

WAGING PEACE BRIEFING ON HOW UK OVERSEAS AID WAS SPENT TRAINING SUDANESE POLICE

In March the Independent Commission for Aid Impact released a report on how UK aid has been spent training overseas police forces. The report (available at: <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/reports/uk-development-assistance-for-security-and-justice/>) received little attention in the run-up to the general election. Yet, it concludes that UK officials may be making bad human rights situations worse by honing the skills of repressive security forces.

In the case of Sudan, more than £850,000¹ was spent on a programme that had to be “terminated ahead of schedule, following violent suppression of protests in Khartoum and other cities in September 2013”, in which more than 100 unarmed democracy protesters were killed.

The Commission urges UK officials to bear in mind the local political conditions before embarking on unrealistic projects. The warning comes in the Commission’s Review of UK Development Assistance for Security and Justice.

On average £50 million of aid money is spent each year training foreign police. However, the Commission questions the UK government’s underlying assumption that “training police officers leads to improved police attitudes and behaviour.” The report concludes, “We find it difficult to reconcile these assumptions with the pattern of results reported.” It urges UK officials to take note of “political constraints” where “an entrenched police culture is not easily changed though training, particularly when externally initiated.”

“The institutions involved are large and cumbersome with strong vested interests working against change,” the report concludes. “Political support for transforming their culture and ways of operating often proves short-lived or illusory.”

In going ahead with the Sudan project the Department for International Development (DFID) chose to ignore the government’s own annual Foreign Office assessment of Sudan’s highly repressive human rights environment.² That assessment is in line with research by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch detailing years of arbitrary arrests and torture of opposition figures and journalists, the systematic confiscation of newspapers, and the crushing of any peaceful dissent.

The government’s 2008 Sudan programme memorandum on its Safety and Access to Justice Programme noted that the Sudanese National Police was a highly centralised, military-style organisation that had remained unchanged since colonial times.

In the light of the government’s own memorandum, the Commission notes that it was never realistic to expect that the Government of Sudan would support decentralisation of its security services. “In fact, the opposite occurred, preventing the programme from achieving many of its objectives.” DFID spent £854,380 on training the Sudanese police before the project was brought to an end.

Sudan’s president, Omar al-Bashir, is the only sitting head of state to be indicted for genocide by the International Criminal Court. In addition, the civil liberties watchdog, Freedom House, puts Sudan on its lowest rank. Olivia Warham MBE of human rights group Waging Peace (<http://wagingpeace.info/>) comments:

“The Sudanese police have a track record of brutality toward unarmed democracy activists. It was an act of ignorance or excessive optimism for the UK to believe it could change the fundamental ethos of the Khartoum regime with a politically correct sensitisation project. The police in Sudan exist to keep the regime in power, and they do so using violence and fear. Why would Sudan’s rulers wish to change that?”

The Commission also cites the aid programme’s unintended consequences in Bangladesh, saying it is “problematic” when DFID “helps to build capacity that might be misused.”

“In Bangladesh we were surprised to find that a UNDP-run DFID programme was helping to develop the intelligence functions of the Bangladesh National Police,” including tracking mobile phones, analysing call data and monitoring

¹ DFID Development Tracker, accessed on 18 May 2015 [<http://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-200568/>]

² FCO Human Rights and Democracy Report 2012 – Sudan, accessed on 18 May 2015 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2012-country>]

social media. It warned that the capacity built by the UK could be used to monitor and suppress political opposition, and called for “clearer principles on when and how to engage.”

Warham highlights the Commission’s recommendation that the UK must consider the wider context of countries where it engages: “Instead of naively tinkering with Sudanese institutions devoted to maintaining a brutal regime in power, we should work with our international partners, using our diplomatic and economic power to bring about more fundamental change. We could start by imposing the personal financial sanctions targeting President Bashir and his cronies, already approved by the UN Security Council but never implemented.”

DFID’s troubled Sudan project is not the only UK security training programme benefitting the avowedly Islamist fundamentalist regime in Khartoum. A Ministry of Defence Parliamentary answer revealed that in 2013 alone the UK spent £750,000 training the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF).³

The SAF have been repeatedly implicated in gross violations of human rights, including the recent mass rape of more than 220 girls and women in Tabit in North Darfur on the night of October 31st 2014.⁴

NOTE:

In 2012 a *Guardian* investigation revealed the UK government was training Sudanese military officers: [UK spent millions training security forces from oppressive regimes](#)

In 2013 a *Guardian* analysis of OECD figures showed \$230,000 was spent on military and security training for African countries including Sudan and Ethiopia: [Millions of pounds of overseas aid money spent in Britain](#)

³ TheyWorkforYou, 20 March 2013, accessed on 18 May 2015 [http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2013-03-20b.148212.h&s=%28Sudan%29+section%3Awrans+section%3Awms]

⁴ Human Rights Watch, Sudan: Mass Rape by Army in Darfur, accessed on 18 May 2015 [http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/02/11/sudan-mass-rape-army-darfur]