my honourable friend Jeremy Quin, the Minister in the other place, for his determination to lift the drain covers to find out what had been happening. I am grateful to the noble Lords, Lord Coaker and Lord Purvis, for acknowledging his efforts. I also thank David King, the MoD director of health and safety and environmental protection, for his report, which, although deeply troubling, is also robust, analytical, comprehensive and helpful.

The noble Lord, Lord Coaker, quite understandably raised the catalogue of failings and asked how this could be. We are absolutely clear about what the recent report has produced. It confirmed that there were serious failings in how the MoD handled the health and safety concerns regarding Ajax vehicles. The review concluded that it was not the failure of a single individual but a complex combination of the Armed Forces’ relationship to harm and weaknesses in the MoD’s acquisition system. It also pointed to missed opportunities to act on safety and risk management across the programme.

Let me make it clear that all that is unacceptable. My honourable friend in the other place made that clear and I repeat that to your Lordships. That is why I say that this report, although deeply troubling, points to a way forward in a constructive and helpful manner. Your Lordships will be aware—the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, alluded to this—that the recommendations in the report not only cover Ajax but reach out helpfully into the broader areas of procurement, particularly in relation to health and safety, and what changes might be made.

The noble Lord, Lord Coaker, asked how no one knew what was going on. It has emerged that warnings were not given sufficient attention; the report is explicit about that. Very troublingly, the Army did not believe that it was potentially causing harm to people as it was tacitly expected that soldiers could and should endure such conditions. That is utterly unacceptable, as the report makes clear. The recommendations are designed to ensure that a completely different and much more scrutinising approach to health and safety is adopted in future.

The noble Lord asked about the relevance of the follow-on review. I suppose that the review will look partially at the current health and safety report that has been published, but it is really determined to look at the whole Ajax programme to try to work out exactly what was going on beyond health and safety, and why communication was so poor and warnings

were ignored. I make it clear that if gross misconduct is disclosed by that follow-on review then the appropriate administrative and disciplinary action will be taken.

The noble Lord asked specifically about the Defence Safety Authority report. That report was withdrawn for good reason: it did not follow the process, quality control and due diligence that you would expect of an inquiry such as a formal initiation establishing and analysing the facts, gathering and verifying evidence and, of course, deploying peer review. Following the retraction of that report because it was not considered sufficiently robust to be proceeded with, the Defence Land Safety Regulator, which works within the DSA, followed up on the concerns directly with Army HQ and DE&S. Again, while that sounds reassuring up to a point, I fully understand, as the report has disclosed, that the whole background and territory of communication—of the warnings being given, of how those were acknowledged and what response was given to them—becomes very opaque, and that is utterly unacceptable. The follow-on review will certainly look very closely at those issues.

The noble Lord, Lord Coaker, also asked whether we were sticking with Ajax. As he will understand, Ajax is a very important piece of equipment. It is a step change in how we deal with carrying personnel and with deploying cutting-edge technology to do that safely and to have as precise a knowledge of battleground as possible. We have made it clear that we are working with General Dynamics to try to get to the root of the problem with a view to finding solutions, but I make it clear again to this House that we will not accept a vehicle that is not fit for purpose. As my honourable friend said in the other place yesterday, it remains impossible to share with your Lordships 100% confidence that this programme will succeed, or, if it does, of the timing for achieving full operating capability.

In relation to overall capability, a point to which the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, referred, as did the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, we live in a world where we constantly consider, assess, adjust and, as necessary, plan what our response will be to threats. We will make sure that we are able to deal with whatever operational obligations fall upon us. Very particularly, I make it clear that this is not impacting on our operational capability nor on our obligations under NATO.

The noble Lord, Lord Purvis raised the matter of trials. As he is aware, trials have taken place and we are currently assessing them. The physical trials at Millbrook have concluded. They have generated hundreds of gigabytes of data, and we expect to see conclusions from the analysis shortly. We will then verify the data, conduct assurance trials where required and draw conclusions on the next steps. Over and above that, separate from the trials, General Dynamics has conducted its own tests of proposed modifications to address vibration issues. Once analysis is complete, the MoD will verify the results through subsequent trials.

The noble Lord, Lord Purvis, raised the follow-on review. It is important that we build on such knowledge as has now been gathered together, and I think the health and safety report is a robust foundation on which to do that. The Secretary of State's intention to bring in a leading legal figure is absolutely right, and

they will look objectively, analytically and dispassionately at whatever the evidence may be and draw conclusions from that. I cannot pre-empt that, but we await progress on it.

When I looked at the report, it was deeply concerning—and I can tell your Lordships that it was deeply concerning to my ministerial colleagues—that personnel worked in a vehicle that had the potential to cause harm. I find that utterly unacceptable. The 310 people identified as working on Ajax trials and training have all been contacted for assessment. We shall continue to monitor those who have been assessed. We encourage those who have either declined assessment or been unable to attend an assessment to come forward, and any identified with continuing or emerging conditions will be supported appropriately.

3.26 pm

Lord Berkeley (Lab): My Lords, listening to the questions and the Minister's answers persuades me that this is a complete disaster, as we have debated in your Lordships' House quite a few times now, and it does not seem to be getting any better. I am glad that some further work has been done; we have now spent billions on this, apparently.

I wonder how it is possible that the Army top brass has allowed the situation to get this far without coming along and explaining why it has got so expensive and why it does not work properly. In the previous debate, in addition to the effect on the soldiers inside the tank, there was the question of whether the thing can go backwards up a step or something, and I think I made a comment that the British Army probably does not think we ever retreat so it does not matter—I hope it has some better reasons than that for saying what it has. Nor can it fire on the move or do its designed speed. If any private company were ordering something at a hundredth of the cost of this thing and made these kinds of mistakes, they would have been sacked.

This has also been debated before in your Lordships' House, but Ajax came out very badly in the Infrastructure and Projects Authority annual report. I remember asking at the time: do Ministers ever read that report, and do they take action? It is clear that in this case they have not, otherwise they would have done something by now to get the answers. I appreciate that the report is a step in that direction, but they need to take stronger action to control the costs.

My last question is: why do we need this at all? Is it really part of the Army's necessary equipment? Do we need to spend all this money on tanks? I do not know where we deploy them apart from Salisbury Plain. Is it not time that someone took a step back and said, "Do we, as a medium-sized power in the world, need tanks that can't go backwards and cause injury to the people inside them?" We do not seem to be questioning it.

Baroness Goldie (Con): I will respond to the noble Lord's questions in reverse order. Yes, Ajax is an important capability for the future British Army. It will provide a mobile, resilient and crewed ISTAR capability that is optimised for "find, understand and exploit" effects. It will offer the newest and most technologically advanced capabilities, equipped with a

[BARONESS GOLDIE]

best-in-class sensor suite and other cutting-edge technological aids. It is a very important piece of equipment and I think that is universally acknowledged.

The contract for this is a firm-price contract. We know what the price is. It is now down to the company, in collaboration with the MoD, to resolve the issues that have been causing the noise and vibration.

The noble Lord raised the question of the IPA report. The IPA released its public data in July 2021, showing that the Ajax programme had moved from amber to red status back in April 2021. The then senior responsible owner asked the IPA to review the programme over concerns that it was not progressing as it should be. However, as the health and safety report indicates, that is just one element of a very confused system of accountability, communication, acknowledgement of warnings and reaction to warnings. The noble Lord is right to express concern about that, and I will not diminish the significance of his question. If you look at the recommendations of the health and safety report, there is a lot of comfort to be derived from it, not only in relation to the Ajax programme but the relevance of some of these recommendations to the wider procurement programme. The noble Lord is correct that there are still questions to be answered. That will fall within the jurisdiction of the forthcoming follow-on review.

Lord Macpherson of Earl's Court (CB): My Lords, I welcome the Government's response to this report, and the involvement in the other place of Jeremy Quin, who was a first-rate official in the Treasury at the time of the financial crisis. I also think that this country still needs to be able to deploy tanks in Europe, fulfilling its NATO responsibilities. My question is a simple one, derived from 30 years of working at the Treasury. The MoD has undertaken countless reports over many generations to deal with problems of procurement. I would welcome an explanation from the Minister of why this time it will be different.

Baroness Goldie (Con): I thank the noble Lord for his kind remarks about my honourable friend in the other place. Everyone is clear that Jeremy Quin has been like a terrier trying to get to the root of what has been going on here; hence we have much more information available to us today. This programme in particular has indicated and illustrated that there is no denying that there are weaknesses in the system. The defence director of health, safety, and environmental protection is owed a huge debt. He has analytically looked at the problems and come forward with rock-solid recommendations based on evidence. I can assure the noble Lord that it is the intention of the MoD to accept.

As the noble Lord is possibly aware, there are three recommendations that pose some practical problems. In principle, we understand what they are trying to do, and we are sympathetic to them, but we need to look at them more closely to see how they will work in practice. However, I am satisfied that these recommendations are very much a way forward. He will be aware that reforms have been adopted in the MoD in relation to contracts, procurement, and acquisitions. They have

been working well. This programme started back in 2010, so it has been a long-standing development. The follow-on review will begin to answer some of the question that I know are uppermost in his mind, but I assure him that this is not a one-off. In terms of solutions, this will be looked at as a signpost to how we should act in the MoD and be regarded as a template for future procurements.

The Deputy Speaker (Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall) (Lab): My Lords, it appears that there are no further questions on the Statement.

Integrated Rail Plan: Northern Powerhouse Area *Question for Short Debate*

3.35 pm

Asked by Lord Berkeley

To ask Her Majesty's Government how the Integrated Rail Plan will deliver the (1) capacity, and (2) regional connectivity, sought for the Northern Powerhouse area.

Lord Berkeley (Lab): My Lords, I am pleased that we can have a quick debate about the integrated rail plan this afternoon. My question relates to the capacity and regional capability contained in the plan, particularly for the east-west areas of the north and the Midlands.

I am grateful to the Minister for arranging a Zoom call this morning with Andrew Stephenson MP, the Minister for HS2. We had a useful discussion. I now realise that the IRP appears to be a cut-down version of HS2, with some welcome electrification on the Midland main line and the trans-Pennine route, but which appears not to deal with the capacity issues and the priorities for east-west connectivity, particularly for Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and Hull.

Therefore, it did not really surprise me when I received a copy of the letter sent from the chair of Transport for the North to the Secretary of State, dated 26 November. It starts:

"I am writing on behalf of the Transport for the North Board to express our collective disappointment and dismay at the inadequacy of the Integrated Rail Plan; the plan as proposed is unacceptable to the North."

That is a fairly strong statement from a regional authority. One of the issues it goes into is that the plan fails to deal with infrastructure constraints, particularly around Leeds and Manchester, saying that

"the plan is the wrong solution for the whole of the North and does not deliver the long-term transformation required to level up the North's economy".

I shall not go on, as it is a very long letter, but it also mentions that Bradford is left out, despite being the seventh largest local authority area in England by population.

I share Transport for the North's vision to improve the network and make it as good as the network we have in the south-east around London. One can compare against the routes through the capital, Thameslink

and Crossrail, once it opens, which serve dozens of routes on each side for seamless journeys. I would give the time of all those journeys, but I do not think we know them. That is what is particularly missing in terms of capacity across the Pennines and east-west services, including from Birmingham to Derby and Nottingham. In particular, there is a lack of not just through services but local services, connecting many of the smaller towns on the way. I do not know whether that matters to the Government, but it should.

I have one particular concern about Manchester, where the plan is to expand the existing planned HS2 station, so that all trains coming on the line reverse before going across the Pennines to Leeds. On page 65, the report justifies having terminus stations by saying that there are many in Europe, for example in Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Zürich, Milan and Rome. It fails to say that all those stations were built probably over 100 years ago, when tunnels were less easy to build. It is also wrong, because the German Government and the German railway company are actually building a through tunnel underneath Stuttgart station. What the Government are proposing is old-fashioned—so be it.

As I said, I welcome the electrification of the Midland main line and the trans-Pennine route. That is a good idea but I point out that a small piece of the HS2 line now planned between Derby and Birmingham is, I think, costed at £11 billion when it would have cost just £2.5 billion to electrify the existing line. The biggest missing issue is that there is nothing in the report about improving the many secondary lines and services in the regions. It is good that Leeds is promised a metro service but I wonder how many decades that will take to come. It is a very good idea, if and when it happens.

On the costs, £96 billion is quoted in the document; it appears that the Government are including HS2 and Network Rail costs in this. It is my calculation that HS2 phases 1 and 2a are going to cost £83 billion to complete. While that has come from whistleblowers and my own estimation, it leaves just £9 billion for the rest of the project, which I hope is wrong. I have to question how much money matters to the Treasury. Many noble Lords will have read an article in the *Guardian*—I think it was on Monday this week—which said that the Department for Transport was requiring all train operators to prepare plans to cut costs by at least 10%. That is quite critical at this time, when nobody really knows what the forecast of future passengers might be. Has it asked HS2 to do the same? That might be a good thing. With all this, there seems to be very little money left for upgrades, electrification and capacity enhancement because it is all going on HS2.

The other interesting thing is: who will be building and developing all these things? In a series of Written Answers that I received this week, it seems that: Network Rail will be told to upgrade existing lines with help from HS2 to get trains into Leeds; HS2 is going to be building phase 2A and bits in the West Midlands; and there may be a new line for Northern Powerhouse Rail—we are not quite sure where, but I think it stops somewhere at the summit of the Pennines. Where does Great British Railways come into this? Apparently, it has no responsibility for HS2, as I had it from another Written Question some time ago.

Who has the best track record? Network Rail has a very good one on electrification now. It has just completed the Werrington dive-under on the Doncaster line, which is a really good piece of work, if not so cost-effective—

Lord Adonis (Lab): If my noble friend will forgive me, does he think that its record on Great Western electrification is creditable to Network Rail? The costs are running at about four times the projection and it is taking three times as long as it was supposed to.

Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen (Con): My Lords, this is only a one-hour debate and we are quite short on time.

Lord Berkeley (Lab): Briefly, Great Western electrification finished about five years ago and Network Rail has improved things as a result. That was true at that time but things have got a lot better.

What is missing from this document is a real acceptance by the Department for Transport that the decision-making on strategies and routes, priorities and deliveries should rest with the northern powerhouse/Transport for the North members—the local authorities which know their areas. That is devolution. I am afraid that the document has demonstrated the department's inability to plan and deliver to time and budget. It should give TfN a chance.

If the Government were honest in wanting to improve the rail network in the north and Midlands, they would cancel the bits of HS2 that they are funding and put all the remaining funds included in the IPR into not only giving much-improved capacity and speed on the two east-west axes—Liverpool, Manchester, Bradford, Leeds and Hull, and Sheffield, Birmingham, Derby and Nottingham—but improving the many secondary lines in each area. So many people rely on those for their daily commuting to school, colleges, work, levelling-up and everything else.

I fear that this Department for Transport will result only in nothing happening for the next few years and I hope that it not the case. I hope that the Minister, when she replies, will say that I have got it completely wrong that it does not matter that Bradford is only connected to the south and not east-west. I hope she will sit down with her colleagues in the department and northern powerhouse people and come up with a solution that is acceptable to all.

3.45 pm

Lord Horam (Con): My Lords, my first trans-Pennine rail journey took place when I was seven. I was living in Preston and my parents decided to send me to school in Wakefield so for the next 10 years I spent rail journeys shuttling backwards and forwards over the Pennines between Lancashire and Yorkshire. Subsequently I became the Member of Parliament for Gateshead West and got to know the east coast line. After that I was a Transport Minister in James Callaghan's Government and got to know the whole network. More recently, this last year, I was shuttling around the Manchester conurbation on trains going to the party conference and visiting my relatives, family and friends in that area. So, I come at this from that particular committed northern point of view.

[LORD HORAM]

The Minister will be glad to know that I therefore strongly and warmly welcome the plan. It seems to be extremely sensible. Of course, the response was subject to the usual political grandstanding, which I fully understand—people have to make their names and the local mayors have to say what they can. But if one wants an objective view, the Institute of Civil Engineers had it just about right when it said it was

“a step in the right direction”.

I was concerned, as many have been, that the huge cost of HS2 would gradually erode the necessary funds from all across the east-west connections and the local connections which the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, spoke so eloquently about. It seems that possibility has now lessened with this recalibration of the whole programme. I was surprised by what he said about the crucial east-west line between Liverpool, Warrington, Manchester, Huddersfield, Leeds and York, because that is clearly inked in as an improvement. Bradford, which was neglected by HS2 itself, has an improvement in that the line between Leeds and Bradford is electrified and the time comes down to 12 minutes; we could hardly improve on that. All this has led to a much better scope for what we want in the east-west improvements.

The integration has been improved. It always seemed like the HS2 original plan was like a fork stuck up the middle of England without much connection with the rest of the network. All of that has been improved to the advancement of towns such as Derby and Nottingham. Finally, the whole thing has been brought forward in time. The original HS2 document planned no real improvements until 2040. Now we are promised at least 10 years earlier than that—I might live to see some of this myself for heaven’s sake—so that is a vast improvement.

The broad statement of the Institute of Civil Engineers about this being a move in the right direction is correct. But it also says that in the next 12 months there should be a detailed analysis and working out of what should happen. I hope that the Minister will commit the Government to doing that. It is essential that we now get a move on.

3.49 pm

Lord Beith (LD): I agree with the objectives of the integrated rail plan but, as far as the east and north-east of England are concerned, the plan fails to meet them. HS2 was never going to do much for the north-east and now, cut back, it will do virtually nothing for it. The plan leaves the east coast main line, in the words of the *Railway Magazine*, as the “withered arm” of the system.

In the plan, there are infrastructure improvements to the east coast line, but lack of capacity remains severely limiting to passenger and freight services for years to come. Why is there no commitment to reopening the Leamside line in County Durham? That would solve a significant capacity problem and allow for further development of local services. The report says that

“the case for re-opening the Leamside route would be best considered as part of any future city region settlement”.

What settlement? What city region? What plans do the Government have to bring this forward, and why would it not have been better to include this project in the integrated plan? In this respect, it is a disintegrated plan.

A further consequence of not doing enough to increase line capacity is that improvements to London services, and to cross-country and trans-Pennine ones, are dependent on robbing Peter to pay Paul—in other words, reducing services from some stations to speed up or accommodate more services from Edinburgh to London. The report says that journey times from London to York, the north-east and Edinburgh will be reduced by around 25 minutes “subject to stopping patterns”. We know what that means, because we saw it in LNER’s draft timetable, now delayed to 2023. It means reducing services and lengthening journey times from some stations, such as Berwick and Darlington—the very opposite of levelling up.

It appears that preparation for service reductions is already being made by LNER, with a major reduction in travel centre staffing hours and consequent redundancies. It is a very odd time to be doing this, not only in advance of decisions on the integrated rail plan but with the planned handover of responsibility for station staff from LNER to Great British Railways. They should surely leave decisions such as that until that transfer has taken place.

All the maps in the integrated rail plan show the east coast main line petering out north of Newcastle, ignoring the existence of Alnmouth and Berwick. That is a sad symbol for a serious weakness in the plan. In his introduction to the plan, Grant Shapps talks of a

“modern network for the whole country, benefiting small towns alongside big cities sooner than previous proposals”.

