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Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chairman of the United Nations Association – UK (UNA-UK) to urge you to give priority to the need for an effective UK strategy towards the United Nations, at a time when the international system is under increasing strain.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the UN. Since 1945, the UN has had a transformative impact on the world, from the promotion of dialogue between adversaries to the provision of essential services to the poorest and most vulnerable. For the UK, the development of a rules-based global order has delivered stability and prosperity, serving also to cement the UK in international power structures in a manner that has endured even as the global distribution of power has changed.

The breakdown of this system would have serious consequences for the millions of people for whom it is a lifeline, but also for the UK, in terms of its security, ability to trade and international standing. Unfortunately, this prospect is increasingly likely, as key UN agencies have been forced to cut services and the Organisation's ability to restrain nationalistic ambitions fades.

Ultimately, the UN's success depends on states' willingness to work together and to invest in the system. The UK remains one of the most powerful UN member states. Its capacity to lead, its convening power and multilateral skill are well-suited to the modern political environment and it will be some time before emerging powers are able – or willing – to match it. By exercising concerted leadership, it could do much to restore communications between big powers, forge diplomatic compromises and champion practical solutions.

With this in mind, UNA-UK has led a number of initiatives over the past year to encourage greater UK engagement with the UN system. We believe the UN should have a prominent place in the Government's new National Security Strategy and the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). These policy pronouncements should articulate a strategy that acknowledges the link between the health of the UN system and the safety and well-being of citizens in the UK and beyond.

The Department for International Development (DFID) would necessarily play an important part in such a strategy, and in ensuring that the Government takes a broad and long-term view of what is needed to deliver national security and prosperity. Two recent UNA-UK reports, shared with your Conflict Adviser in the CHASE team, set out specific opportunities for UK action that would support this, focussing on areas where the UK could and should play a stronger role: UN peace operations and atrocity prevention.

The main recommendations for your department are summarised below:

Recommendations to DFID on UN peace operations

- The UK should set out a clear rationale for participating in UN peacekeeping, as a framework for strategic deployments to operations that are collectively funded, UN- authorised and address potential risks to the UK.
- Within these parameters, DFID should make the case that UN peace operations provide a framework for its own objectives on building stability and preventing conflict in priority countries.
- DFID should also consider greater emphasis on conflict prevention and post-conflict stabilisation in its work, accompanied by support for a redefinition of ODA to include more spending on security and stabilisation activities, such as UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations.

Recommendations to DFID on atrocity prevention and the responsibility to protect

- The UK should state that the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity – which can destabilise countries and regions and lead to conflict, displacement, extremism and a reversal in development gains – is in its national interest and a foreign policy objective.
- DFID should undertake a review of how it approaches atrocity prevention; examine how its work affects the risk of atrocity in the countries in which it works; and look at how best to prioritise particular development interventions in each situation.
- DFID should work to improve knowledge and understanding of atrocity prevention throughout the department to ensure that this is a recognised secondary goal of development and that programmes on the ground are placed within a wider atrocity prevention framework.

The UK must use its resources to strengthen the rules-based international order on which global stability and our own security and prosperity depend. By investing in UN initiatives, the UK can address national and global challenges that affect the everyday lives of people in this country and beyond, while maintaining its position in the international system. Doing so would be the most appropriate way in which the UK can mark the 70th anniversary of our global organisation.

Yours sincerely,



Sir Jeremy Greenstock
Chairman, UNA-UK