HOUSE OF LORDS

# Select Committee on the European Union

## External Affairs Sub-Committee

## Uncorrected oral evidence: Operation Sophia

Thursday 30 March 2017

11.05 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Verma (The Chairman); Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top; Lord Dubs; Lord Horam; Earl of Oxford and Asquith; Lord Stirrup; Baroness Suttie; Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean.

Evidence Session No. 2 Heard in Public Questions 13 - 27

### Witnesses

I: Mr Simon Jones, Deputy Head, Euro Atlantic Security Policy, Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Mr Edward Hobart, Migration Envoy, Europe Directorate, Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Mr Nicholas Williams, Head of North Africa Joint Unit, Middle East and North Africa Directorate, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Department for International Development.

# Examination of witnesses

Mr Simon Jones, Mr Edward Hobart and Mr Nicholas Williams.

Q13 **The Chairman:** Thank you for joining us this morning, Mr Jones, Mr Williams and Mr Hobart. This session will be in public. We will send you a transcript of the evidence after the session. If there are any changes that you wish to make, please make them and send them back to us. We have a number of questions. The Committee is free to add supplementaries. You will have received a circulation of some of the questions that we propose to ask you this morning.

What is the Government's assessment of the security situation in Libya and the prospects for the Libyan government of National Accord reaching agreement with the House of Representatives and General Haftar? You can answer in whichever order you wish.

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** It makes sense for me to start answering that question. The security situation is probably best summarised as fragile and complex. The recent violence that we have seen in the area called the oil crescent, and in Tripoli, is evidence of that. The security position will remain difficult for some time. Our assessment is that there is no military solution in Libya. No one side has the capability to take and hold Libya by force. Our focus is therefore on trying to encourage a political solution that binds in the various actors and provides stability, and addresses the security challenges.

That is a segue into the second half of the question. The most positive recent development we have seen is emerging consensus among moderate Libyans that the way through the current impasse is through a revision to the so-called Libyan Political Agreement, the political framework that was agreed in December 2015. The fact that we see that emerging consensus is a positive development, but we need to be realistic about how challenging it will be to reach a new or revised agreement.

Recent efforts, including by regional countries such as Egypt, have moved us forward a little. In theory, there is an agreement that two delegations should be formed, one from the House of Representatives and one from what is called the State Council, and that they will start a discussion around how one might revise the Libyan Political Agreement to make it more inclusive and try to bind in the people, particularly in the east, who have until now rejected it. That rejection, that stand-off, is one reason why we see the fragile security situation and the tension—including security tension.

As I said, we need to be realistic. There have been some positive developments, but it will be difficult. There are very strong views on both sides. The recent violence has made the dynamic more difficult, particularly with regard to the violence in the oil crescent. Feelings are still quite raw on both sides, so we need some confidence-building measures to try to build trust on both sides to allow them to come

together to talk about how they could amend the Libyan Political Agreement to make it acceptable to all.

**The Chairman:** Where does this leadership come from, and who would lead the leadership?

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** Do you mean of a negotiation?

**The Chairman:** Yes.

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** That is a very good question. The agreement itself provides for amending the agreement, and the mechanism for that is the establishment of the two delegations. The House of Representatives needs to agree a representative delegation. The House of Representatives itself is not unified; there are different camps within the House of Representatives. The first challenge for them is to come up with a representative delegation that represents the spectrum of views in the House of Representatives. Broadly speaking, those in the State Council delegation would represent views largely from the west of Libya. They would need to ensure that their delegation represents the spectrum of views in the west. The leadership, in the shape of the two delegations, needs to be truly representative of the views in the west and the views in the east.

**The Chairman:** Mr Jones and Mr Hobart, if you wish to comment, please feel free to do so.

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** Nick is the expert in this area.

Q14 **Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean:** Quite apart from the very complicated situation within the country itself, and with the regional players too—you just mentioned the role that Egypt is adopting—many of the other neighbours have quite strong influence over what is going on at the moment. The next layer out is Russia and Turkey and, of course, there is the role of the European Union and the UN. Can you say something about the significance of those various roles, looking from Libya itself to the countries around and then the other players who are certainly trying to exert influence—obviously Russia, in its way—and the role of the UN and of our partners in the European Union?

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** Yes. Traditionally, some regional countries have been associated with a particularly close relationship with the main actors in the east of Libya, and other regional countries have had a traditionally close relationship with actors in the west of Libya. In crude terms, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have had close relationships with the east, and Turkey and Qatar have had close relationships with the west. Those relationships continue, and those countries will have an important role to play in encouraging the parties with whom they have particularly close relationships to engage on a political track rather than seeking to advance their interests through force.