It does not look like that from the small town of Berwick, which is the real access point for the whole of the eastern borders, or from the cities of eastern England, especially Newcastle and Sunderland.

HS2, as planned, was primarily of benefit to Birmingham and the north-west, and that is even more the case since the eastern arm part of the plan was chopped back. While the north-west may benefit, on the eastern side of England we will still not even have adequate linkage to the area whose prosperity might well be improved by faster rail services. We will not be part of that, and this is not going to achieve levelling up.

3.52 pm

Lord Adonis (Lab): There are two aspects of the integrated rail plan that I strongly welcome: the decision to move ahead with a metro system for Leeds and the decision to electrify the midland main line and the trans-Pennine line. However, these both reflect chaotic and inconsistent transport planning over the last 25 years.

Noble Lords from Leeds—and I see that my noble friend Lady Blake, the former leader of Leeds City Council, is here—will know that a tram system for Leeds was first proposed more than 20 years ago. Unfortunately, the Government of which I was a member cancelled that plan. There was supposed to be a trolleybus scheme, but that bit the dust too. We have

now come full circle. Indeed, I think that the Government of which the noble Lord, Lord Horam, was a member first proposed the serious upgrading of metro services in and around Leeds, and I admire his confidence that things will now happen with an alacrity with which they failed to happen in previous decades.

The same is true of both electrification schemes. Electrification of the midland main line and the trans-Pennine line was announced 10 years ago. Midland main line electrification was supposed to follow on directly from Great Western electrification which, despite the remarks of my noble friend Lord Berkeley, has been a textbook case of disaster in terms of cost overruns, descoping and failure to meet proper project management specifications. Both those electrification schemes were then cancelled because of cost overruns and austerity, and they are being revived. We are now being told that they are a great offering to the Midlands and the north and should make us confident that there will be transformational capacity in the Midlands and the north, when in fact they are schemes that should have been delivered many years ago, if we had any proper planning.

However, the two big decisions in terms of changes of policy in the integrated rail plan—the cancellation of the eastern leg of HS2 and the cancellation of the new east-west line that was intended to link the northern cities—are both utterly deplorable. They are deplorable in three ways. First, in transport policy terms they are deplorable. As the noble Lord, Lord Beith, just said, the eastern side of the country will now essentially be left out of the high-speed rail plan. This will produce a new east-west divide in this country on top of the north-south divide, and overcoming it was a large part of the intention of HS2 in the first place. When HS2 is now completed, it will take nearly twice as long to get to Leeds as to get to Manchester and there will be only a fraction of the rail capacity going to the eastern side of the country—Sheffield and Leeds—because there is no high-speed line. High-speed lines treble rail capacity and allow an enormous release of capacity for new local services of the kind that my noble friend Lord Berkeley was talking about.

The second reason why it is deplorable is that it is a complete uprooting of proper and systematic infrastructure planning. The plan for HS2 was announced more than 10 years ago. It followed exhaustive work by HS2 Ltd. Indeed, it went back to the plan that the noble Lord, Lord Birt, produced for the Blair Government in 2003, which recommended that the Government look systematically at the introduction of high-speed lines between our major conurbations. I was privileged to be the first chairman of the National Infrastructure Commission in 2015. The first report of the National Infrastructure Commission said that HS2 should be completed to Manchester and Leeds and that there should be a new east-west line.

The third aspect in which it is deplorable is that it uproots cross-party working. We will get no serious infrastructure built in this country unless there is cross-party agreement, because it takes many Parliaments to build big infrastructure. There was cross-party agreement to HS2 and a new east-west line. There is not cross-party agreement for this integrated rail plan.

It is a dog's breakfast. The Opposition have said they have no confidence in it and will seek to change it if they come to power. We are therefore going to take a massive step back in terms of the upgrading of the infrastructure of this country, and the principal loser will unfortunately be the whole eastern side of the country, which could be at a massive economic disadvantage as a result of the IRP, compared with the Midlands and the north-west.

3.57 pm

Lord Birt (CB): My Lords, I am a proud Liverpoolian and chair of a business headquartered in Yorkshire. Well into the last century, most people, like my grandfather, walked to work. No longer. Modern business requires a multiplicity of skills, from technologists to service engineers to data scientists to financial analysts and myriad more. Most people travel significant distances to work and while they undertake their work, mostly not on trains but in cars, vans and HGVs.

Economically, it is best to think of the heartland of the north, from Liverpool through Manchester to Leeds, as a single metropolitan area with a huge population. The north has long had a wholly inadequate road and rail system to connect its major centres. The M62 is seriously jammed for many hours of the day. By way of example, Halifax and Huddersfield are only eight miles apart, but the direct route between these two famous towns is through hilly country on narrow, bending and heavily trafficked roads, and at rush hour the eight-mile journey can take a whopping 45 minutes. By train, it takes an incredible one hour and 46 minutes to travel the 74 miles from Liverpool to Leeds at a sluggish 42 miles per hour.

To unleash its potential, the north needs not just a rail plan but an integrated rail and road plan. That plan would create a strategic road network and, inter alia, relieve the pressure on the M62 and enable rail to do what rail does best: moving people into, out of and between major metropolitan areas. Leeds and Liverpool need to be connected to London by high-speed rail. London is an unrivalled global centre of financial and professional skill and, to prosper, the north needs effective connectivity with it. Remarkably, under the Government's proposals in future it will be quicker to reach London from Manchester than to reach Leeds from Liverpool. That is truly shocking. The north will not thrive until the Government focus equally on all three of its major metropolitan areas.

For the past 70 years—not 25, as the noble Lord, Lord Adonis, said—we have had the worst record of any major country in the world in investing in our national transport infrastructure. The Treasury bears prime responsibility for that. High-speed rail is the most vivid example. The International Union of Railways records that China has 38,000 kilometres of high-speed rail, Spain has 3,500, France has 2,700 and the UK—any guesses?—has 113 kilometres. That is 24 times less than France.

That is truly shameful, and it illuminates a horrible truth about our politics: all the pressures on our highly disputatious political system press on the short and not on the long term. This is less than half a plan and I do not expect to see that change.

4.01 pm

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD): My Lords, this is neither integrated nor really a plan. I wish to correct the noble Lord, Lord Horam; the Institution of Civil Engineers actually said that this was “at best ... a step in the right direction.”

Northern Powerhouse Rail has now shrunk to a new line between Warrington and Marsden—a village west of Huddersfield—without any clarity as to whether that will involve doubling the Standedge tunnel to remove the bottleneck in the middle. Are the Government confident that they can reopen the two very old single-line tunnels on either side of the current double Standedge tunnel for fast and electrified trains? If they cannot, a new tunnel will be needed somewhere, which makes the case for it being somewhere different, rather than simply doubling the Standedge tunnel. That is the case for a second fast trans-Pennine link, which the Government have just denied.

This is a question of capacity. I have heard several times about the sheer difficulty of finding additional freight paths across the Pennines. The idea that freight between Liverpool and Hull must go on the M62 because there is not enough space on our railway network for container trains is absurd—but that is where we are. Tunnels and capacity are essential.

After all, the concept of a “northern powerhouse” rested on bringing together Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool and Sheffield, with links to Hull and Newcastle, and their surrounding cities and towns, into a metropolitan network comparable to that from which Greater London already benefits. I fear the slogan has now outlived its credibility and therefore ought to be abandoned. The concept included reopening or upgrading a number of local feeder lines, which are also important to economic regeneration, but the core of the concept was fast lines to bring together the major cities across the north.

Bradford is one of those major cities. I declare an interest; I live in the Bradford metropolitan region and benefit from one of the very few electrified local lines in the north, so at least I can get from Saltaire to London and back via Leeds. However, getting from Saltaire to Sheffield or Manchester is a very long, slow and difficult process, because the lines do not go through the tunnels or south from Bradford to Huddersfield and Sheffield. We need to link in Bradford, Halifax and the northern Pennine towns to this metropolitan network. Without a second link, or at the very least a substantial rebuilding of the Calder Valley line, which flooded badly two years ago, we condemn Bradford as a city, and Halifax and the Pennine towns, to long-term decline.

The Minister for Rail, as MP for Pendle, ought at least to know this; Pendle is one of the most economically deprived areas in Britain, which is partly because its transport links are so poor. I am shocked that the Department for Transport has declined to provide even a small sum to look at the feasibility of opening the Skipton-Colne link—a third link across the Pennines—because it does not think that it is justifiable.

As has already been said, it takes an enormously long time to travel from Leeds to Liverpool, and it is very complicated to travel from Bradford to Sheffield. Bradford to Manchester is a long and slow journey on

a crowded two-carriage or three-carriage diesel train. However, the costs of two miles of extra tunnelling in south London to link the expensive new property developments around Battersea power station are justified, apparently because the foreign owners of those new properties have contributed to the Conservative Party. I hope that is not correct, but that is what *Private Eye* suggests to me.

What this looks like is “If it’s in the north, it costs too much”. The potential impact of economic transformation is left out of the calculation. If it is in London, it is essential to maintaining the region’s prosperity. I hope that is not the case the Government will continue to make.

4.05 pm

Lord Davies of Brixton (Lab): My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Berkeley for introducing this important debate and thank the Minister for the useful and informative session this morning exploring the plan. I have it here with me, and my eyes are drawn irresistibly to page 15, where it states:

“Bringing local transport systems outside London to the standards of the capital is a critical part of levelling up, driving growth and prosperity.”

This was raised in a separate debate last week, since when we have moved from the absurdity of a three-month financial deal for TfL to the farce of a one-week deal.

The Minister will have us believe that the situation is all the fault of the mayor. However, the truth is that it is solely the result of the Conservative Government’s political animus towards London. I know it; Londoners, from business leaders to poverty campaigners, know it; the whole world knows it. I suspect even the Minister knows it.

The failure to adequately finance TfL is directly relevant to the Integrated Rail Plan and connectivity in the northern powerhouse, for two reasons. First, the Government have set London as the standard to which other cities should be levelled up. Poorer services in London will mean poorer provision in cities in the north and the Midlands. Secondly, and crucially, this is not a zero-sum game. Growth and prosperity in London are as important to people in the north and the Midlands as they are to Londoners.

4.08 pm

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak at this point. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, on introducing this short debate.

As a frequent user of the east coast main line services and to his lesser extent the trans-Pennine services, I am familiar with the difficulties, in particular with east-west connectivity, and I support many of the points that have been made this afternoon. I will just make a simple plea to the Minister and to her department. Many of the picturesque mill towns that are served by the east-west route are deserving of a completely new line. What was attractive about the Integrated Rail Plan was that it recognised the level of investment which was required. I regret that the subsequent document has now been downgraded, with plans looking only to deliver a combination of new track and upgrades to existing infrastructure, rather than an entirely new line.

I realise that this is a blueprint—a first step along the way—but I hope that my noble friend will take the opportunity to revisit this as soon as she possibly can. That one simple step will open up and unlock the whole of the northern powerhouse economy, and I believe it is entirely in keeping with the government agenda to do so.

4.09 pm

Baroness Blake of Leeds (Lab): My Lords, the IRP should have been a blueprint to enable the north to deliver its transformational economic vision. The disappointment and sense of betrayal felt across the region is immense and I hope that the Government are listening and will act accordingly. I thank the Minister for the briefing we had this morning. Of course we welcome the commitments in the plan, but we are very concerned about the gaps.

As we have heard, authorities across the Midlands, the north and the north-east have spent at least 10 years and more planning for the arrival of HS2's eastern leg, integrated into Northern Powerhouse Rail. We know that it is about not just speed but capacity, taking pressure off Victorian infrastructure and freeing up the existing line for more local express services and freight trains. Most of all, as I have said, it is about economic transformation. The investment would have supported 150,000 new jobs at least, and stimulated a gross value uplift to the economy of £200 billion. These are the factors not taken into consideration in terms of investment versus further economic viability.

Leeds is a very successful city. It is the financial centre of the north of England and plans already made have been attracting new businesses to come to Leeds: Channel 4, the Bank of England and the UK Infrastructure Bank are examples. Integrated plans have been drawn up to accommodate HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail at Leeds station; the idea that they are separate schemes is just not the case. The argument has been well made that the eastern leg provides a better economic return than any other stretch of HS2. Why, despite all the rumours of cancellation, did the Department for Transport not even have the decency to inform local authorities, until the plan was published, that the elements between Leeds and Sheffield would be included?

Funding commitments are always welcome but we face more delays, more studies, and more vague timeframes, and know that some sections will be delivered later than originally planned. Is this really the ambition of the Government's levelling-up agenda?

4.12 pm

Baroness Randerson (LD): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, for initiating this debate. His indefatigable approach to all things transport always leaves me feeling slightly exhausted, because he brings so many things to our attention.

The integrated rail plan was announced only on 18 November, but already there are rumours of a U-turn. I want to wade straight in with a question to the Minister on the accuracy of recent reports in the *Telegraph* newspaper that the traction decarbonisation network strategy, the £30 billion plan to decarbonise

the railways in the next 30 years, has been shelved. If that is even slightly true, how do the Government plan to deliver a net zero-emission rail network by 2050? As the noble Lord, Lord Birt, pointed out, we are already way behind other nations, not just in electrification but in the development of high-speed rail. How do the Government's spending priorities in this respect stack up, when there appears to be a continued commitment to the £27 billion roads programme?

To say that the integrated rail plan went down like a lead balloon across most of the north and Midlands is an understatement. The headlines were of course about HS2 but the noble Lord, Lord Adonis, pointed out that HS2 was as much about capacity as it was about speed. By abandoning the grand plan and going instead for a patchwork of upgrades, the Government will be creating very little additional capacity. My noble friend Lord Beith has explained that issue. I am concerned about the lack of a cost-benefit analysis undertaken on these plans. Any rail upgrades carry a heavy burden of costs of disruption of existing infrastructure—not just to the railways but to the roads. The Great Western electrification, which took 10 years, involved the closure of the railway system at weekends and involved central Cardiff roads being closed for a year at a time to raise bridges, for example. The disruption was tremendous.

The blow to investment plans for northern cities, which have been based on the arrival of HS2, as the noble Baroness, Lady Blake, pointed out, is considerable. Birmingham has demonstrated the attraction of HS2 for investors. There was a major levelling-up opportunity. It has not just been missed; worse, it has been struck down when it was already under way.

There is hardly a reference in this document to freight. There is hardly an improvement at all to the situation at Bradford, the nation's seventh-largest city, which has effectively been abandoned and left with appalling transport links. Once again, the Government are centralising power, thinking they know best, by taking power from Transport for the North and making decisions on behalf of the people of the north.

This plan is a disgrace, and it is no way forward for a nation that wants to hold its head up in the modern world.

4.16 pm

Lord Rosser (Lab): I thank my noble friend Lord Berkeley for securing this debate. He asked a number of questions of the Government, to which I too will be interested to hear the answers.

We will hear from the Government about the reduced amount of money they now intend to invest in our railway network as a result of their broken promises—only they will not describe it that way. Instead, they will portray it as a brilliant new programme of investment which will deliver more than the original programme they had repeatedly promised. Try telling that to the people of Bradford, for example, as the integrated rail plan does not include the new high-speed trans-Pennine route between Leeds and Manchester via Bradford, which is a key component of the Northern Powerhouse Rail project. Try telling it to the people of Leeds, who, after 10 years of investment and planning based on the Government's clear—but now reneged on—proposal to bring HS2 to their city have, insultingly, been left

[LORD ROSSER]

with only a government statement in the plan about looking further into the most effective way of running HS2 trains to Leeds.

If the reduced rail investment programme was actually going to deliver more than the programme repeatedly promised by the Prime Minister—which it will not—it begs the question of why it has taken this Government more than 11 years to find that out. If the answer is that the costs of HS2 have risen during that time, that is simply an admission by the Government that they lack the ability to exercise any meaningful control over costs, as happened with the Great Western main line electrification, which, like HS2 now, was cut back and left unfinished.

As the Government cannot control costs today, they will be unable to control future costs even of their now greatly reduced rail investment programme. The integrated rail plan was supposed to present a blueprint for how HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail and trans-Pennine upgrades could all be integrated and delivered in parallel. We now have a watered-down HS2, a failure to deliver Northern Powerhouse Rail at all, and money to deliver upgrades that were needed not instead of but alongside the high-speed lines.

The upgrades will not provide the capacity the network needs, including for local services and rail freight, to become more reliable and efficient; will not create the infrastructure required to attract business investment; and will result in significant disruption to existing services while the upgrade work is undertaken, which would not be the case with the construction of new high-speed lines. Not all the investment left in the integrated rail plan is even new, timeframes are vague, and it appears that some new line sections may well be delivered later than under the original HS2 and NPR proposals.

By trading off fast strategic national rail links and higher-quality local ones against one another and prioritising short-term fixes and cost savings, the truncated plan is likely to fail to meet future demand and deliver the social, environmental and economic outcomes promised under the previous HS2 and NPR proposals. Those projects were about boosting the northern and Midland economies, as HS2 is already doing for the Midlands; closing the transport investment gap with London; rebalancing the economy and levelling up, creating thousands and thousands of new jobs; connecting millions more people and businesses in our major towns and cities in our industrial heartlands; and taking car and lorry trips off our roads to help address the climate emergency.

The truncated rail plan, which will also lead to the sidelining of Transport for the North, as my noble friend Lord Berkeley said, is driven by those in government who want simply to achieve the lowest capital cost they think they can get away with. Instead, as my noble friend Lady Blake of Leeds said, we should be looking at the whole-life benefits of major projects and programmes—economic, social and environmental—as the major cities in the north, north-east and Midlands were doing with their investment and planning while they still believed the Prime Minister's now worthless promises on HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail. If there were any doubts before, there can be

none now: the Prime Minister's slogans about levelling up and building back better are just that—slogans—and nothing more.

4.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton) (Con): My Lords, I thank all noble Lords for this wonderful Christmas present on the last day of term: a debate about Northern Powerhouse Rail and the integrated rail plan. I am enormously grateful for the thoughtful contributions that have been made and to many noble Lords for coming to the briefing this morning. I am happy to arrange further briefings in due course, as obviously, plans will develop.

We know that this is an issue of huge importance to places across the north and the Midlands, as well as to the rail and construction industry. I understand that there are strong feelings about rail investment across the country. We all want to ensure a fair deal that enables economic growth, employment opportunities and better connectivity. We as a Government must also make sure that it offers value for money for the taxpayer.

I thank my noble friend Lord Horam for his warm words for the plan; they were few and far between from other contributors. I believe that this Government are taking the right action when it comes to the integrated rail plan. At £96 billion it is an enormous programme; indeed, it is the largest single investment in rail ever made by any UK Government. I believe that it will reshape our railways in the north and the Midlands.

The plan will provide those benefits quicker, which is really important when we are looking at timeframes of 10, 20, even 30 years. These are long timeframes, and we need to be able to bring those benefits to communities as soon as we possibly can. There is a boost for eight of the 10 busiest rail corridors. We will speed up journeys, increase capacity and run more frequent services, all much earlier than previously planned. I, too, hope to be alive when some of these benefits are felt.

