

The Rt Hon. Vicky Ford MP
Minister for Africa at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
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Copied to: Liz Truss, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs; Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of South Asia, the United Nations and the Commonwealth, in his capacity as minister responsible for atrocity prevention; Giles Lever, Her Majesty's Ambassador to Sudan; Robert Fairweather, UK Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan; Tom Tugendhat, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee; Sarah Champion, Chair of the International Development Committee

4 November 2021

Dear Minister,

We write as members of the [UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group](#), which exists to cooperate, collaborate, and share knowledge to improve the UK's prediction and prevention of mass atrocities. We wish to express our deep concerns about the alarming situation in Sudan. We welcome the [condemnation](#) of the "betrayal of the revolution" by the United Kingdom alongside its Troika partners, its [repetition of this condemnation](#) alongside partners in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, and continued support for a peaceful and inclusive transition as further indicated by your robust remarks in Parliament during an Urgent Question on the day of the unrest, and in the Westminster Hall debate on 3 November. These actions are a coup – and need to be named as such – and the resulting regime must be internationally isolated.

We are concerned that the UK's systems, capabilities and policies towards Sudan still lack a focus on atrocity prevention, grievance, and political marginalisation. Our expertise tells us that without cross-cutting and coordinated international responses that centre atrocity prevention, opportunities to mitigate risks of further deterioration and violence will more likely be missed.

When Omar al-Bashir was deposed, Sudan's people created a window of opportunity to move towards inclusive justice and sustainable peace. Protection Approaches, Waging Peace, and REDRESS [urged](#) the international community to support Sudan to help prevent escalations of identity-based violence and mass atrocities. We knew that the historic experiences in Sudan of widespread and systematic violence against racial, ethnic, religious, political, LGBTQ+, and other groups, meant risks of reoccurrence remained high. The coup and its consequences could now lead these risks to erupt. We are particularly concerned that large-scale violent repression of protesters and intensification of ongoing violence in regions such as Darfur and the Nuba Mountains are now very likely. The potential regional spill-over, at a time when South Sudan and Ethiopia are already experiencing mass atrocity crimes, could have far reaching consequences including jeopardising the Juba Peace Agreement and fuelling further human displacement.

For the past two years, Her Majesty's Government (HMG) and other members of the international community have failed to recognise and respond to Sudan's continuing trends of violence and risks of mass atrocity crimes. This [included the re-launch of the Strategic Dialogue](#) in the days before the coup, which though we understand was designed to support Hamdok's premiership, may have again put normalising relations and democratisation ahead of the risks to vulnerable communities –who will now likely face the greatest price for the coup.

In summer 2019, Co-Executive Directors from Waging Peace and Protection Approaches wrote in [The Guardian](#) of the need to recognise parallels between Sudan and Myanmar. When Myanmar began to open up after its dictatorship, the international community prioritised a democracy-first strategy which did not take into account the rising risks of mass atrocity crimes. Opportunities to interrupt and mitigate the trajectory of violence were missed. The UK has had an opportunity to learn and apply lessons from Myanmar, where a democracy-first agenda and insufficient attention on atrocity prevention contributed to a collective failure to prevent and then respond to genocide and ethnic cleansing in Rakhine in 2017; earlier this year a coup led to the reinstatement of the military regime. The UK's Myanmar team has worked hard to address its own gaps, strengthened its atrocity prevention toolbox and capacities, and recognised the need to integrate atrocity prevention in its thinking. We ask the Minister and her colleagues to finally prioritise atrocity prevention in the systems, capabilities and strategies that govern HMG's approach to Sudan.

The outcomes of the Prime Minister's [Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#) were clear in committing to an integrated approach to conflict and instability prioritising atrocity prevention and addressing drivers of conflict such as grievances and political marginalisation, which was warmly [welcomed](#) by members of our Working Group.

We respectfully ask how these commitments to prioritising atrocity prevention are reflected in the UK's current Sudan strategy and HMG's response to the coup? Is there, as called for by the [International Development Committee](#) in response to the violence and regional threats posed by the conflict in Tigray, a named atrocity prevention lead in the Sudan team, and if so, who holds this position? Is there an emergency communications protocol in place so that in the event of acute risk HMG staff in country can rapidly raise the alarm? Now that the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS) has been updated to include identity-based violence and mass atrocity indicators, are there plans for a new JACS for Sudan? How many in the country team have received training in atrocity prevention or the dynamics of atrocity crimes? Paul Williams, Director of Open Societies and Human Rights and former UK focal point for the Responsibility to Protect, [drew attention](#) at the Foreign Affairs Committee to atrocity prevention training delivered by Protection Approaches to the UK's Myanmar team as a tool that the FCDO would "try to promote" elsewhere. We invite the Minister and the country team to meet with Protection Approaches and Waging Peace to discuss whether such training could support the Embassy in Khartoum and geographic desks.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, as a state which aspires to be a force for good in the world, and because of the histories that connect Sudan and the UK, HMG is well placed to lead by example. The UK should add pressure on the Sudanese military by continuing to urgently raise the coup at the UN Security Council or in Special Sessions of the Human Rights Council, and we welcome the UK's leadership in securing such a Session on 5 November. The UK should leverage its multilateral influence to support international isolation of the coup regime, including through the suspension of financial support, and the considerations of sanctions, all in coordination with US and EU partners, as well as the World Bank and IMF.

The responsibility to protect vulnerable populations from identity-based violence begins at home. The FCDO should ensure it communicates its analyses across government, including to the Home Office who are currently facing rising cases from Sudan; according to the latest quarterly statistics, asylum applications from Sudan were up 77% in the year to June 2021. The UK Government could do more to protect these groups, Sudanese nationals, and diaspora communities resident in the UK, by engaging civil society, like Waging Peace, which supports Sudanese communities in the UK and Sudan. We note that FCDO colleagues have before enjoyed very positive relationships with the UK-Sudan advocacy working group, and that group intends to make itself available at any opportunity for information-sharing, connections, and joint thinking.

Mr Williams was clear in his testimony to the Foreign Affairs Committee that the FCDO were looking at how to engage with civil society organisations as a “new tool” of atrocity prevention particularly in gathering “upstream information.” We therefore ask the Minister and her colleagues to meet with and draw on the expertise of the UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group coordinated by Protection Approaches, and the UK-Sudan advocacy group and diaspora network coordinated by Waging Peace.

We look forward to working with you and your colleagues towards a peaceful, just, and inclusive transition in Sudan.

Sincerely,

Burma Campaign
European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
Holocaust Memorial Day Trust
Jo Cox Foundation
Korea Future
Protection Approaches
Rights for Peace
Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice
Syria Solidarity UK
United Nations Association UK
Videre est Credere
Waging Peace