Let me share a few examples of the transformation plans in the IRP. Journey times from Sheffield to London will be slashed by around half an hour, and we will more than double the number of seats on Sheffield to London services. Darlington will benefit from faster and more reliable connections to places on the east coast main line, with the potential to add additional seats as required as demand grows. The time it takes to travel from Leeds to Manchester will reduce over time from 53 minutes to just over half an hour. I do not think that is bad at all; in fact, it takes me half an hour to get from Norbiton to Waterloo.

The first of these big improvements, a reduction to just over 40 minutes, will be seen later this decade. Again, this comes back to the speed at which we can make these changes. Of course, there will also be significant increases in seat capacity. We will electrify the entire trans-Pennine route, install full digital signalling and add longer sections of three and four-tracking to allow fast trains to overtake stopping services. The IRP is absolutely focused on bringing communities in the north and the Midlands closer together, boosting intercity connections and improving east-west links.

Noble Lords will be aware that there are three high-speed lines coming: Crewe to Manchester; Birmingham to the east Midlands; and the £23 billion we are investing in Northern Powerhouse Rail, which includes the brand-new high-speed line from Warrington to Manchester. The proposals set out by Transport for the North—TfN—for NPR would have come at a cost to places on the existing main lines such as Huddersfield, which would have seen little improvement or a worsening in services. They would have made Manchester to Leeds journeys only four minutes faster than the option we have chosen, at a cost of an extra £18 billion.

We will upgrade the east coast main line. It is important to note that there will be a package of investment in track improvements and digital signalling to bring down journey times from Edinburgh, Newcastle, Darlington and Leeds to London. Again, these benefits will be available to communities much sooner than previously planned.

This debate was focused on capacity and regional connectivity, issues that were woven into comments from all noble Lords today. In many instances we will see very significant capacity improvements, particularly from Manchester to London, where there will be both capacity and journey time improvements. There is a potential to treble capacity between Manchester and Birmingham. The changes to the east coast main line have the potential to increase capacity.

Many noble Lords will want details and accurate descriptions of exactly what capacity will be provided for whom and when. We do not know that now. This is a plan, and there is an enormous amount of work to do to move from the plan to the next level down—to the detail about how this will actually work on the ground. While in some places we can be very clear about what capacity improvements will be available, in others there will be an enormous amount of designing to do and engineering options to look at, particularly when it comes to upgrading lines. So, service frequency, capacity and duration of journeys may be subject to change, but, of course, we always want to maximise capacity, increase service levels and reduce journey times.

I note that there was a cynical comment about “subject to stopping”. Trains have to stop: that is their job. How else do you get passengers on and off them? But, of course, we have to think about the best way to look at the frequency of services, particularly to intermediate towns between the large economic nodes. That is really important when it comes to planning journey times and the frequency of stopping.

On freight capacity, although an awful lot of work has been done on this, I think all of us in government would admit that we did not put enough of that into the integrated rail plan. I know we will work very hard to provide more information on this in due course.

The interesting thing is that west and east are not the same. There seems to be this feeling that if the west gets something, the east has to have exactly the same, but they are very different railway markets. Not only is the western leg of the route, from Crewe to Manchester, broadly agreed but we will be able to proceed with it much faster, and the benefits in terms of connecting significant cities are clear. But on the eastern leg, the market is more balanced. Unlike the western leg, there

are far more credible choices to explore for upgrading existing sections of railway network, combined with new lines and longer trains. Those will bring the benefits that we want to see.

The underlying case for investment in the rail network in the north and Midlands remains very strong. Regional connectivity is at the heart of everything we do on rail improvements in the north. Again, integration is absolutely key. I have made the case before that plans were previously set out in isolation. They connected very large economic nodes, and kind of forgot about everywhere else in between. Many of the smaller places—although we are still talking about significant places such as Leicester, Kettering, Grantham and Newark—will benefit from the improvements coming down the track through the IRP.

At the heart of what we are doing—and this is why I think continued conversations will be beneficial—is the core pipeline. We have set out what it looks like, and any further schemes will be subject to affordability constraints and considerations. We also want to be able to deliver commitments on time and on budget. So, those are all the key things we will be thinking about.

So we have this core pipeline at the heart, and then there is this adaptive approach which sits around it. Noble Lords have mentioned, for example, Skipton-Colne. The noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, mentioned secondary lines. There is an awful lot of work to be done around how else, having gone with the core, we can maximise the connectivity into those harder-to-reach places which perhaps previously have not had good services.

I hear the concerns raised by some people from Leeds. We have looked extremely carefully and are very keen to keep working on what we can do there. We are spending £100 million on development work to look at the best way to get HS2 trains to Leeds from the east Midlands. Obviously, we will look at the current station and how it could absorb the additional capacity. I am as keen as anyone to see a mass transit network for west Yorkshire, and I am absolutely committed to working with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority on this. There was a comment about it perhaps taking decades, but that is probably not in the Government’s hands. The West Yorkshire Combined Authority is the sponsor of the project and we will look to it to bring forward plans that are well thought through and which represent good value for money for the taxpayer.

I was going to mention the electrification of the Midland main line, but perhaps I will not, because I would like to address the issue around Transport for the North and its role going forward. The noble Lord, Lord Berkeley, mentioned the letter from TfN and how it did not welcome the plan. Of course it did not welcome it; it was not TfN’s plan. We have made changes to its plan, but of course we do listen to what TfN has to say and any input that it has, as we do with all the sub-national transport bodies. I have a very close relationship with all of them. We want to work with TfN going forward in a collaborative way to ensure that we can maximise the benefits of our investment. Not everyone will always get exactly what they want. That is one of the huge challenges with planning transport networks. However, we can listen,

[BARONESS VERE OF NORBITON]

and TfN will have a really important part, as it will be co-sponsor of the project and therefore will have a key role in providing that sponsorship to the project as it goes forward.

On the Leamside line, the north-east is eligible for a multiyear city region sustainable transport settlement. Unfortunately, we need the governance structures to be in place for it to have the CRSTS. We are working very closely to encourage the local area to form a combined authority, and then we will be able to think about providing funding, which may or not subsequently be used for the Leamside line.

There is a huge amount of opportunity for rail in the north and the Midlands. Many of the questions raised cannot be answered now, not because I do not have the answers to hand but because they do not yet exist. We have an awful lot of work ahead of us, which is why we are very keen to continue the conversations around the plan that we have and the proposals that may or may not augment that plan. However, from where I am at this moment, this plan, with £96 billion to be invested in rail in the Midlands and the north, to be delivered over the next 30 years, is a good one.

Prisons Strategy *Statement*

The following Statement was made in the House of Commons on Tuesday 7 December.

“Today, the Government have published our prisons strategy White Paper to build the places, support our staff and transform the prison regime to cut crime. Prisons play a vital role in protecting the public by keeping the most prolific and dangerous offenders in custody and rehabilitating those who deserve a second chance.

As the House knows, the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill will lengthen sentences for serious violent and sexual offenders to keep them in prison and away from the public for as long as possible. We are therefore determined to build modern prisons to protect the public. We secured almost £4 billion at the spending review to carry out the biggest prison-building programme that this country has seen in more than a century, creating 20,000 additional prison places by the mid-2020s—but buildings are only one part of our plan, because of course most offenders will be released back into the community. To protect the public, we also need to strengthen the prison regime to reform and rehabilitate offenders throughout their sentence, which is the most effective way to reduce reoffending and cut crime overall. The White Paper sets out a seven-point plan to deliver it.

First, we will support prisons in taking a zero-tolerance approach to the drugs, weapons and mobile phones that disrupt and destabilise prisons, allowing organised crime gangs to run their empires beyond the prison wall. We will make greater use of our recently installed X-ray body scanners, which are now operating across the closed male estate and which prevent drugs, weapons and phones from getting into our prisons and create safer conditions for our prison staff and for offenders to focus on reform and rehabilitation.

Secondly, prisoners will be assessed on arrival for any drug or alcohol addictions so that prison officers and health teams can support offenders to map out a sustainable recovery from addiction, enabling offenders to go clean, which we know is pivotal to going straight. We will shift the focus to longer-term recovery, including through abstinence-based treatment, drawing on the best examples of incentivised substance-free living areas, such as at HMP Styal, where prisoners commit to live without drugs and undergo regular drug testing. Crucially, we want continuity of treatment once an offender is released into the community, so that they do not slip back into using drugs and into the life of crime that so often follows.

Thirdly, prisons will assess an offender’s numeracy and literacy skills and their level of qualifications as soon as they arrive in prison. Prison governors will be expected to develop a plan for each prisoner to improve these core skills and raise their level of qualifications so that we better equip offenders for work when they are released. A new prisoner education service will put vocational skills such as construction and computing at the forefront of learning so that offenders get the opportunity to improve their job prospects, giving them credible hope that they can take a second chance, turn their life around and lead a better life after prison for themselves, their families and our communities. I have seen what can be achieved by prison staff and prisoners working together, for example at HMP Lincoln, where prisoners are able to gain their construction skills certification scheme card—it is currently the only prison in Europe where prisoners can be assessed inside the prison walls so that they are ready to go once they are released—and at HMP Downview, where female prisoners work with the London College of Fashion, developing skills, confidence and great clothes.

Fourthly, we want to transform how prisons get offenders into work—one of the best ways to cut reoffending. We will introduce a new digital tool to match candidates to jobs. We will ensure that prisons have dedicated employment advisers to help offenders to find work. There are some brilliant examples, such as the marketing call centre run by Census Life at HMP High Down, or Lyons Haulage, a firm working with offenders at Ford Prison, but we need to do far better at spreading best practice across the estate. Prison governors will be expected to make their work programmes central to the way they operate their prisons, subject to appropriate vetting and security considerations.

The Government will support the changes needed to adapt prisons to accommodate the needs of employers, including through better links with businesses in surrounding areas. We are also designing smarter prisons such as HMP Five Wells in Wellingborough and Glen Parva in Leicestershire, which the Deputy Prime Minister recently visited with my honourable friend the Member for South Leicestershire, Alberto Costa, to mark the last major phase of construction at the site. These new prisons are being built with large-scale workshops so that offenders can get straight to work in those locations.

Fifthly, we will ensure that prisoners have the support they need to plan properly for a successful release from custody, because it can be a disruptive and potentially precarious moment for many offenders.

Our new resettlement passports will help to prepare offenders before release by bringing together everything they need to settle back into the community, such as a CV, identification, and a bank account, and start looking for work straightaway. Health and home matter, too; programmes for drug rehabilitation, skills and work will be more closely linked to the support services available in the community when offenders are released, and the new community accommodation service will help to tackle the challenge of homelessness, which disrupts an offender settling back into society and increases the risk that they will resort to crime.

Sixthly, we will make much greater use of smart technology to support reform and rehabilitation. Digital technology will enable inmates to access education and training courses online, as well as addiction recovery and healthcare services.

Finally, we will deliver this ambitious strategy with the hard work, determination, ingenuity and dedication of the brilliant staff who work in our prisons every day to keep us safe. We will recruit up to 5,000 more prison officers across public and private prisons as part of our expansion plans. We will upskill our existing staff throughout the estate so that they are better equipped than ever with the skills required to be a prison officer in the 21st century.

Prison leadership will be critical, too. We have some truly exceptional governors working across the estate today. We will empower those trailblazing governors who deliver the best results by giving them more autonomy over how their prisons are run to meet the strategic vision set out in the White Paper. We will also set out key performance indicators and league tables and evaluate performance so that we can spread the very best innovative practice right across the estate.

The Government put public protection at the heart of everything we do. We are recruiting more police officers, we are putting serious offenders behind bars for longer, and now we are building state-of-the-art prisons, bolstered with a regime that will drive down reoffending by making sure that every day that an offender spends behind bars involves purposeful reform and rehabilitation to help them to go straight, turn their life around and make a positive contribution to society. That is how this Government are cutting crime and making our communities safer as we build back better, stronger, and fairer, after the pandemic. I commend this Statement to the House.”

4.34 pm

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): My Lords, the prison strategy White Paper can most charitably be described as a missed opportunity to tackle the escalating prison crisis. While presenting the biggest prison-building programme in more than 100 years as a way to improve public protection, the strategy contains next to no credible solutions to the multiple problems plaguing our existing estate, which have made rehabilitation nigh-on impossible and have led to record levels of reoffending.

Unusually for a White Paper, the document contains very few direct legislative proposals and instead asks numerous consultation questions, many along the lines of: “Do you agree with our ... vision?”

Old ideas from previous papers are repeated and recycled, through the 76 pages of vague aspirations and feel-good gimmicks, such as resettlement passports and workforce drug testing. Yet key drivers of violence and instability, such as widespread squalor and the collapse in staff retention, morale and experience, are glossed over and ignored.

Worse, there is no recognition that government policies over the last decade have caused the current crisis, including cuts to staffing and other resources, leading to the degradation of pay, terms and conditions, a haemorrhaging of experience and the surge in violence, especially against prison staff. The paper’s headline pledge to recruit 5,000 new officers seems optimistic in light of the current recruitment and retention crisis and the lack of ministerial interest in the reasons behind the record resignations—from poverty pay to an unrealistic and cruel pension age of 68.

The long-promised prisoner education service gets a few mentions, but with no real detail apart from praise for the potential of in-cell technology. We agree that in-cell technology could be a game changer in rehabilitation and the whole incarceration experience.

One glimmer of hope, however, is the recognition that mass unstructured social time can make some prisoners feel unsafe and inhibit the ability of staff to manage the risks of violence and bullying. This is a key lesson from the pandemic that trade unions have consistently highlighted—as did the then Lord Chancellor Robert Buckland in July, when he insisted that there could be no going back to pre-Covid regimes. However, running smaller-scale regimes with higher staff-to-prisoner ratios will be at the discretion of governors, rather than required by national policy. As far as I can see, the strategy shows no understanding that such initiatives need significant staff investment and will be simply unsustainable with current staffing capacity.

Very little in this White Paper requires primary legislation: only the proposals to bring forward release dates, potentially—we debated this yesterday on the PCSC Bill—and to strengthen the powers of scrutiny organisations. What will all these extra prisoners do all day? The White Paper states that

“opening up the estate to employers”

will deliver a step change in the number of prisoners who work in prison. It seems likely that new legislation may be needed to create a presumption in favour of adapting the prison estate and regime to facilitate work in prison for appropriate prisoners. As important as a sense of satisfaction from doing a proper day’s work must be to prisoners, it seems unlikely that, with a minimum wage of £4 a week, they will earn enough to buy the things they need day to day in prison and also save for their release.

In praising prison officers as “hidden heroes”, the White Paper’s strategy commits to making

“the prison officer role one which is understood and valued in society in the same way that police and other core frontline roles are”.

But it concedes that attrition rates are simply too high, which is

“causing an unsustainable level of turnover in the system”, leaving

“new staff feeling unsupported, contributing to a vicious cycle of staff dissatisfaction and lack of retention.”

[LORD PONSONBY OF SHULBREDE]

Even the Prison Service's new retention framework, referenced in the White Paper, admits that poor pay is a key driver to attrition and accepts that there are limits to what governors can do locally to improve pay and rewards. In other words, the solutions to the problem are well known; we are just seeing a lack of political will from the Government.

What about the existing teachers and how they will operate within the new prison education service? We are told that there will be two overriding strategic priorities: improving the numeracy and literacy of all prisoners, and incentivising them to improve their qualifications to increase their prospects of finding work. These are both admirable aims, but involve very different types of teaching, alongside additional resources and a break from the current private commissioning model, which is not recognised in the strategy document that I was reading earlier.

There is at least an admission that the current education system is not fit for purpose. The White Paper insists:

"Despite recent changes, the current quality of education provision is not good enough, with 60% of prisons in England receiving Ofsted grades of 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate' over the last five years."

However, the proposed solution is to

"work with our providers to improve the delivery and quality of training in prisons to drive year on year improvements to Ofsted grades, so they are much closer to those achieved by Further Education in the community."

This is a laudable aspiration, but if it is not backed by new investment it will be an empty promise.

One area that will see a boost, thankfully, is in-cell technology. There is no question but that this could dramatically change learning and rehabilitation more widely, as well as help maintain and improve family engagement, and, of course, promote stability and good behaviour when used as a reward or incentive. Can the Minister say whether virtual visits via in-cell kiosks should be treated and charged as a phone call or as an in-person visit? Of course, in-person visits are free at the moment. Moreover, will Parliament, and indeed the public, get to express a view on this? It is a very specific question that I suspect parliamentarians would have a view on.

In reality, it is the probation service that is responsible for keeping new releases on the straight and narrow. The new strategy makes no mention of *Transforming Rehabilitation*, which was the failed probation privatisation experiment that caused so much misery.

To address the scandal of homelessness among prison leavers, the White Paper proposes extending

"a new provision of temporary accommodation and support for up to 12 weeks after release"

to all prison leavers, but it is not resettlement passports that new leavers need; it is front-door keys. Where is the commitment to helping them on to housing benefit with deposits paid in advance to trusted landlords?

The understanding that prisons

"cannot support rehabilitation unless they are safe, stable and secure"

is to be welcomed, as is the pledge to

"provide safer working conditions for staff",

but the proposed

"new ministerial prison performance board that will hold the system and Governors to account for ensuring prisoners and staff are safe"

will have key performance indicators and "appropriate league tables". The KPIs are

"security and stability; substance misuse and mental health; and resettlement and family ties."

It is worrying that the crucial metric of staff safety seems to be missing from the KPI list. One simple way for Ministers to send a clear message to staff that they are on their side would be to ensure that all attempts at potting are prosecuted and for the Government to back the amendment from the noble Earl, Lord Attlee, to the PCSC Bill.

Bizarrely, the strategy calls for

"modern desktop computers, devices and software to benefit the people who work in our prisons",

which

"will allow for increased productivity and a reduction in time wasted by users waiting for systems to boot up".

Why does it need a White Paper for prison staff to get new PCs? Just how long does it take for their current systems to turn on? This seems ridiculous.

Finally, the strategy looks at rolling out a two-year programme of future regime design to let governors design their own regimes. The highest performing governors will receive "earned autonomy" and "greater flexibility to deviate from nationally set policies."

This includes

"greater freedoms to deviate from prison service instructions and policy frameworks",

as long as KPIs are met. This begs the question: why will governors be rewarded for hitting targets by being given the opportunity to break the rules? That is maybe a rhetorical question, and I approve of giving governors greater flexibility and managed autonomy, but this cannot be allowed to shift responsibility and accountability from Ministers who have put this new regime in place.

Lord Paddick (LD): Forgive me, my Lords, but I understood that it was five minutes for each Front Bench and then 10 minutes for the Minister to respond to our questions. Hopefully, with the leave of the House, we will give the Minister appropriate time to respond despite the Labour Front Bench.

Like the noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede, we believe that the White Paper is disappointing. The Statement gets off on the wrong foot as far as we on these Benches are concerned. It says:

"Prisons play a vital role in protecting the public by keeping the most prolific and dangerous offenders in custody"—

although, as we see from the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, even peaceful protesters are going to be subject to custodial sentences—

"and rehabilitating those who deserve a second chance."

Can the Minister explain which prisoners do not deserve a second chance? On what criteria are the Government going to decide who does and does not deserve one?

The Statement says that the Ministry of Justice has secured enough money in the spending review to build an additional 20,000 prison places by the 2020s. The Nationality and Borders Bill intends to criminalise

asylum seekers entering the country through irregular routes, with a maximum penalty of four years' imprisonment—again, not

“the most prolific and dangerous offenders”,

but on current numbers every one of those 20,000 new prison places is likely to be filled by asylum seekers.

When I was a police commander in charge of Brixton, the governor of Brixton Prison told me that illegal drugs were more freely available inside his prison than they were outside on the streets. I am pleased to see that action is being taken to deal with that, but why has it taken over 10 years for this Government to act?

It is also welcome that the Government are going to treat illegal drugs as a health issue, but the probation service has very little financial leverage to secure support to ensure that drug treatment programmes started in prison continue through the gate when a prisoner is released. It is one thing to live without drugs when you are in prison with regular drug testing, but quite another to release prisoners back into the same environment that they came from on release and expect them to continue. What additional resources are being provided for drug rehabilitation and support outside prison specifically for ex-prisoners? Can the Minister specify how much per prisoner compared with 10 years ago, adjusting for inflation and taking into account the increase in prisoner numbers? I am reminded of shops that double the price of things for 12 weeks and then advertise them at 50% off, except that the Government make drastic cuts, put half back and then claim credit for what is in fact a reduction.

There is an increasing prison population compared with proportionately declining staff numbers. Where is the budget to recruit and retain prison officers and the other staff who will be needed to carry out the numeracy and literacy assessments and to deliver the training? I understand that the increase in prison officers outlined in the Statement is to cope with the expansion plans, but who will deliver these enhanced education and skills plans and who will backfill when staff are being “upskilled”?

What pay rises are factored in for prison officers to ensure retention, set against a record increase in inflation not seen for a decade and an increasingly difficult working environment? Wandsworth Prison today has 68 prison officers looking after 1,300 prisoners. Officers are leaving because of poor pay, and applications from new recruits are down 44% because the Prison Service cannot compete with other sectors. How can rehabilitation be delivered in Wandsworth Prison today in such circumstances?

Any measures to find ex-prisoners employment are to be welcomed, but is the limiting factor not that employers will not take them on? A

“new digital tool to match candidates to jobs”

will not help if there are no jobs to match the ever-increasing number of prisoners to. What incentive or encouragement is being provided to employers to employ former prisoners—or at least those prisoners that the Government deem lucky enough to be given a second chance?

Can the Minister explain the “new community accommodation service”? What additional funding or other incentive will local authorities and housing

associations be given to provide accommodation and to what extent does this compensate for the devastating cuts to local authority budgets in recent years?

This White Paper appears to shift the balance further towards retribution and away from rehabilitation, with the only realistic, properly thought-through and funded proposals being to build and staff yet more prison places—plans one would expect from a right-wing, authoritarian Government.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice (Lord Wolfson of Tredegar) (Con): My Lords, I am grateful for the contributions. I will respond to as many of the points as I can in the time I have and will reply in writing on anything I cannot deal with orally.

The noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby, started off by criticising the fact that we are asking questions, but that is a poor place to start. I do not apologise for asking questions and seeking consultation. We published a prison safety and reform White Paper in 2016 and this White Paper builds on that. We are keen to learn. There are new things and new money in this White Paper, which I will come to, and we make no apologies for asking people for their views.

On staffing, which I agree is of absolute importance, since the end of October 2016, we have recruited a net increase of over 4,000 staff. In 2020, we accepted all but one of the review body's recommendations on pay and, as we announced in October this year, we accepted all of the PSPRB's recommendations relating to the 2021 pay award. To retain staff in the sites hardest to recruit for, prison officers in the 31 hardest to recruit for sites receive an additional payment of between £3,000 and £5,000.

I think everybody around the Chamber understands the importance of education in prison. I acknowledge, as the noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby, did, the work done by the former Lord Chancellor, Robert Buckland, in this area. Throughout the pandemic, we have kept education running. The Prisoners' Education Trust called for major investment in digital technologies in prison. We are developing the digital infrastructure and have reintroduced classroom teaching in prisons in line with government advice on Covid. We absolutely acknowledge that improvements have to be made in prisoner education. The pandemic has obviously not helped in that regard, but we are focused on this and have put new money into it as well.

On employment, which is absolutely key, there are over 1 million vacancies in the UK at the moment. Employers must look to wider talent pools to fill them and the New Futures Network, which is the Prison Service's network of employment brokers, now works with over 400 organisations to place prisoners in employment. The Government lead by example: we will hire over 1,000 prison leavers into the Civil Service by the end of 2023 and, as the noble Lord will be aware, in the PCSC Bill, we are focusing on the rehabilitation regime, which is also important for people to obtain employment.

On the specific question about virtual visits, I can confirm that we are committed to continuing to offer secure social video calling beyond the Covid restrictions. We are looking at future options in line with the

[LORD WOLFSON OF TREDEGAR]

recommendations of my noble friend Lord Farmer's review on maintaining family ties, but the current position is that there are no charges for secure social video calls.

We will come back to the issue of potting in the new year—I look behind me to see whether my noble friend Lord Attlee is here—so that is a joy which awaits us early in 2022. If I may, I will deal with that at that time.

Autonomy and flexibility for governors are important and we will discuss with them the appropriate KPIs in this context. However, ultimately, the buck always stops with Ministers.

I turn briefly—I am conscious of the time—to the points from the noble Lord, Lord Paddick. He asked, “Who deserves a second chance?” The short answer is everybody, perhaps with the exception of those who have a whole life order, because that means, essentially, that you are there for life. We can have an interesting debate about whether that means you deserve a second chance, but the nature of that sentence is obviously somewhat different. I agree about the importance of education. Some prisoners may deserve to have the book thrown at them, but all prisoners deserve to have books thrown to them. We think that prison education is very important. As to asylum seekers, can we pick that up when we debate the Nationality and Borders Bill next year?

Regarding drugs, I am grateful that the noble Lord, Lord Paddick, welcomes our strategy. He asked why it has taken so long. As it is the festive season, could I invite him to concentrate not so much on the ghost of Christmas past but to join us in looking to the ghost of Christmas future? We are putting new money in here. We have a £785 million package for treatment and delivery, and we are now investing £120 million of new money over the next three years for drug treatment in prisons. As far as drug treatment out of prisons is concerned, which the noble Lord rightly focused on as well, we are rolling out £80 million of drug treatment funding with the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that prison leavers get the support they need. I think I have dealt with his points on prison officer retention and pay.

On the community service accommodation point, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced this scheme on 28 July 2021. It is a pathway for prison leavers to give them a route from prison to their own private rented sector accommodation. Local authorities will be providing monitoring information to that department alongside wider monitoring information on homelessness and rough sleeping. Overall, we have allocated £13 million to 87 schemes across 145 local authorities. If there is anything more that I can say on that, perhaps I can drop the noble Lord a line. I have an eye on the Clock and am conscious that others will want to get in, so I hope the House will forgive me if I pause there.

4.57 pm

Lord Adonis (Lab): My Lords, the roots of the issues we are talking about go back a long way and it is fair to accept that they go back to well before the present Government. The prison population has trebled

in the last 50 years and it has done so under Governments and the leadership of all parties. Indeed, the Labour Government of which I was a member was not progressive on these issues at all; the prison population rose significantly, prison regimes did not improve notably, and the average length of sentences increased.

If we are standing back from this White Paper, which is now in a line of government policy statements going back to the 1980s, it is fair to ask whether we should be looking at more fundamental reforms and learning from the practice of other countries. What is undeniably true is that, as a proportion of our population, we imprison significantly more—we are a significant outlier—than almost any country in Europe. When I last checked the statistics, I think only Portugal had a higher proportion; I am not sure why it is an outlier. We are well above the average for mainstream European countries, none of which appears to have a bigger problem of disorder and lack of respect for the law than we do. The Minister is obviously constrained in what he can say, but does he not think that the time is coming for us to start looking more seriously and systematically at the experience of countries that have succeeded in dealing with issues of law and order with a much smaller prison population than we have and learn from their example?

Lord Wolfson of Tredegar (Con): The noble Lord is right that I am not going to make government policy standing on my feet. In so far as he says that we should look at other countries, I would always agree with that; one can always look at other countries and learn. In the PCSC Bill which is going through the House at the moment, there is a focus on a number of issues, including the use of non-custodial sentences. The critical thing about those sentences is that they have to be robust and the public have to have confidence in them. Later today, I will be making a Statement on victims' issues. I would hope that the greater inclusion of victims in the criminal justice process may lead to greater use of non-custodial sentences, because victims will buy into the process more. However, I suspect that this is a topic with which we will continue to engage.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, I wrote down carefully what the Minister said in response to the question of the noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby, about charges for videocalls for family engagement: that the current position is there are no charges. Does the Minister believe that that will continue for the foreseeable future? On the broader question of the in-cell technology, does he agree that this must have full democratic oversight and control, and be run for public good, not private profit?

Lord Wolfson of Tredegar (Con): My Lords, on the video charges point I hope that I was clear as to what we are committed to doing in future. I also set out clearly the current position. I do not think I can go beyond that at present. On technology, of course it must be appropriate. I do not get hung up, I am afraid, on whether public services are delivered by the public sector or the private sector. My focus is on making sure that public services are properly delivered and of a very high quality.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): The Minister indicated that the PCSC Bill included non-custodial sentences. Can he highlight what they are, and would he say that there will be a net increase or decrease in the number of people likely to go to prison as a result of the Government's measures in that Bill?

Lord Wolfson of Tredegar (Con): I was trying to say that on a number of occasions in debates on the PCSC Bill—I think perhaps the noble Lord was not participating in them—I have explained that under the sentencing guidelines, before somebody can be sent to custody the sentencer has to be satisfied that there is no proper alternative to custody. Even when that threshold is met, the sentencer then has to be satisfied that an immediate custodial sentence must be passed. We have had interesting debates on out-of-court disposals and alternatives to custody. I am happy to continue those conversations. As to the projections, I do not have those to hand but am happy to write to the noble Lord with them.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Motion to Take Note

5.03 pm

Moved by Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth

That this House takes note of the importance of the constitutional integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and of upholding the Dayton Agreement.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Con): My Lords, I declare my interests as published in the register, in particular my presidency of the institution Remembering Srebrenica. I thank noble Lords who are participating in this important debate. We have a strong line-up of speakers, particularly my noble friend Lady Helic, who has personal experience of this like nobody else here does, my noble friend Lady Warsi, who has direct experience from the Foreign Office, and my noble friend Lady Mobarik, who was a Member of the European Parliament. I understand that the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, will come in during the gap; we very much look forward to that too, as well as hearing from many other speakers.

We have been here before. In the 1990s, we saw the horror of Sarajevo under siege. We saw victims held in concentration camps and atrocities committed across Bosnia. We saw genocide committed; that is at the root of the issues that we are confronting today. Genocide took place on European soil, 50 years after the Holocaust and the cries then of “Never again”, yet it happened again. The events of the 1990s and the inaction, or certainly the slow action, of the West is a stain on the conscience of the West—of us all.

In July 1995, more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were systematically murdered by Bosnian Serb forces. Let us not forget that. They were dumped in mass graves and later moved to secondary and, in some cases, tertiary mass graves, and their remains are still being identified today. War leaders were charged, convicted and imprisoned for unspeakable crimes, and

Sarajevo, as I have said, was shelled under the orders of Ratko Mladic—to the point of madness, as he asked for at the time.

There followed the Dayton peace agreement of November 1995, which effectively split the country into two parts: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Republika Srpska, within Bosnia-Herzegovina, the area that was ethnically cleansed by the Bosnian Serb forces and army. The accords established peace, underpinned by a tripartite rotating presidency—a far from perfect arrangement, but it has, by and large, provided a durable peace in the time since.

I had the great privilege of visiting Sarajevo and Srebrenica as a Minister. For me, it was the most important political experience of my life. I met many survivors. I remember meeting in Sarajevo a doctor who had qualified just before the Bosnian war, who had decided that he did not want the hurly-burly of practice in Sarajevo and moved to Srebrenica, expecting to work as a general practitioner. His life took a very different course, and he had to deal with unspeakable horrors as a surgeon. That brought home to me what had really happened in that dreadful civil war. I remember also meeting a twin, Hasan Hasanović, in Srebrenica. He had been on the death march, which was for many people an attempt to escape the horrors of Srebrenica. He was on the march with his twin brother, and he never saw his twin brother again; he completed the march, but his twin brother disappeared.

I met, too, some of the incredible mothers of Srebrenica—survivors who had lost husbands, brothers and sons and who were determined that this would never happen again and that their country would come through this. They had the most incredible grace, serenity and goodness—and that, too, has stayed with me.

We now face a very serious threat from the Bosnian Serb president of that tripartite presidency, Milorad Dodik, who is trying to create, in effect, a parallel state within Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Bosnian Serb part of the country is undermining state institutions—the army, the judicial system, the intelligence agency and other parts of the state apparatus of Bosnia-Herzegovina. People are also up in arms about the law that was passed under the influence of the previous High Representative of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Valentin Inzko. It is worth pausing at this point to say that the name of the late, lamented Lord Ashdown—Paddy—still carries so much weight over there, because of what he did in establishing a strong presence as high representative. The outgoing high representative forged an important genocide denial measure, to say that any attempt to deny the genocide would be a crime, and the Serbian part of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Dodik in particular, is up in arms about that.

Behind all this, of course, we have the influence of Serbia and the malign influence of Russia, which casts a very long shadow, supporting what is happening. Ultimately what will happen if the West does not act is that there will be secession, which is why it is important that we do act, so we are not faced with the same situation that we were faced with some 26 or 27 years ago.

The West, NATO, the G7 and the EU must all act. We must use our influence. We cannot have the same shameful inaction that we had 26 years ago. The moral

[LORD BOURNE OF ABERYSTWYTH] case is truly compelling, but so is the geopolitical one when one looks at the serious threat presented by Russia in Ukraine, the Balkans and, indeed, the Baltic states. Our country knows like no other that appeasement does not work.

I commend the Government and my noble friend the Minister on what has been done so far. The appointment of Sir Stuart Peach as special envoy to the region is certainly welcome, as are the recent visits of my noble friend the Minister and my noble friend Lady Goldie to Bosnia-Herzegovina; I look forward to hearing about them. That is obviously not enough. Like others, I met the Foreign Minister, Biserka Turković, who I know has met our Foreign Secretary. It would be good to hear the Foreign Secretary's stance on this, because we have to up our game. More is needed.

I respectfully say that we need a commitment of more British troops to either the NATO force in the country or EUFOR; that is certainly possible, but it is not limited to EU forces. That is, I think, a *sine qua non* for progress; we need that commitment and show of strength to make it clear that we stand with our allies in Bosnia-Herzegovina. We also need to make clear our support for the current high representative, Christian Schmidt.

We need to look at and impose sanctions. We have the legal framework for this; a pre-emptive sanctions regime is anticipated in the Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020. This would provide for the freezing of assets and travel bans and would forbid financial institutions providing funds to Dodik and his allies. We really need to up our game and do that too. The Bank of England needs to work with other central banks from the G7 and the EU to ensure that Dodik and his allies are excluded from the SWIFT transaction system to prevent money circulating via international transfers. These things are vital and urgent.

In the longer term, there are things we need to do to provide for civic society and institutions of that nature being strengthened. But there is an imperative need in relation to dealing with the immediate threat, which is considerable, of secession and unsettling the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina. We cannot afford a repeat, or anything akin to it, of what happened to this wonderful country, with which our own country has such strong, positive ties. We have those ties through remembering Srebrenica and institutions in Parliament, including all-party parliamentary groups.

Recently, there was a debate in the Commons that put many of these things on the agenda and in which many honourable Members, including Alicia Kearns and Bob Stewart, who has a direct interest and influence in Bosnia from being out there, spoke. They argued for many of the things I have argued for, as did other Members, including Yasmin Qureshi and Fleur Anderson from the Labour Party. This is something on which all political parties are united. That should strengthen the Government in doing what is needed.

If I may say so, we have an opportunity to make it much clearer than we have done how strongly we support the admission of Bosnia-Herzegovina to NATO. We are not in such a strong position to influence its

admission to the EU, sadly, but that would help too; I suggest that we at least try to do that behind the scenes. If global Britain is to mean anything at all—I hope that it will—I certainly look to the Government doing more. Warm words may be important, but we need strong action at a time when we can see off this threat; it will not last for ever. There is a window of opportunity here where we can act firmly and clearly. The Government, the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Office can show the mettle they are made of, and we can see off this dreadful threat to prevent anything like a repeat of the horrors that happened to an ally on our doorstep 26 years ago. I beg to move.

5.15 pm

Baroness Helic (Con): My Lords, I am very grateful to my noble friend for bringing this debate and for his wise words. I commend the Foreign Secretary, the FCDO and MoD Ministers on the clear stance they have taken on the crisis facing Bosnia-Herzegovina, including the appointment of Sir Stuart Peach as the UK envoy to the western Balkans.

Thirty years after the wars began in the western Balkans, I wish we were able to speak of a region that is as prosperous and as firmly integrated into the EU and NATO as the Baltic states are today, but regrettably that is not the case. For all the talk of progress and of a future in the EU, the western Balkans have stagnated. They have been infiltrated by Russia, gripped by corruption and dazzled by Chinese loans that trample over transparency and the environment. Aggressive nationalism reminiscent of the 1990s has for some time been on the up.

Today, just like 30 years ago, the most vulnerable country is Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the words of Christian Schmidt, the high representative, Bosnia

“faces the greatest existential threat of the postwar period ... The prospects for further division and conflict are very real.”

Many noble Lords will clearly remember the 1990s, when a calculated policy of ethnic cleansing culminated in the first genocide on European soil since the Holocaust. Any Bosnian citizen above the age of 25 has direct memories of the war: memories of shelling, rape camps, siege, displacement, fear, abandonment, ethnic cleansing and genocide. Almost everyone under 25 carries the trauma of their parents.

It is hard to describe the sensation of horror that arises from any prospect that this could be repeated, that the poison of extreme nationalism and that willingness to disregard human life in pursuit of goals entrenched in political fanaticism could once more be unleashed in the Balkans. That nationalism, mixed with corruption, is still alive. It manifests itself in genocide denial, the decision of secessionists to withdraw the entity of Republika Srpska from Bosnian state institutions and the re-establishment of the very Bosnian Serb army that besieged and broke Srebrenica and committed genocide throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This is not the innocent pursuit of autonomy for RS. Autonomy is already there. The Dayton peace agreement was a compromise that gave Republika Srpska its autonomy. This is the dream of achieving a greater Serbia, the same wartime goal of Karadžić and Mladić, the notorious war criminals now languishing

in prison. With this aim, separatists seek the erosion and eventual collapse of the Bosnian state, bringing the country to a point of no return. This is about picking up where they left off in 1995, only this time with Russia as an active player. Moscow sees the western Balkans as NATO's underbelly: an easy means of destabilising and humiliating Europe. What better way to limit the expansion of NATO, for instance, than by keeping the whole region in a state of perpetual instability?

Beijing's interests are aligned with Moscow's. They march together at the UN Security Council, while China buys Balkan proxies and secures energy and mineral resources. Meanwhile, the EU is split down the middle, with its own illiberals leading the way in repeating the mistakes of 1990s. Now, as then, its policy is built on appeasing the provincial strongmen who are bringing Bosnia to the brink. The US, wary of alienating the EU, has yet to take an independent position.

The picture I paint is dark but it is not hopeless. We and our allies have the capacity to turn this around and to push back against the secessionists, their enablers and their allies. First, we need to recognise that the crisis in Bosnia-Herzegovina is not a political crisis. It is a security crisis and, as such, demands a security response. The fastest way in which to guarantee security is by deploying a deterrent force to Bosnia. I repeat, it would not be a peacekeeping force or a fighting force but a show of strength to deter adventurism. At present there are only 660 EUFOR troops, dispersed in vulnerable units across the country. Under the UN Chapter VII mandate, Dayton's Annex 1A, and the Berlin-plus arrangement, NATO has the authority to deploy. My noble friend Lord Hague has recently called for troops to be sent to

"strategically critical areas such as Brcko and Tuzla airport."

As he put it,

"it is only strength, determination and readiness to act that will deter a great deal of trouble."

The presence of a NATO brigade, if deployed soon enough, would make violent secession impossible and would transform the security situation. Nationalist strongmen would be forced to switch from threats to compromise.

Secondly, we must ensure, as my noble friend said, that those who seek the destruction of Bosnia face consequences. We have an existing sanctions framework to uphold territorial integrity, peace and security in Bosnia and ensure compliance with the Dayton peace accord. High Representative Schmidt told the Security Council that

"the RS authorities are already in grave violation of the Agreement and are poised to violate it further, potentially causing irreparable damage."

The United States has already sanctioned Milorad Dodik, for

"actively obstructing the Dayton Accords",
warning that he

"poses a significant threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina".

It is high time that we and our European allies join the US, pushing back firmly and imposing sanctions on anyone undermining Dayton.

Thirdly, once the question of redrawing Bosnia's borders has been taken off the table and the break-up of the state is impossible, then there is space for an inclusive, bottom-up political process—space for a new social contract for the 21st century and a political settlement that works for all, not just some, Bosnian citizens.

The original agreement was a bandage for a bleeding wound but was not meant to be a permanent settlement. It stopped the conflict but it has locked Bosnia into a set of Kafkaesque institutional structures. Dayton Bosnia has three Presidents, 13 Prime Ministers, 14 Parliaments, 147 Ministers and 700 parliamentarians, divvied up according to ethnic quotas, all for a population of less than 3.2 million—about as many people as live in Wales. This is not a recipe for good governance but a route to inefficiency, corruption, abuse and chaos.

There is more. The current Bosnian constitution works for Bosnia's so-called constituent people: Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs. But in Dayton Bosnia, if one is Jewish, Roma, or simply do not wish to declare oneself a member of one of those three exclusive constituent groups, one cannot stand for the presidency or the House of the Peoples. That basic right is denied. In a series of court cases brought by Bosnian citizens who sought to challenge this discrimination, the European Court of Human Rights has ordered that the constitution must be changed. However, that reform agenda has been hijacked. The quest for minority rights has again been subverted by nationalists seeking to lock ethnic division into the system to cement their own power. Bosnia's future should be founded on a principle of genuine equality, meritocracy and ability, not on discrimination and segregation, as it is today.

Finally, one of our biggest mistakes in the 1990s was looking to solve the Bosnian crisis via Serbia and Croatia. This did not work then, and it will not work now. As neighbouring countries, their support is welcome but they must not be allowed to be kingmakers. A myth has been created that they, like the United States or the United Kingdom, are guarantors of the Dayton peace accords. Serbia and Croatia were signatories but are not members of the Peace Implementation Council. They are not guarantors.

The late Lord Ashdown told a story of a dinner in Banqueting House in 1995 with Franjo Tuđman, the then Croatian President. Lord Ashdown sketched a map on the back of a menu, offered it to President Tuđman, and asked what his plan was for Bosnia. Tuđman drew a line down the middle. One half was to be Croatian, the other Serbian. There was to be no Bosnia—and no space for Bosniaks.

We cannot afford to repeat the same mistake over and over. All the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, whether Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish or atheist, deserve an alternative to life under fear and threat of conflict. The secessionist elites do not speak for most Bosnians. They speak for themselves and their interests. If anyone doubts the desire of Bosnia's people to live in a stable, prosperous country—to live in peace and dignity—they need only look at the queues outside European embassies in Sarajevo lining up for visas. They need only look at the Bosnians in language

[BARONESS HELIC]

schools, studying hard so that they can work abroad. Bosnian doctors and nurses staff German hospitals, while Bosnian engineers build roads across Europe.

Given a choice, most would probably want to stay in Bosnia, but while the current elite retains its grip on Bosnian politics and insecurity dominates their lives, they will make their futures elsewhere. If we can give Bosnia-Herzegovina the security and confidence to agree a new social contract for the 21st century that works for all citizens, support a positive vision for the whole region and make Russia and its satellites understand that there is a line we will not allow them to cross, then we, together with like-minded democracies, can turn this around. Then we can make sure that the ugly past never comes back and that genocide and ethnic cleansing are never again used to destroy a country in the heart of Europe.

5.26 pm

Baroness Mobarik (Con): My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth for securing this debate at a critical time for Bosnia-Herzegovina. In six months' time, we may see another descent into war.

If noble Lords will permit, I will first recount a memory which haunts me to this day, and which I believe is important to this debate. I travelled to Bosnia in November 1996, after the Dayton peace agreement, having spent much time during the conflict years raising money for humanitarian aid and, after the horror of Srebrenica, calling for UN intervention as part of a group founded by some of us in Glasgow known as the "Save the Bosnian People Campaign".

Still with no direct flights to Bosnia, I travelled to Zagreb in Croatia to meet members of the team of Edinburgh Direct Aid, a charity we had used to deliver aid to Bosnia. I declare an interest as patron of EDA. From Zagreb, we travelled by road to the town of Ključ in north-western Bosnia-Herzegovina. Devastation paved the way. Every one of the 34 mosques in the Una-Sana Canton had been dynamited to rubble. No house was left intact—they were covered with bullet holes and without windows or door frames—not even the one where we stayed in the village of Biljani. Some plastic sheeting from UNHCR was all that acted as a barrier from the bitter cold.

The next day, we received a call from the mayor's office, as he knew that foreigners were present in the town. He asked if we could meet him; it was important, as he needed us to see something. He had something to tell the world—for us to be witnesses to the truth. The chairman of Edinburgh Direct Aid, Dr Denis Rutovitz, and I, along with Feho Botonjić, who had spent six months in the Manjača concentration camp, reached the appointed place, the outskirts of a forest in a mountainous region some 14 kilometres from Ključ. Then accompanied by the mayor, Amir Avdić, we walked into the heart of the forest with its towering trees.

We came upon a strange scene. There was a wooden table where four or five exhausted young men, not more than 17 or 18 years old, were sitting eating their meal. Beside them lay bundles wrapped in black plastic sheeting laid out in a row. A few hundred yards across

from them were people around a gaping hole and down below, as we approached, we saw that there were more young men digging many metres below to extract what was there and haul up, by ropes, one by one, the evidence of the brutality that had visited that forest several years before. The bodies of 188 people, some of whom had been beaten and killed outside the local primary school in Biljani, and others taken alive and loaded onto buses in July 1992, and whose whereabouts had been unknown, were there in that dark abyss.

The townsmen who had gone hunting in the forest after the war had noticed that the natural crater, 20 metres deep, that had been there was now filled in and covered over with earth. It rang alarm bells, so they started digging, only to discover those 188 people who had seemingly vanished. The strange, unfamiliar, bitter-sweet scent that shrouded the forest now made sense—it was of human remains long since decayed. It pervaded the forest, and my consciousness, long after we left. The bodies were transferred to the school hall for identification by those who had missing family members. Among them, the oldest was an 85-year-old man; the youngest were a four month-old baby and a young girl in her teens. "The sweetest, prettiest, kindest girl", lamented Ramis and Raifa, our hosts: "How is it possible?"

It is too often possible, as history tells us, for perfectly normal people to descend into such barbarism. If the language of division is used as a weapon to bring out the worst in people and to deliberately incite hatred, it is all too possible. We face that scenario once again in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. If our humanity means anything to us, we must act to prevent another inhumane situation—another genocide in the heart of Europe.

In 1992, the world watched and waited and ignored the deteriorating political situation, the reports of mass killings, until eventually the scale of the genocide in Srebrenica awoke us to a truth we could no longer ignore. Alongside the physical devastation lay a devastated economy. The factories I visited in Sarajevo lay mostly empty, with owners struggling to revive their businesses. All the export markets, for leather shoes, timber and textiles to Germany, Italy and elsewhere, had been lost during the years of conflict. I ask whether we could have done more to ensure the economic success of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Some 25 years on, many of the villages lie empty. Opportunities are few. Half a million of the brightest and best have left in the last decade, and in recent years the institutions of government, which should have been strengthened in order to build on a fragile peace, have instead, in the last 10 years, been eroded by the political leadership of the Bosnian Serb region, Republika Srpska, with the President, Milorad Dodik, questioning the legitimacy of the Bosnian institutions—the Bosnian army, security services, tax system and judiciary. Last Saturday, on 11 December, the Bosnian Serb entity of the assembly voted for a set of provisions which would see the regional government opt out of these national institutions, in clear contravention of the Dayton peace agreement—this despite the threat of sanctions by the US and Europe. It is clear that this confidence is partly because Dodik has the backing of Russia, as he has more or less made clear.

The Opposition leader in Republika Srpska, Mirko Šarović, has said that secession would be

“a direct threat to peace, which would lead Republika Srpska into the spiral of war.”

We cannot allow that to happen. If we care nothing for what happens to Bosnia, let us ask ourselves: can we afford another refugee crisis? At this moment, we have a small window of opportunity. The proposals that have been voted through require new laws and changes to the constitution within a six-month period. We can no longer ignore what is happening and time is of the essence. We support it and were deeply involved in the Dayton peace agreement. We must uphold it, and the constitutional integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Dayton peace agreement was by no means perfect, but nevertheless has provided peace.

When you look at the geography you realise that there is no clean separation of the territory, as Dodik proposes. In parts of the country, villages are entangled along ethnic lines. Let us for a moment remember that in Bosnia in the early 1990s, the people were completely integrated. They spoke the same language, went to school together and worked side by side in the same factories and offices. They socialised with each other. The only thing that was different between them was their names. When I spoke to the citizens of Ključ and of Sarajevo they said, “We were targeted simply because of our Muslim names”.

When Dodik and others refuse to define Srebrenica as a genocide it means they have no regrets for what happened. The theory that the mass murders across Bosnia and genocide in Srebrenica the 1990s is a lie is espoused by a small percentage of people, not just in the Bosnian Republika Srpska, Serbia and Croatia but right across Europe. I heard such views in recent years from individuals I served alongside as a Member of the European Parliament. It is why organisations such as Remembering Srebrenica—I declare an interest as a patron—must be supported. Educating future generations about that miserable episode of European history is vital to a more caring, tolerant and peaceful society.

I am heartened to know that our Government are taking the current situation in Bosnia very seriously, having recently appointed to the role of special envoy to the Balkans Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach, whom I had the pleasure of meeting in 2006. There can be no one more qualified. This step is to be commended, but would my noble friend the Minister agree that this issue means that we leave every option on the table? Do we follow up on our interventions or do we walk away? Britain, as one of the signatories of the Dayton agreement and a participant in the NATO peacekeeping forces, has a clear duty to intervene and to persuade all its allies to intervene. We owe it to those 59 British soldiers who lost their lives and the many more who were injured in the 1990s war in Bosnia, to people such as Christine Witcutt, who was killed by a Serb bullet while delivering humanitarian aid to Bosnia on behalf of Edinburgh Direct Aid, and to our future generations, for whom we would wish a peaceful and prosperous Europe.

5.37 pm

Lord Randall of Uxbridge (Con): My Lords, I highly commend my noble friend Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth for bringing this debate. It is very timely, even if it is

almost the last bit of business before the Christmas Recess. I hope it will have a wider audience, because this is a crucial moment, not just for Bosnia and Herzegovina but for Europe and the wider world—and so often we ignore these things until it is too late.

It is also an absolute privilege to follow my noble friends Lady Mobarik and Lady Helic, who have so much experience—not necessarily of the best sort, I have to say. They brought passion but also great wisdom in possible solutions. I cannot say that I will be able to improve on that, but I can certainly support them in what they say. I am the weak link in this debate; my noble friend Lady Warsi and the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, will follow me.

As to my experience in the region, on my 18th birthday I was sitting in the Herzegovinian artists' village of Počitelj along the Neretva River, about 20 miles down-river from Mostar. That was 48 years ago. I would never have thought that, 20 years after I was sitting in that idyllic landscape dotted with mosques—it was the first time I had seen mosques in Europe; I found it fascinating, exciting and exhilarating that we had such diversity in Europe—the village would be pretty much destroyed. Of course, the famous bridge in Mostar was also blown up.

I followed that by studying, at university in London and for three months in Belgrade, Serbo-Croatian language and literature. That language has now been superseded, as it has split into Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian and so forth. As my noble friend Lady Mobarik said, at that time one was aware of the rivalry, even hatred or hostility, between Serbs and Croats. I remember getting into trouble on a train going back from Belgrade through Croatia because I used the wrong word for bread. I tried to explain that I was an English student, but that was not good enough for them. But Bosnia-Herzegovina was actually a model of integration, where people lived together regardless of religious differences and everything. As my noble friend said, it was only the names that really identified to which group people belonged.

So what happened in the 1990s was appalling to me. I would not have expected that savagery and ethnic cleansing to take place there, but we know that it became—it still is—a byword for all that was bad in that conflict. I do not have to mention Srebrenica again. As has been said, it is a blot on the world's history for that to have been repeated in Europe after the Holocaust, when everybody said, “Never again”. That is something we should be ashamed of.

I remember reading a Yugoslav author, Ivo Andrić. He wrote a short story called *The Titanic Bar*, in which he described how, during the war, a Jewish barkeeper who had been part of the community was eventually targeted and killed by a young nationalist, who was just showing off.

The Dayton accord resolved the bloodshed, as we have heard, but it was unfortunately just that. I feel we have to go forward. As my noble friend Lady Helic said, the state of the country is not tenable with all those different institutions, presidents and so forth. Something has to be done immediately, but we also have to look at economic help, because that would make people realise that it is worth trying to get together.

[LORD RANDALL OF UXBRIDGE]

Republika Srpska seems to want more and more independence. It is nationalism that causes so much problem in the region. I believe Belgrade does not want it, but there will be people in Serbia who think this “Greater Serbia” idea is still the way forward. It is rampant in the region; nationalism is the curse of the Balkans. Today we are discussing this particular situation, to which I will return, but I point out to the Minister—although he is aware—that there are all the other questions in the Balkans, such as Serbia and Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia. North Macedonia is now being somewhat bullied by Bulgarian nationalists to rewrite its history books and deny that the Macedonian language exists. These things are going on all the time, pretty much unobserved by the West. They are all potential flashpoints which, as we know, are fanned by outside politics.

I return briefly to the works of Ivo Andrić who, by the way, was a Nobel prize winner for literature. He wrote a book called *Travnik Chronicles*, which is available in translation. It went back to the early 19th century, when foreign powers—France at the end of the Napoleonic period and Austria—were sending in their consuls to try to influence what was then a declining Ottoman state. The same thing goes around, except that the superpowers have changed. We know that Russia and China have said that, if sanctions are imposed on Republika Srpska, they will help out. We must not take our eye off the ball in the Balkans, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

On that first visit I made to the region all those years ago, I stood—I do not know if they are still there—in two footprints put in concrete where Gavrilo Princip was supposed to have stood when he shot Archduke Franz Ferdinand. I do not think we need that to realise that there was a flashpoint and what it led to. Ignore the Balkans at our peril, I would say.

I am deeply grateful for what the Government are doing; they have risen to it. There is more that we can do, and I shall look forward to hearing about it. This has been said before, and it will be said again, but we owe it to those countless victims of conflict in the region—not least those lying in named and still unnamed and unmarked graves in Srebrenica and elsewhere—never again to go into this spiral of conflict, ethnic cleansing and genocide. We cannot just issue hollow promises; we have to put forward concrete measures.

5.46 pm

Baroness Warsi (Con): My Lords, we speak in one of the last debates on the last day of parliamentary business before recess, but the subject was one of the first which shaped my adult politics and which continues to shape me today.

I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Bourne for securing this important and timely debate, and like my noble friend Lord Randall, I just hope that it reaches a much broader audience. I also pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Bourne’s work as president of Remembering Srebrenica and his ongoing commitment to shining a light on this issue.

Bosnia-Herzegovina hit the general public consciousness in two stark ways when I was growing up. The first was the Winter Olympics of 1984 in Sarajevo—which many

of your Lordships will remember—where Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean performed that wonderful “Bolero” routine to win gold. The second was a few years later when the same city was under siege as the world watched a nation rip itself apart, where neighbour killed neighbour and the genocide of the Bosniak people unfolded. Today, art, music and culture once more thrive in Sarajevo—as, however, does the threat from hateful ideologies rooted in the past which are once more being adopted by right-wing politicians to further their own political and financial interests.

Noble Lords before me have spoken with great expertise and experience. I pay tribute to the work of my noble friend Lady Helic; we had the privilege of serving at the Foreign Office at the same time. Her work and that of my noble friend Lord Hague meant that the issue remained a priority under the coalition Government. As we heard from my noble friend Lady Mobarik, this issue has shaped so many of us for so long—long before many of us even entered politics.

I commend my noble friend the Minister and my noble friend Lady Goldie for their recent visit and refocusing of the FCDO’s attention on this issue. Through their ministerial work and wider Conservative Party engagement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, they both have many years of understanding of this issue. Therefore, it gives me some comfort that they are in office at this crucial time. I also pay tribute to the work of the late Lord Ashdown, which remains the bedrock upon which the killing stopped. We all miss him and his leadership. Paddy was brave and clear. His diplomacy produced results and was rooted in a clear sense of justice.

And it is justice that I want to focus on first today, because there can be no justice or a just settlement if those who perpetrated genocide, those who still perpetuate the hateful ideologies that underpinned it and those who prevent healing by promoting genocide denial are rewarded. We cannot and must not reward genocide. By dancing to the tune of Milorad Dodik, we are doing just that. If we continue to stand by and allow an ever-belligerent leadership from the Republic of Srpska to continue to weaken and dismantle state entities and institutions, if we do not stand strong in the face of nationalism, if we do not ensure that consequences follow those who undermine the territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina and if we do not sanction those who deny genocide, we are rewarding genocide.

We must also be clear in our policy and approach about who we are dealing with. For over a decade Dodik has enjoyed the support of the European Union, the United States and this country. He was elevated to the position of Republika Srpska Prime Minister with the help of the Office of the High Representative and NATO-led peacekeeping troops. We saw him as a moderate, which of course he was compared with Karadžić, the butcher of Bosnia, the chief architect of the Srebrenica genocide and now a convicted criminal.

However, over time Dodik has adopted an increasingly nationalist stance, aligning himself with Russia, China, illiberal nations within the EU and populist xenophobic leaders within the EU. He has adopted a belligerent stance and an anti-statist position, weakening Bosnia-Herzegovina state institutions while strengthening Republika Srpska institutions and proposing legislation

for Republika Srpska to withdraw from state judicial and tax structures and, most worryingly, from the state armed forces. Dodik increasingly promotes an anti-reformist stance against NATO membership and pays lip service to EU membership while doing everything to block it. As the high representative said, these actions “endanger not only the peace and stability of the country and the region, but—if unanswered by the international community—could lead to the undoing”

of the Dayton peace agreement itself.

Can my noble friend the Minister assure the House that officials working on this issue across departments understand Dodik and the way in which he operates? Do they understand that making outrageous demands, only to pull back—but, in doing so, extracting less outrageous concessions—is how Dodik operates, all the while undermining the territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina? He is no honest broker. He is no moderate. His agenda—of carving out a separate state for Serbs—is the same as that of Mladić and Karadžić; what they started down the barrel of a gun, Dodik is striving to implement through the bullying of an international coalition that is fragmented and, sadly, increasingly uninterested. If he is not stopped, if this lack of international pushback continues, then we are collectively rewarding genocide.

The second issue on which I seek assurance from my noble friend is whether the Government understand both the seriousness of this issue and the need for urgency. We have been found wanting in the past. We reacted too slowly: our civil servants urged caution in action, Ministers spoke of the need for balance, politicians made well-meaning statements, peacekeeping troops stood aside—and a genocide took place, with men and boys separated and shot and women and girls raped.

The late Baroness Thatcher accused us then of lacking resolve in the face of Serb aggression. She said we were accomplices and urged action. She foresaw a catastrophe unfolding and predicted a massacre, but at that time her views were dismissed as emotional and insulting.

Can my noble friend the Minister assure the House today that we have a plan, that we have our red lines, that civil servants are well engaged and fully informed, and that we have contingency planning for troops to respond, if necessary, to what is being described as the most dangerous moment in Bosnia-Herzegovina since Dayton? Can he assure us that the recent firefighting engagement by the US has focused minds on a more united and long-term plan and is more than a simple short-term reaction?

With this country as one of the strongest and most informed voices on this issue in Europe, can the Minister assure us that our exit from the European Union will not prevent us working closely with European partners in finding solutions? In particular, have the Government raised concerns about the visit by the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, to Bosnia-Herzegovina last month, when, in breach of diplomatic protocol, he met Dodik but not the other two members of the tripartite presidency?

I want to end on an issue that relates to Bosnia-Herzegovina but impacts us here in the UK. The slaughter of Bosniaks in the Srebrenica genocide, a

cleansing of Muslims in Europe which took place in our time and near our shores, was a moment that shaped the lives of so many British people—it shaped my life and that of many British Muslims. It is why in government we established the Remembering Srebrenica programme, a programme that works across all four nations and which has resulted in hundreds of initiatives that keep alive the memories of those killed and make sure that, through never forgetting, we continue to learn the lessons and build tolerant and inclusive societies.

We fail Bosnia-Herzegovina. We fail the idea of a multi-ethnic, multiracial, multireligious nation state in Europe. We feed extremism, we feed division and we allow the powers of hate to win. As the rise of populism, xenophobia and authoritarianism sweeps through parts of Europe, we must stand strong as defenders of democracy, human rights and progressive liberal values. How we respond to the current crisis in Bosnia-Herzegovina will be an early test.

5.55 pm

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB): My Lords, I am speaking in the gap and will therefore not detain your Lordships long. Having been much involved in the Bosnian tragedy as Britain’s Permanent Representative to the UN until July 1995, which was before the Dayton accords were concluded but after the horrors of Srebrenica, I thought it right to participate. I begin by thanking the noble Lord, Lord Bourne, for securing such a timely occasion to debate this important matter.

I will make only three points. First, the policies being pursued by Republika Srpska are not only a complete denial and contravention of the Dayton accords but a real threat to international peace and security in the wider west Balkans region. I hope the Government will do all they can to deter these policies, including by working as closely as possible with the European Union and its member states, who must be the key actors in this, along with the United States. Unfortunately, I do not believe we are a key actor on our own, but we need to work with others. I hope therefore that the Minister will make it clear that we will keep in lockstep with the European Union in its response to any events in Bosnia that may now occur and resist any attempts to play us off against each other—a feature of every Balkan crisis for the last 100 years or more.

Secondly, I warmly welcome the intention of the incoming Prime Minister of Bulgaria to lift Bulgaria’s veto on the opening of North Macedonia’s accession negotiations. EU accession by the remaining non-members in the west Balkans is the sine qua non of peace, security and prosperity in that whole region. Progress on that has been very slow and almost invisible for far too long and it really would be good if the incoming French EU presidency abandoned the hesitations it has had in this respect. Britain is of course in no position to play a role in that matter, but we did participate in the Thessaloniki commitment that the EU would admit all the countries of the region.

Thirdly, we really should not let the cuts in our aid budget lead us to withdrawing from the good work we have done in recent years in strengthening democracy, human rights, the rule of law and freedom of speech

[LORD HANNAY OF CHISWICK]

right across the region, including in Bosnia. That would be a foolish error, as neglect of the west Balkans has proved to be again and again, for 150 years.

5.59 pm

Lord Lea of Crondall (Non-Aff): My Lords, I apologise. I am speaking in the gap—but my apology concerns being two minutes late at the start of this debate. I thank everybody who was consulted for allowing me nevertheless to speak a few words. I shall not take too long.

I agree with all the remarks about urgency—but urgency to do what? I tend to be 100% in the line of the noble Lord, Lord Hannay. I remember, in the period before the tragedy, that I was in a meeting at Wilton Park—he may have been there himself—where all the parties were looking so dismayed that nothing could be done. But in the corridors they said, “Bring back Tito; all is forgiven”. One thing about Tito, of course, although it is not exactly news to say this, is that he was not a tool of Moscow. The idea that someone is the tool of somebody else has to be kept out. I am not even sure about how we play the card vis-à-vis NATO, the EU and so on, but it is very important that this is decided in a west Balkans context, even though the politics is not clean politics. Greater Albania could be given as an example vis-à-vis Kosovo, and Belgrade sees some of those things in those terms.

What can one do without giving way to blackmailing Belgrade? Obviously, we do not know whether there is a settled view in Belgrade about a European Union accession initiative, but it is the only card game in town, even though this may be exactly the wrong moment to take practical action. Perhaps the Minister could comment on that. We cannot say, “This is what we would do in theory, but this is what we can’t do in practice”.

Some of us have been able to put ourselves in the shoes of Princip, who shot Archduke Franz Ferdinand—but people did not think it was a big deal at the time. We do not know what people in Moscow think would be a useful tool—along with other things going on in Moscow at the moment. We have to see how these great powers can be engaged without them playing the game of proxy. I do not know the answers but those are some of the questions.

6.02 pm

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth, for bringing this debate to us. He introduced it so well and so clearly, and he gave us an opportunity to hear from the noble Baronesses, Lady Helic, Lady Mobarik and Lady Warsi, who have direct practical experience and made very moving contributions to this debate. I am grateful.

It struck me that history is a very heavy weight and, when empires or autocracies weaken, nationalism often strengthens. There is a lesson from history in that regard. I remember my visits to the region, as others have said they remembered theirs. No one who spoke in this debate has visited the region without having powerful memories; it is telling that the region allows us to have those. I remember that, when I served on

the then International Relations Committee with the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, and the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, we carried out a short inquiry into the western Balkans and the UK—I shall return to that later—and I went with a number of colleagues to Sarajevo. During a break, I went to see an area for which it is famous, being the only European city with a mosque, a synagogue, an Orthodox church and a Catholic church in the same neighbourhood. I wanted to walk that circuit across all the different areas. In so doing, I did what many tourists had done, which was to stand on the “east meets west” line. On that short walk around that neighbourhood and over that line, it struck me that its having brought so many cultures and religions together has been part of its beauty—but has also led to part of its tragedy.

When I was doing the walk, I walked around a number of the Sarajevo roses, which I had not heard of and which have always stuck in my memory. For noble Lords who are not aware of the Sarajevo roses, I can explain that they are the wounds in the concrete of the shells, which have been left but filled with red resin. They struck me with a real conflict. I was not sure whether I was happy that these remembrances were there for people to recall the sacrifices and violence inflicted on a community, or whether I felt that this was still an open scar. As I listened to the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, I felt that there were still many open scars, not just in the fabric of the city but in the people of the region.

Before this debate, and before my visit, I reread part of Gladstone’s Midlothian campaign, because this is a debate not just in the context of 30 years, a century or even six centuries hence but of the Ottoman Empire. That campaign in 1879—coincidentally, given in what is now my former constituency—led to him establishing what he called the six principles of a Liberal foreign policy, which I think on these Benches we still fairly hold true. He was inspired then because of the atrocities in that very region. The principles are: good government at home; the preservation of nationhood; maintenance of the concert of Europe; avoiding needless wars; maintaining the equal rights of all nations; and always being inspired by the love of freedom. It struck me that those six elements are also necessary for any sustainable future for the region,

June this year marked the 30th anniversary of the opening shelling of the conflict in the Balkans, the first killing that led to bloodshed among those who had lived together in relative stability, as we have heard. When those binding ties were released, so was dreadful nationalist violence—in a region as easy and as quick to get to from here as it is to Shetland. Our intervention eight years later, after the Dayton accord but when there was still violence inflicted on the Kosovans, was separated by only 16 months from Operation Noble Anvil, the US-turned NATO bombing of Serbia, and then Operation Enduring Freedom and the invasion of Afghanistan. As we reflected this summer on the sustainability of Operation Enduring Freedom, we were also concerned about the sustainability of the settlements in this region.

I pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Bourne, for his role in remembering Srebrenica. He was right to highlight the experience of those taking part in this

debate, and I am grateful for the many references to my late noble friend Lord Ashdown. He is highly regarded in memory in this House, as he is in many communities in the areas that the noble Baroness, Lady Warsi, mentioned. We on these Benches are grateful for that. I spoke to Paddy before my visit and, as you can imagine, he gave me characteristically clear, practical and structured advice and did not leave much option for any of my thoughts to come in: he told me exactly what I was to expect. That preparation was valuable. I remember being met by Bosnian Serbs, who singled me out directly because they knew that I was in Paddy's party and blamed him as the cause of all their troubles. However, as the noble Lord, Lord Bourne, said, Lord Ashdown and others worked hard to create the best elements for a sustainable future. As the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, indicated, there are significant questions about that framework's stability, given the fragility of the area.

As I mentioned, I reread the International Relations Committee's summary of conclusions and recommendations before this debate and, as with our debate on Afghanistan, it was depressingly prescient, because it highlighted some of the areas where progress could all so easily be turned away. I quote from its third conclusion:

"The region still suffers from the legacy of the wars of the 1990s. Some political leaders are pursuing the aims of those wars by different, political and diplomatic, means including calls for redrawing national borders and secessionism. Any such act would be regressive, dangerous and destabilising for the region. Progress cannot be taken for granted."

That is exactly right and, if anything was to summarise this debate so far, that is it. The report also highlighted that Russia's influence in the region was a factor of particular concern. The committee found its effect had been to

"slow progress towards good governance and the region emerging as fully democratic".

The report made a number of recommendations. Key among them was the need to sustain our partnerships with our European colleagues, as the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, indicated. I would be grateful if the Minister could outline what institutional frameworks exist for UK and EU co-operation, specifically on the western Balkans. When the UK hosted the Western Balkans Summit, in the UK press that was known as the week when Boris Johnson resigned as Foreign Secretary, not the week when the UK was hosting the summit. However, during it a number of areas were highlighted where the UK could act and I would be grateful if the Minister could update us on the practical steps that can be taken.

Key among those was highlighted in an excellent briefing that was given to me by Dr Kate Ferguson of Protection Approaches, which is a member of the UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group and has done work in the Balkans to consider where the Government could act and make preparations with others for the position that we are now in, which is to prioritise atrocity prevention. It is depressing to say so after all the work that has been put in, but that is where we now must make preparations. Atrocity prevention is an element within the integrated review and I welcome that within the Government's approach. The noble Baroness, Lady Mobarik asked, "What if we had

acted differently?" The noble Baroness, Lady Warsi, asked the same question, adding, "What would have happened if we had listened to others at the time?"

Among the recommendations that the Atrocity Prevention Working Group highlighted is recommendation 3, the preparation of a smart sanctions strategy. I add that that should not be limited by the US or EU but should be co-ordinated with them. What would a smart sanctions strategy look like, specifically for Republika Srpska, on the areas where it is acting to destabilise, as the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, indicated? Recommendation 4 is to work with civil society within areas that are resistant to the nationalist leanings of the leadership. What struck me on my visit was that, even with the plethora of representatives, the numbers of Ministers and Prime Ministers and the tripartite presidency, as the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, mentioned, a large proportion of the public still do not feel represented and neither do a large proportion of the female public, hence the enormous number of young women in particular who want to leave the area. The brain drain on the area is now getting towards a critical mass.

Another recommendation is that the Government publish their central atrocity prevention policy. As Protection Approaches has indicated, this area is a good case study for the Government to outline their preparatory thinking. It highlighted that our embassy in Myanmar has an emergency communications protocol and is applying a framework of atrocity risk analyses. Are these preparations going on and are these areas being worked on within the Balkans?

I conclude by returning to one of the areas that I mentioned at the outset. These communities that come together, along with their tensions, have to be part of the solution too. I do not mean to be flippant about this. I am a borderer and every year—apart from when there is a pandemic—I take part in remembrances and events that mark the conflict in that border area five centuries ago. We do it through our cultural history. The tensions that exist in the region that we are discussing are so raw and fresh that they are live wounds, but reconciliation and social and political cohesion have to be secured and that has to be done in a political way. I therefore support the Government working with any of our partners to place more emphasis on this social and political cohesion that is so desperately needed.

6.14 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I, too, thank the noble Lord, Lord Bourne, for initiating this debate and noble Lords for all the contributions that we have heard today. I hope that the other end will read this debate and follow some of the expert advice that we have heard. I particularly thank the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, for her contribution and the noble Baronesses, Lady Mobarik and Lady Warsi. The point is that in this House we have a lot of expertise. Our work, particularly the response to the Urgent Question that was repeated here, as well as the Westminster Hall debate down the other end, shows that Parliament is taking this issue seriously. We need to keep reminding ourselves how important it is that this country responds.

[LORD COLLINS OF HIGHBURY]

The Dayton agreement, which saw the ending of armed conflict in post-war Europe, is a key diplomatic achievement, which this country played a significant role in helping to establish. While everyone here recognises the clear imperfections of the agreement, it has stopped the bloodshed and allowed nearly 30 years of peace, although perhaps not as much development as we had hoped. There is an ongoing threat to re-establish a Republika Srpska army, which would represent a disastrous turning point in the region. It is the responsibility of us all to ensure that peace continues.

To deliver on this, we have to ensure that there is a medium-term and a longer-term strategy on Bosnia-Herzegovina. As the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, said, we need to begin to think about how that agreement could be modified, possibly even going as far as a Dayton II agreement. But first we must do the groundwork. There are certain basic principles that we need to keep repeating. In her article in the *House* magazine, the noble Baroness made this fundamental point: we are committed to a multi-ethnic state and demand that that idea continues. There can be no redrawing of the boundaries of Bosnia-Herzegovina. We cannot return to the violence and destruction of the 1990s. It is critical that the United Kingdom works with all our European partners to defuse the current situation. There is no doubt that the challenges that the international community and the people of Bosnia face are huge. We have a special duty to protect the peace and progress made in the region, not just as a signatory to the agreement, but also, as we have heard in recent debates, because UK troops served there with distinction and 57 died securing that peace.

I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, that we also need to reinforce our commitment to practical peacekeeping in Bosnia. There is the European Union Force, which, although we are not members of the European Union anymore, we still support. We need to ask whether 600 to 700 personnel on the ground is sufficient. I hope that the Minister can respond to that and say whether we should be working with our alliance on the ground in a more practical way.

James Cleverly, in response to the Urgent Question down the other end in November, stressed the vital role of the high representative. I, too, pay tribute to the late Lord Ashdown and his critical work in that role. When the Urgent Question was repeated here, the Minister reminded us that UN High Representative Christian Schmidt will visit the United Kingdom for meetings in the beginning of December. Mr Schmidt is tasked with discharging civil affairs in the country and has been seriously undermined by the actions of Russia and its attempts to abolish his role. The noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, assured us that the UK stands firmly behind the high representative, who

“has the United Kingdom’s full support, including for the use of executive powers should the situation require it.”—[*Official Report*, 10/11/21; col. 1756.]

I am also grateful to the Minister for the opportunities to engage directly with the high representative on the situation during his visit. In the briefing to MPs, Mr Schmidt warned of a potential return to violence and fragmentation. He also discussed the importance of keeping Dayton alive and of refreshing it, so picking

up the points that we have made. I welcome the Government’s announcement of the appointment of Sir Stuart Peach as special envoy. I am pleased that his brief appears to be wide—to support the civil institutions, to work with others in the area and to ensure that the British Government give a firm commitment to do everything possible to stabilise and, we hope, improve the situation—but how will he support the work of the UN high representative and ensure that the role is not undermined by players such as Russia?

The EU, the UN, and NATO have all echoed Mr Schmidt’s warnings of a real danger of a return to violence. We underline the point made in this debate about the importance of working with our EU partners here. At last month’s NATO Foreign Ministers’ meeting, the Foreign Secretary pushed for more focus on and resource for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and on the need to rebuff Russia’s actions. While diplomacy is the best option to secure the peace there, it is important to recognise the need for short-term stability and to work with France, Germany and the US in NATO to reinforce the EU’s peacekeeping operation. I hope the Minister will tell us again today about the detail and form of the greater focus on and resource for Bosnia and Herzegovina that the Foreign Secretary called for, and how specifically we will rebuff Russia’s actions.

I completely agree with the noble Lord, Lord Bourne, about sanctions and having a flexible and immediate response on them, so that people better understand that we mean business in ensuring that our strategy is stuck to. I know the normal mantra about designating sanctions, which he will no doubt repeat tonight, but I hope that the Minister will say that this country will respond positively on sanctions to all those who seek to undermine the agreement and threaten the peace and stability of the past 30 years. Of course, as we have heard, UK and international engagement is key to supporting the progress and peace enjoyed over the past 30 years. We must redouble our efforts across all the Balkan states to demonstrate our commitment to the region.

Here, I agree with noble Lords’ emphasis in the debate on the importance of civil society. We focus on politicians, but real change and sustainability come from an effective civil society. I have played a small part there, working with Balkan political parties on how they engage with civil society on the question of LGBT rights. I was surprised by how receptive politicians were in countries portrayed as fairly conservative. They were willing to engage on issues where the need for equality and respect was understood. I got a very positive response. This has been an excellent and important debate. It is important that we engage with our neighbours.

I understand the points made by the noble Lords, Lord Bourne and Lord Hannay, who suggested we are not necessarily in a good position to advocate EU enlargement. However, not only should we advocate it, we can give practical support, and not just through political commitment or by arguing for it. When we engage with civil society and political parties there, we can stress that EU membership can deliver a better society that results in working across those states, emphasising the importance of good governance and making sure that there is no vacuum in which Russian destabilisation efforts can win.

It has been an excellent debate and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

6.25 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, I join all other noble Lords in thanking my noble friend Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth for tabling this debate. I totally agree with the noble Lord, Lord Collins. The quality of this as the final debate today is a reflection of the deep wisdom, expertise and insight of your Lordships' House.

I can say with great humility and pride that I am the Minister of State responsible for foreign and development affairs in this House, which gives me a unique perspective and insight. We really do draw on the expertise of your Lordships' House. The noble Lord, Lord Collins, spoke poignantly of his experience of civil society leadership, and we are fully aware of his expertise on some of the challenging situations faced by different communities, particularly the LGBT community. I very much valued his voice, advice and counsel on certain issues and how to resolve them. That reflects the tone of the debate.

Perhaps I may first turn to my noble friend Lord Bourne. He continues to play an important role on this agenda, these issues and their impact, and on standing up for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He remains vice-chair of the APPG and is president of Remembering Srebrenica.

My dear noble friend Lady Helic is someone who, perhaps I may say on a lighter note, often keeps me on my toes—and rightly so. I pay tribute to her valuable work as a senior adviser to my noble friend Lord Hague, playing a significant role on this issue, which I will move on to in a moment, and setting up the important initiative on preventing sexual violence in conflict. That word, “preventing”, is key as we approach the issue of conflict resolution. I know that other noble Lords, particularly the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, talked of that significant issue.

I am also grateful to other noble Lords, including the noble Lord, Lord Hannay—whose specific questions I will come on to—as regards the United Nations and the insights that he provided on strengthening alliances. They are much valued here. My noble friend Lady Mobarik spoke of her early insights and my noble friend Lord Randall of his early visit as an 18 year-old. Among other things, I began to calculate how long ago that was. Although we are not here to talk about ages, he mentioned his experience. He illustrated valuably the vital importance of Bosnia-Herzegovina. My noble friend Lady Mobarik spoke poignantly about communities living together, learning from each other and coming together. That is indeed what our country—which I am, with all its challenges, still proud to represent—is all about. That was a theme of my recent visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Equally, I pay particular tribute to my noble friend Lady Warsi. She has a unique insight, given her previous role—one that I now conduct. I always have a degree of trepidation when I take on a subject that I know my noble friend has taken on and charge forward with it. Along with my noble friend Lady Helic, I pay tribute to her dedication and devotion. It is not often said but

I thank my noble friend Lady Warsi for ensuring that the Remembering Srebrenica initiative was set up. Anyone who has served in government, in your Lordships' House or the other place, knows how difficult it is to set up an initiative and sustain it. I pay tribute to her. I was there and I saw the dedication and devotion that she put in. It is a live initiative that we as the British Government and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office are proud to support and is led so ably by my noble friend Lord Bourne.

This debate has highlighted, as the noble Lords, Lord Collins and Lord Purvis, said, the importance of your Lordships' House in bringing insight and experience. Like my noble friend Lady Mobarik and the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, I remember seeing that conflict unravel. I was a younger man at that time as well; I had just started a career in the City of London but, together with two charities—one was Save the Children and the other, which I helped to set up, was Humanity First—I embarked on a visit to the western Balkans in response to the crisis. At that age, you do not know what to expect. Little did I know that those two charities would epitomise what was needed and required in that conflict.

My noble friend Lady Mobarik spoke with great emotion and dedication about the work that she carried out. Perhaps I may have a moment of reflection, which I know will resonate with my noble friend Lady Helic, as well as my noble friends Lady Mobarik and Lady Warsi. I remember returning from that conflict and sitting down with my late father, God bless his soul, to recount my experiences of conflict and division. What I had seen was friend turning on friend, neighbour turning on neighbour and even, in some cases, family members who were taken by the divide turning on each other. That was one of two occasions that I saw a tear in my father's eye—for it was at that moment, 45 years on, that he opened up to talk about the conflict of Partition that he had witnessed. When my noble friends Lady Mobarik and Lady Warsi and others in your Lordships' House speak of that, it is perhaps a reflection of our own family heritage to realise the importance of avoiding conflict and standing up for the rights of others.

The noble Lord, Lord Purvis, talked about those issues of conflict. The troubles that people go through run deep through the generations. As I look towards my noble friend Lady Helic, that holds true for many people. It is therefore vital that we keep on the front foot on this important issue.

Noble Lords have rightly shone a light on the serious risks that Bosnia-Herzegovina faces to its stability and integrity. After the devastating conflicts of the 1990s, notwithstanding differences, it was beginning to build peace, stability and prosperity. The Dayton peace agreement, referred to by noble Lords, provided the basis for much of this but it has required co-operation and support from all sides and partners. The late and much-missed Lord Ashdown—I join others in remembering him—described the peace agreement as

“the floor, not the ceiling”—

a base on which to build progress on issues of concern to all its citizens. Sadly, politicians who are more focused on maintaining their own positions have exploited

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

that agreement over the years. At my recent meeting with him, Christian Schmidt recalled referring to the current situation as a “de facto secession”.

We must not be complacent—I assure noble Lords that the Government are not—about the risk posed to peace and the long-term future of the country. The situation is as serious as we have seen since the Dayton accords. Milorad Dodik, the Bosnian-Serb member of the tripartite presidency, continues to threaten to withdraw Republika Srpska, one of the country’s two constitutional entities, from the important state-level institutions.

I know that the decisions taken recently, on 10 December, which my noble friend Lady Mobarik pointed to, cause even greater concern. As my noble friend Lady Warsi said so eloquently, this will undo 26 years of hard-won progress made since that conflict ended. It would significantly harm the state—the symbol of that hard-fought peace that so many people have worked so hard to build and maintain. The state’s integrity must of course be respected, and Mr Dodik’s dangerous plan cannot be allowed to proceed. In this regard, I assure all noble Lords that the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina demand a better future—yes, and we will play our part and ensure that we commit ourselves to just that.

The Prime Minister’s special envoy was referred to and welcomed by several noble Lords. My right honourable friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary decided to appoint a very experienced individual in Sir Stuart Peach as the UK’s Special Envoy to the Western Balkans. Indeed, we announced that during the visit my noble friend Lady Goldie and I made to Sarajevo. Sir Stuart is well known to many as a former Chief of the Defence Staff and chairman of the NATO Military Committee. He brings all the necessary skills, experience and gravitas to influence change in the region, working with our networks and Ministers.

I can share with noble Lords that Sir Stuart is actually in Sarajevo as we hold this debate. He is there as an immediate outcome of the Lancaster House meeting, which I will come on to. It is his first visit in his new role. He met a wide range of political, defence and civil society actors. During his visit, he has called on all three members of the presidency and stressed the seriousness of what is happening and unravelling in the country. He was clear that the UK cannot and will not allow conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina to happen again. Sustained engagement will remain through Sir Stuart and our other senior figures. That will be an important part of ensuring not only that the political dialogue continues but that we head off any signs of conflict.

I fully accept that there are other influences, as noble Lords raised. I will come on to those in a moment. I am sure that noble Lords will join me in welcoming Sir Stuart’s appointment, which many noble Lords alluded to. However, as my noble friend Lady Warsi highlighted, that is just one of the actions. I hope that, with some of the areas I will list, I will give the assurances noble Lords have sought about the action Her Majesty’s Government are taking.

As noble Lords will know, my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary convened a meeting on Monday. We spoke directly about the stability and security of the western Balkans. My right honourable

friend brought together the Foreign Ministers of all six countries of the western Balkans to boost our close co-operation on trade and security, and to ensure that, through this, we prevent the horrors of conflict returning and together build enduring stability. I assure the noble Lords, Lord Hannay, Lord Purvis and Lord Collins, that we are working directly with the EU. The EU’s high representative on foreign affairs, Mr Borrell, was also present at that meeting.

On other actions, I have already alluded to, and noble Lords mentioned, the recent visit. The commitment not just of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office but of my colleagues in the Ministry of Defence was shown through a joint visit I had last month to Sarajevo with my noble friend Lady Goldie. We separately met our respective counterparts, but we also met President Komšić directly to discuss how, together, we can safeguard the country’s sovereignty and integrity. I also had a meeting with the chairman of the Council of Ministers, who is himself a Bosnian Serb. He once again assured me, together with the ambassador, of his commitment to ensuring the unity of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

However, there is deep concern. It was perhaps pre-planned, but it was noticeable that, during our visit, Mr Dodik was on his way to Moscow via Belgrade. It was quite clear that he was seeking further support and reassurances from Russia.

My noble friend Lady Goldie marked Armed Forces Day, together with members of the military. We visited EUFOR. We also met troops who are being deployed in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The noble Lords, Lord Collins, Lord Purvis and Lord Hannay, mentioned the role of civil society. I was privileged to meet members of the Forgotten Children of War Association and Medica Zenica. It was a particularly poignant visit. I remember visiting the very centre that, together with two other Members of your Lordships’ House among others, we helped, through our own relative skills, to decorate and renovate back in 2013. It was quite poignant to return there. I also met once again the courageous survivors of the conflict in the 1990s. They continue to be incredible campaigners.

As my noble friend Lord Bourne mentioned, I too have visited various parts of the country during various times as a Minister. I have also gone directly to places such as Srebrenica. You cannot help but be moved and horrified by what unravelled there. We pay tribute to the Mothers of Srebrenica, as my noble friend did, who continue to this day to ensure that the genocide against the Bosnian people is not forgotten.

Perhaps there is hope. My noble friend Lady Helic is better placed than I to judge, but that it happens to be Srebrenica in that part of the country, which falls within the Bosnian Serb entity of the current country—

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Con): I am very grateful to the Minister for giving way. I thank him for what he has said so far, but will he say something specific about two issues that came up repeatedly: the commitment of more troops—I appreciate he might not want to indicate exactly where or how many—and sanctions? Those are two very positive things we can give an indication of. I appreciate he might not want to be specific, but something general on that would be welcome.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): Of course—my noble friend is right to point that out. We continue our work in that respect; if noble Lords will bear with me, I will come on to those specific points in a moment or two.

I underline our continued commitment on the community side. During our recent visits, we met civil society leaders and the youth of the country. It is important that we continue to engage on all these fronts and show our unrelenting support for the people.

I turn to the specific points referred to by the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, which my noble friend has just highlighted. On EUFOR, we are supporting the bodies created by the Dayton peace agreement. We have worked hard in the UN Security Council with our allies to renew the mandate. Questions were asked about the high representative; I met Christian Schmidt while I was in Sarajevo. The noble Lord, Lord Collins, and others talked of their recent meetings; the Foreign Secretary met him during his visit to London. I assure the noble Lord, Lord Hannay, that we continue to ensure that we are fully behind the mandate of the high representative. We will not allow those who wish to cause harm to Bosnia and Herzegovina to undermine his authority. While he did not address the Security Council directly, all his briefings were fully provided.

My noble friends Lord Bourne and Lady Helic asked specific questions on NATO. My right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary has said very clearly that NATO must play an enhanced role in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the western Balkans. At the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in Riga, the Foreign Secretary called on all allies to contribute personnel to the NATO headquarters in Sarajevo. She also urged them to support work to counter disinformation and strengthen defence reform. Many noble Lords—my noble friend Lord Bourne in particular—have called for an increased number of UK troops to be sent to Bosnia and Herzegovina. I can say at this juncture that we will use all UK expertise and resources to support NATO in the country. The fact that I visited it with my noble friend Lady Goldie, Minister of State for Defence, underlines our commitment in that respect.

I will say a word about Russia, which my noble friend Lady Helic and the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, raised. We are seeing a concerning pattern of Russian behaviour, attempting to stop Bosnia and Herzegovina moving closer to NATO and Europe. I assure all noble Lords that the UK Government take an extremely serious view of this and will continue to call out aggression. It is very true that we are seeing assertiveness and added Russian aggression across the European continent.

The noble Lords, Lord Purvis and Lord Collins, and my noble friend Lord Bourne talked about the important issue of sanctions. I have listened very carefully to noble Lords; if it helps, I also hold the portfolio of Minister for Sanctions at the FCDO. Sanctions are an important part of our toolkit for the western Balkans, to address corruption and destabilising activities. We are in close touch with partners and are discussing all aspects of our response to the current challenges. As I have said repeatedly, we work very closely with our key partners; sanctions work when we work together with the likes of the United States and the European Union.

To conclude, I join others in paying tribute to my noble friend once again for tabling this debate. In doing so, I also pay tribute to the contributions we have heard from across your Lordships' House in this final debate before Christmas. It underlined the strong commitment across the House and across parties and the unity of purpose and action we have seen. I assure noble Lords that that is shared in the intent and actions of Her Majesty's Government. I fully accept, as my noble friend Lady Helic said, that there is no short-term solution. We are very much in it for the long term—and we need to be. We owe it to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who want and deserve peace, security and hope for the future.

I hope that in closing this debate I have underlined that the UK does not just believe that it has a vital role but is already playing a key role in ensuring a co-ordinated and focused international response, as my noble friend Lady Warsi said. I thank noble Lords once again for their valuable contributions, and I assure the House that Her Majesty's Government will continue to remain committed to the success of Bosnia and Herzegovina for all its people. I will continue to update noble Lords on progress in this respect.

6.45 pm

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Con): My Lords, I thank all noble Lords who have participated in a debate of incredible weight and significance, as other noble Lords have said. I regret the circumstances that cause us to be discussing this subject, but it is heartening that we have such unity of approach across all parties and on the Cross Benches. I thank all noble Lords for their contributions.

I also thank the Minister for what he said, and particularly what he said about options being on the table in relation to troops and sanctions, which are important. Like other noble Lords, I agree about the importance of ensuring civic society is brought forward, but there is an immediate threat and, as the Minister will well know, we will be holding the Government's feet to the fire to make sure that the approach is appropriate. It is good to see that the Government are taking this seriously and taking it forward and that we are providing the sort of lead which we are looking for. I am most grateful.

Motion agreed.

FCDO Staffing

Commons Urgent Question

6.47 pm

The Deputy Speaker (Baroness Finlay of Llandaff) (CB): My Lords, we now come to a repeat of an Answer to an Urgent Question asked in the House of Commons today on FCDO staffing.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I take it that the Minister is not going to read out the Statement.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con): My Lords, my apologies—I was just checking what the latest convention is.

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

“My right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary has been clear that there will be no 10% staff cut. Internal work has taken place which we are looking at in the light of preparations, but that has not been signed off by Ministers. We are investing massively in overseas aid. At £10 billion a year, the UK remains one of the largest ODA spenders in the world and well above the OECD average. The FCDO must continue to promote a positive, confident, outward-looking global Britain deploying its diplomacy and development expertise to advance freedom, democracy and sustainable enterprise around the world.

To do this, the department needs to ensure its resources, both its funding and its people, are aligned to its priorities. Over the next three years, some areas of the department will see staffing resources increase, reflecting the need to align our people to our priorities. The FCDO will continue to retain one of the largest overseas diplomatic networks of any nation, while also ensuring value for money for the taxpayer. There will not be a 10% staff cut, and Ministers will make decisions on workforce changes in the spring.”

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): I thank the Minister for repeating the Statement.

In the other place, James Cleverly was quite categorical, as was the Minister in repeating the Statement, that there will be no 10% cut, but, as Tom Tugendhat said, this is not a just question about a 10% cut, but about the investment in staff numbers needed to meet the aims of the integrated review and, we hope, next spring’s development strategy. Recent whistleblower revelations about the failures in the Afghan withdrawal point to an FCDO that is overstretched and under-resourced. Which high commissions and embassies around the world will receive more resources and which will see fewer? Which of the desks in the FCDO will be strengthened to meet the strategic threats this country now faces? What we need from this Government is greater transparency and actions that match their words.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, I note what the noble Lord said but, in planning to 2025, it is right that the department reviews its workforce and capabilities to ensure it has sufficient resources in the right places to deliver both ministerial and integrated review priorities. That is our focus. Some areas of the department will see staffing and resources increase, as I have said, reflecting the need to align our people to our priorities. We will also look to move resources to the department from other areas to meet these priorities.

The noble Lord asked specifically about the network. As he is aware, we have actually increased our footprint in increasing our missions overseas. That reflects equally our ambition, in the strength of what we wish to achieve on the world stage, and the importance of our excellent diplomats and development professionals who, now together as one unit, represent Her Majesty’s interests through high commissions and embassies around the world.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, I think that everyone knows that morale in the FCDO is low, that the merger of the two departments was handled poorly

and that the report of the whistleblower mentioned is only one example—a public example—of the reality. The Minister wants us to believe that, in two years, that department will be able to plan, implement and deliver an extra £5.2 billion of development spend if we return to the legal 0.7% of GNI. In her Chatham House speech, the Foreign Secretary said:

“The Office itself is a national asset”,

but we know that there are reductions in the capability of that national asset.

Will the Minister now provide public, baseline information on staffing—local and UK staff—the network itself, and roles and responsibilities, so that we can judge the results of this review properly and avoid a situation in which the Government obfuscate on roles, responsibilities and scale? Baseline information would be helpful now and necessary to hold the Government to account.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, as the FCDO Minister responsible for operations, I can say that we are currently going through our planning both for the next spending review and, as the noble Lord is aware, for the workforce, specifically to ensure that the very priorities he listed are fully resourced. The noble Lord, Lord Purvis, talks of greater transparency, as did the noble Lord, Lord Collins. We will certainly provide more details as these plans are finalised.

The noble Lord also mentioned morale. I can perhaps talk with some insight and experience, and I have read the report to which the noble Lord refers, but the fact is that we have some of the best diplomats in the world and incredible development professionals. In preparing for this Question, I asked quite specifically about the level of staff turnover, through the merger, the reductions and the difficult challenges we have had in respect of ODA and, recently, Afghanistan. I can share with noble Lords that, at this time, there is nothing different from the standard level of turnover we have seen over many years, both in the FCO and DfID. That means we are retaining our professionals not just in the Diplomatic Service but in the development sphere.

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, my question follows neatly from the response that the Minister just gave, because I note that a freedom of information request, sent by Devex, revealed that 212 former DfID employees have left the department. The response given to Devex at the time was that this was a normal level of turnover, but that is heading towards 10% of centrally employed staff who were formerly with DfID. DfID was very well known for its expertise in global public health, sexual and reproductive rights, and water and sanitation issues. That seems a large loss of people. Will the new, merged department be able to attract the same kind of people with the same levels of expertise, given that it does not have the same focus?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con): My Lords, on the final point of focus, of course when you have two separate departments, they run two separate mission statements in terms of key priorities. However, through the merger that created the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office the element of development

has remained a key priority of the department's focus. The noble Baroness rightly points out the importance not just of retaining staff but of attracting new staff. I have been looking specifically at the figures for senior management and others. We want to attract the best and brightest into the FCDO, but equally we want to retain the expertise.

I have looked very closely at the issue of development and our development professionals. Even in the challenges that we have had through the ODA reduction, we have sought to retain that professionalism in terms of both programmes and people. As we return to 0.7%, which we intend to do, we need not just the expertise to ramp up the programme but the people to be able to deliver it.

Delivering Justice for Victims

Statement

The following Statement was made in the House of Commons on Thursday 9 December.

“Today we are publishing a consultation on a new victims' law to raise the voice of victims in our criminal justice system, expand their role in it and strengthen the accountability of all the agencies charged with supporting victims across the system.

We have a moral duty to protect the victims of crime, improve the level of service that they can expect from the criminal justice system and raise the quality of support that they receive. It is the right thing to do, but it is also essential on a practical level to ensure that in operational terms we have the most effective justice system possible. After all, we can secure convictions and bring down rates of crime only if victims have the confidence to report crimes to the police and engage with prosecutors to make sure that their testimony is heard in court. For both those reasons and at every level, we must do better.

As things stand, too many victims feel that the criminal justice system does not deliver justice for them. Too many feel let down by the system, which compounds the pain and suffering from the original crime. In fact, it is worrying that as many as three in five victims do not even report a crime that they have suffered. A survey by the Victims' Commissioner shows that, based on their experience of the criminal justice system, a third of victims would not report a crime again. The evidence demonstrates that a third of victims who do go to police will later disengage from the process.

In those cases, justice is not delivered for victims, and the public are left exposed to criminals left to carry on offending. That must change. The Government are determined to improve the service and support that victims receive from the point at which a crime is reported right through to their experience in the courtroom.

We have already taken a range of actions to support victims. We have strengthened the victims' code, which sets out the minimum standards that victims can expect. We have invested £300 million this year in victim support services, of which the Ministry of Justice has provided more than £150 million; we announced in the Budget that that will increase to £185 million per year by the end of this Parliament, ensuring that more

victims can access what can be life-saving help. We have passed the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to protect victims and strengthen measures against perpetrators. We have published the end-to-end rape review report, setting out a plan of action to drive improvements for victims across the criminal justice system. We have begun to improve the trial experience for victims by rolling out pre-recorded cross-examination—known as Section 28—for vulnerable victims, so that those who want to can give evidence earlier and outside the courtroom, making the process less harrowing so that victims can present their best evidence and helping to secure more convictions.

But we must go much further. I want to guarantee that victims are at the very heart of the criminal justice system. Rather than feeling peripheral to the process, victims should feel supported so that they can properly engage at every step. Our plan for delivering a world-class service to victims has five crucial elements that we will deliver through the victims Bill.

First, we want to amplify the voice of victims and ensure that they are properly engaged at every stage of the criminal justice system. We want to ensure that agencies communicate with victims better. For example, we are consulting on the requirement for the prosecutor in certain types of case to communicate directly with victims before they decide whether to charge a suspect. We believe that such direct exposure to the victim is essential to giving them the confidence to go to trial and to see their cases through, and will help to reduce what are known as the victim attrition rates. As well as amplifying the voice of individual victims, these measures will strengthen the voice of whole communities. We intend to put explicit provision for community impact statements in the victims' law and the victims' code, mainstreaming their use in appropriate cases to ensure that the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts understand the wider scale and extent to which crime can blight whole neighbourhoods.

Secondly, we will increase transparency in respect of the performance of our criminal justice agencies. Today we are publishing the first national criminal justice and adult rape scorecards. They will bring together data to give a cross-system view of performance, including aspects that matter to victims such as how long it takes for cases to be investigated and charges to be made, how long cases wait in the courts before they go to trial, the number of guilty pleas, and what happens to cases when they reach court. One thing that is immediately clear from the data is that we must do better. Some cases are taking too long to get through the system. Covid-19 may be a factor in that, and we are working to bring down backlogs, but rape cases in particular are taking far too much time to get to court. That is not good enough and we are determined to put it right.

A further set of localised scorecards, giving the more granular local detail, will be published early next year. The scorecards will monitor victim engagement so we can see where in the system victims are being failed and take steps to fix that, and the local scorecards will show us where in the country the system is delivering for victims and where it is not. That data and that transparency will equip victims, and our criminal justice agencies more generally, to better monitor performance,

[LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON]

and to better understand the problems in the system and address them more effectively, while spreading the very best practice more widely.

Thirdly, we want to ensure that there are clearer and sharper lines of accountability when victims do not receive the right level of service. We will enshrine the victims' code in law to send a clear signal about what victims can and should reasonably expect from the criminal justice system. It follows that we must also hold the respective criminal justice agencies to account when it comes to delivering for victims. We will strengthen the oversight mechanisms and their focus on victims across the board, from complaints procedures to reinforced inspection regimes nationally and police and crime commissioners locally. That will give victims more effective redress when something goes wrong and it will improve accountability.

Members will recall the Government's rape review action plan, which was published in June. Today I can announce that we are publishing a report detailing progress against its aims, so that we can hold criminal justice agencies to account for how much they have improved outcomes in tackling this horrendous crime.

Fourthly, we want to help victims to rebuild their lives through accessible and professional services, and ensure that criminals pay more to support those services. We propose to increase the victim surcharge, which helps to fund victim services; that will mean criminals paying more to right their own wrongs, and in the process help victims to recover from what they have suffered.

Our consultation will also meet the commitment made to the House, during the passage of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, to consult on the provision of support services for victims of domestic abuse. We want to improve the commissioning and co-ordination of services, particularly for victims of traumatic crimes—domestic abuse, sexual violence and other serious violence—so that they can be given the right support at the right time to help them recover. As part of that, we plan to strengthen the support available from independent sexual violence advisers and independent domestic violence advisers, which we know makes victims almost 50% more likely to remain engaged with the criminal justice process.

Lastly, we want to ensure there are better tools to protect victims and prosecute culprits. We are already making significant progress, and I can announce today that we are planning a national rollout to expand provision of Section 28 pre-recorded cross-examination for sexual and modern slavery victims to all Crown courts, with the specific priority of ensuring that victims of rape across the country pre-record their evidence and avoid the ordeal of facing the full glare of the courtroom.

I shall explain how this will work. The CPS will decide, in consultation with the victim, whether to apply under Section 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999. The judiciary will retain oversight and discretion to ensure that the interests of justice are properly served. This has the potential to increase the number of successful prosecutions and earlier guilty pleas. The justice scorecards will help us to evaluate progress in this regard and will highlight

any challenges in practice. We will be guided by ongoing evaluation of data from courts already trialling the Section 28 arrangements. I am committed to working carefully with the judiciary and criminal justice agencies on this expansion, as are my ministerial colleagues.

This Government will deliver credible change for victims. We will give them a more powerful voice at every stage of the criminal justice system. We will increase transparency and redress in respect of the support that they receive in practice. We will ensure that every criminal justice agency is properly held to account for its role in the wider system. We will better protect victims, especially victims of rape and sexual violence, to give them greater confidence about giving the testimony that can help to secure a conviction. We will make the perpetrators of crime pay more to help victims to recover. That is our plan to give victims the justice they deserve and to build back a better, stronger, fairer country. I commend this Statement to the House."

6.55 pm

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): My Lords, we welcome the Statement. We hope that the proposed consultation exercise is dealt with rapidly, that people are listened to and that we see legislation as soon as possible. Can the Minister tell us when that is likely to happen? I confirm that we will work constructively with the Government to ensure that the new victims' law is fit for purpose and is a law of which we can be proud.

The Statement reminds us just how urgently we need a new law. The number of victims who have dropped out of the system has doubled in the last five years. It is concerning that confidence in the justice system is so poor. Three in every five victims do not even report a crime, one-third of victims would not report a crime again and one-third of victims who do go to the police drop out of the process before any case can come to court.

There are steps that the Government could take now that would help the situation. In October 2021 the National Audit Office released a report on the Government's handling of the court backlog. It found that the Crown Court backlog had already increased by 23% in the year leading up to the pandemic and had increased by a further 48% since. The NAO said that both the Ministry of Justice and its courts agency were not working together properly to solve problems that had their roots in pre-pandemic decisions.

One in 67 rape complainants sees a case come to court, and it can take four years for that process to be completed. The latest data from the CPS shows that the number of rape convictions fell by 6.7% in the last quarter. At the current rate it would take the Government 18 years to return to pre-2016 levels of prosecution. There are 3,357 victims of violent and sexual crime who have already been waiting for over a year for their day in court, and a further 654 victims of these horrific crimes have been waiting for over two years. Can the Minister assure us that the Government are taking all measures necessary to put this right?

We have now had five Secretaries of State for Justice promising a victims' Bill, and all five have failed to deliver. I have heard victims say that their experience of the justice system is worse than the

crime itself. Just 19% of victims believe that a judge takes into account the impact of the crimes on them, and only 18% believe that they are given enough support. Victims do not want consultation; they want action, and the Labour Party has a ready-made Bill to clear the backlog through an increase in Nightingale courts and to fast-track rape and sexual violence cases. Our victims' Bill would also improve rights, strengthen protections and accountability, improve communications and ensure that victims were no longer treated as an afterthought.

The Statement from the Government is welcome, but they must now match their warm words with deeds and ensure that they put victims at the very heart of our criminal justice system.

Lord Paddick (LD): My Lords, as a victim of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, I have to say that dealing with this Statement at this time on this day is not delivering justice to victims.

Seriously, though, I should declare an interest as a victim of two crimes in recent years. One was a homophobic hate crime that my Norwegian husband was a witness to. He said to me afterwards that he would never again be involved in the British criminal justice system as a result of his experience in court, where he felt that he was on trial. The other was a burglary where the perpetrator was caught on closed-circuit television but the police refused to investigate further. In a subsequent meeting with a police superintendent, he admitted that many cases that were solvable were not being pursued because of a lack of police resources. Is it any wonder, as the noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede, said, that three in five victims do not report crimes, and that one-third would not report them again having experienced the criminal justice system? It seems that my husband and I are not alone.

The Government say that they have strengthened the victims' code. What improvements have there been as a result? More money has been invested, according to the Statement, but what impact has this had on victim satisfaction? We should be looking for outcomes, not outputs.

The Statement says that it wants victims to "properly engage at every step."

Research shows that restorative justice significantly increases victim engagement and satisfaction. What plans do the Government have to fund more restorative justice programmes?

The Statement says that the victim will be consulted before charging decisions are made

"in certain types of case".

Can the Minister explain what types of case are being referred to?

The Statement says that the Government

"will increase transparency in respect of the performance of our criminal justice agencies."

What will the Government do when they discover that the reason for poor performance throughout the whole criminal justice system—from the police to the CPS, legal aid and the courts—is that it is underfunded? It is all very well to

"enshrine the victims' code in law",—[*Official Report, Commons, 9/12/21; cols. 595-6.*]

but if the criminal justice system does not have the resources to fulfil its obligations under the victims' code, how will making it a statutory responsibility help?

The Statement says that the Government will publish a report on progress against the rape review action plan. Research clearly shows that victim satisfaction is the most important outcome measure in rape cases; being believed and cared for are the most important elements of rape survivor satisfaction. Does the report detail changes in victim satisfaction? If not, why not?

The Government are long on words and short on delivery. Trust and confidence in the criminal justice system have declined in the decade or more that the Conservatives have been in power. I can understand that the Government welcome the fact that the police cannot investigate some crimes, despite overwhelming evidence, when it is the Government who stand accused, but for the rest of us, if we cannot trust the police, the CPS and the courts to protect us when we are victims of crime, we are in serious trouble. You cannot get a quart out of a pint pot, which is what the Government appear to be trying to do with these measures.

Finally, I am reminded of colleagues who, when the Government do something we agree with, then go on to question the Government's motives. I do not know whether the Minister celebrates Christmas, but I hope he enjoys the break, whatever the motivation for having one.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice (Lord Wolfson of Tredegar) (Con): To pick up on that last point first, I take this opportunity to wish everybody—both those who celebrate Christmas and those who do not—a very happy time and a very successful 2022. I think we are all entitled to celebrate the fact that we have achieved at least three days on the police Bill on Report, and we have more to look forward to next year.

I come back to the matter of victims. Despite the fact that it is the last piece of business for this year, it is a very important topic. I am grateful that the noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede, broadly welcomed the legislation. I think it is fair to say that this is a matter where there is broad agreement across the House on the aims—although, of course, there will be political differences, perhaps as to the way we go about it. We will have an eight-week consultation on the matter, and we will prioritise work on that and introduce the Bill, as the Deputy Prime Minister said in the other place, as soon as possible. We want to ensure that there is wide engagement both across this House and in the other place as we develop the Bill next year.

So far as victim attrition is concerned—I must say, I do not like using that phrase, although it is the phrase that is used; we all use it but there is a real person, so to speak, behind all these statistics—the quicker we get cases to court, the less attrition there will be. That must be balanced with making sure that cases are investigated properly and that the defendant has a fair trial. In the area of rape, for example, we have introduced measures to speed up the extraction of data from mobile phones and make sure that the phone gets back to the victim. In particular, we have found that support from ISVAs—independent sexual violence

[LORD WOLFSON OF TREDEGAR]

advisers, whom we also have in domestic violence cases—really makes a difference. We are providing more than £150 million in this financial year for victim and witness support services, which we will increase to £185 million by 2024-25. The figures show that there is a significant benefit in reducing victim attrition for those victims who have contact with ISVAs.

The backlog in criminal trials is obviously a matter that we have debated on a number of occasions. It is fair to say that the pandemic has had a real impact in this jurisdiction. Although we were one of the first jurisdictions to restore jury trials, there were times when we could not hold them, and then we could not hold jury trials with multiple defendants because of space issues. In the Judicial Review and Courts Bill, which the House will consider next year, Clause 11, I think, provides that more work will be put into magistrates' courts so that Crown Courts are freed up for more jury trials. However, we want to be transparent about this. As the Deputy Prime Minister has explained, we are publishing our rape scorecards, which will provide a tracking basis so that we can see how the system is doing, particularly in rape cases. I know that that is a particular focus of the Deputy Prime Minister.

I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby, that the victim must be at the heart of the criminal justice system. Too often, there has been seen to be a dissonance, or an inconsistency, with putting the victim at the heart of the system while ensuring that the defendant has a fair trial. In fact, there is no contradiction. You can do both; indeed, we must do both. That is something we are very focused on.

Turning to some of the points made by the noble Lord, Lord Paddick—as he said, he has personal experience in this area, if I can put it that way—giving evidence is always traumatic. We recognise that it is particularly traumatic in cases that deal with sexual or other violence or coercive control. As the noble Lord will know, we have introduced Section 28 and are rolling it out so that it is more widely available. At the end of the day, judges, not Ministers, run trials so it is a matter for judges to decide whether and how Section 28 is deployed in a particular case, but our aim is to make it available across the criminal justice system for those cases where it is suitable.

I agree with the noble Lord that we must focus on outcomes. I have already mentioned rape scorecards. He also mentioned restorative justice. I am pleased that he did because, as I am sure he knows, there is very good evidence to show that there can be benefits for victims and a reduction in reoffending where restorative justice is used properly. It really is a win-win. The victim wins, society wins and, of course, the offender wins because they do not reoffend. The code makes it clear that victims can ask to take part in restorative justice at a time that is right for them. Both the victim and the offender have to agree, of course. The welfare of the victim is paramount so there will be cases where it is unsuitable, but there are lots of cases where it is very suitable. We are providing grant funding to police and crime commissioners to provide victim support services; that includes restorative justice. In the last financial year, 2020-21, they spent around £3.7 million of the funding on restorative justice services; around

5,500 victims engaged with those services in that year. We will bolster support by increasing funding for support services, as I said earlier.

The noble Lord asked in what types of cases it would be appropriate to consult a victim. That is one of the things we are going to consult on because, as he will recognise, it will not be all cases, but there will be many where it will be appropriate. Finally, on resources put into the criminal justice system, I do not want to have a statistics battle across the Dispatch Box, especially since this is the last business of the year. However, I will say that we are putting in £477 million as part of the spending review into the criminal justice system over the next three years, to help reduce the backlog and to provide swifter access to justice, which victims deserve. I think it is generally recognised that the most recent spending review has significantly increased the budget of the Ministry of Justice, and that this will be to the benefit of the criminal justice system.

I also say, finally, that we have published the CLAR report on criminal legal aid, authored by Sir Christopher Bellamy. We are very much looking forward to engaging with the profession, and indeed all stakeholders, about criminal legal aid, which is itself such an important part of the criminal justice system.

7.11 pm

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (GP): My Lords, like the two Front-Bench questioners, I want to look at the issue of delays in courts and its impact on victims. There are two angles to that. First, some figures I have seen indicate that about a quarter of victims are withdrawing from investigations and prosecutions, a figure that rises to 42% for rape allegations. Does the Minister recognise those figures? Are the Government doing anything specifically to ensure that support is provided for people in that situation? If they have stepped away from the legal process, what support is available to them? As the noble Lord, Lord Paddick, indicated, it is clear that the impact is likely to continue for very many years after the court process has been dropped.

Secondly, picking up the Minister's point about the money from the spending review, I mention the article published this afternoon on the east of England BBC website that quoted Stephen Halloran of Lawtons Solicitors referring specifically to that extra funding. Mr Halloran estimates that, on current figures, the Crown Court backlog will reduce by only about 7,000 cases over the next three years. He indicated that his firm is already seeing cases listed in the Crown Courts well into 2023, and that he expects to see cases listed for 2024 very soon. Does the Minister agree that it is clear that the money and the resources are just not enough to give victims justice? I am sure he does not.

Lord Wolfson of Tredegar (Con): I am grateful to the noble Baroness. This is an area, again, where we share the same aims. I do not recognise the precise statistics she mentioned, although I am not sure I was able to note them down quickly enough. I can say that the percentage of investigations closed because the victim does not support further police action is now at roughly 60%. That is a continuation of a longer-term trend.

The effect of the pandemic, which I am afraid has increased the delay in cases coming to trial, is probably part of the reason why more victims may have been withdrawing from the process. One brighter point in the statistics is that it seems there are more victims coming forward. There has been an increase in the number of recorded adult rape offences since 2019 and, indeed, since the first quarter of this year. The noble Baroness will understand what I am saying: I am not saying it is good that there has been an increase in rapes—of course I am not. The point is that it is good that victims feel able to come forward when there has been a crime. What we are very concerned about is victims suffering a crime who then do not feel able to come forward. So, somewhat counterintuitively, that is actually a brighter spot in the statistics—but there is plainly work to be done, and I hope I have been very candid about that.

On the backlog, in addition to what I said earlier, we have to be a little careful with statistics. For example, there are cases when a trial date will be given some time in the future, maybe even in 2023, because trial B may be a follow-on trial from trial A, and it cannot be listed until trial A has concluded. I am not suggesting that all cases fall into that category—I am saying only that we have to be a little careful with looking at the

mere listing of a trial as necessarily an indication that the system could not accommodate that trial earlier. Sometimes that might be the case, but sometimes it will not. There are also issues of counsel availability, and some courts have a practice of giving two dates for a trial: an earlier date, which may not take place, and then a hard later date.

I accept that we certainly want to bring on rape trials, and indeed all trials, more quickly than happens at the moment. However, it is not just the time from first court appearance to trial that is important—we must also look at the time from reporting the offence to charge and then from charge to first appearance in court. The time when a victim feels most vulnerable and lost in the system is when the victim does not even know when there is going to be a charge. Focusing on that initial period from when the victim goes into the police station to when a charge is brought is also a very important element of the system.

Baroness Scott of Bybrook (Con): I beg to move that the House do now adjourn—and I wish you all a very happy Christmas.

House adjourned at 7.16 pm.