Looking more widely at the question of Russia, we have all seen that Russia has been more active diplomatically on Libya in recent months.

What has caught the attention and the headlines has been Russian outreach to General Haftar; the Russians hosted him on their aircraft carrier moored off Tobruk. They have also been reaching out to people in the west, including Prime Minister Sarraj, who was recently in Moscow, so they are more active. It is not entirely clear what their intentions are behind that increased activism, but Russia is a permanent member of the Security Council and will have an important role to play in supporting a UN-led process that seeks to deliver a political deal for the current situation in Libya. Provided it is in support of that broader political track, it is a good thing.

I mentioned the UN. Our assessment is that the UN is the actor best placed to lead an effort to deliver a revised political deal based on an amendment to the Libyan Political Agreement. The new Secretary-General has indicated that he intends to appoint a new special representative for Libya at some point in the near future. That will be, I think, an opportunity to re-energise the UN's role in Libya. The Secretary-General himself has indicated that he would like to make Libya a priority. That is a very good thing because, as I said, we believe that we need a UN umbrella to bring together the various efforts, regional and otherwise, that are currently under way in Libya.

There is also a role for the EU; it can play an important supporting role. There was recently a meeting of a quartet on Libya involving the EU, the Arab League and the African Union. They have, potentially, an important supporting role to play, but our view is that leading the top of that effort, the pyramid, needs to be the UN.

Q15 **Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean:** Quartets do not have a great history of success in the Middle East. With our ambassador in Tunis, are we really in a position in this country to assess what is happening? Are we not so distanced now in our own political intelligence that it is quite hard for the Foreign Office to come to well-informed decisions over the next thing to do? It is all very well saying it should be the UN, but the UN does not necessarily have the sources of intelligence, the on-the-ground view of who is really engaging with whom. If I may so, I find the answer quite superficial, when we do not have the access that we ought to have, because we are in Tunis, not there.

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** I hope I can reassure you on that point. It is true that our ambassador, and our embassy, is currently based in Tunis, but he visits Libya and his team is there on a regular basis. Almost every week, they spend days at a time there. Some of the team stay for more than a week. They spend a lot of time on the ground.

**Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean:** Why do we not move them back?

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** The aspiration is to move back once we have confidence that the security situation allows it, effectively. Although we are not there permanently at the moment, we have a regular revolving presence. We do not just visit Tripoli; we regularly visit other parts of

Libya as well. Clearly, the ideal situation would be to be back in Tripoli permanently, but at the moment we have the next best thing, which gives us regular contact with the full range of Libyan players, and gives us, I think, a reasonable understanding of the dynamic on the ground.

Q16 **Lord Horam:** Can we narrow this down to migration? Perhaps, Mr Hobart, this is a question for you. Given this scenario, how realistic is it for the European Union to try to extend Operation Sophia in the way it is doing? We understand the pressures from the Italian Government and the Italian people inside the European Union, but how realistic is it to try to do something of the kind the EU is doing now?

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** As Mr Williams set out, it is a very difficult operating environment, but I do not think that means that the EU and the UK should not be trying to do something to address both the humanitarian crisis and the security aspects of what is happening in Libya, and how migration plays into those. We are reviewing Operation Sophia in the coming month to understand how the mandate can be adjusted and improved. Mr Jones might want to comment on that in due course, as it is his area of expertise.

**Lord Horam:** Did you say you were reviewing it this month?

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** This month, the EU is reviewing the Operation Sophia mandate: what it has achieved, how it can achieve more, and how it can be recast if it needs to be. Actually, we have already done that in the last year, by adding coastguard training to the work that it is doing.

We have to do something. We have to try to engage and we have to keep it under review, which we are doing. We have to adjust things as they go along. The EU needs to be ready to engage more as the political opportunity arises and, as we hope, some of the work that Nick was talking about is productive. We have some positive indications from our engagement with the GNA and other Libyan groups, so we get some progress in Libya.

**Lord Horam:** What sort of progress are you talking about?

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** For example, through EU and UK funding, we work with the International Organisation for Migration, UNHCR,[1] the GNA and, of course, local militia authority bits of government, wherever they are operating, in order to return people who are stuck in Libya. A lot of migrants who are in Libya had originally gone there as their ultimate destination, and they find themselves in a very difficult circumstance: they cannot go back, and going forward is also dangerous. We are working on programmes to return people to the countries they came from, and to try to improve facilities in detention centres. I expect you will want to ask more about some of those areas in due course.

We are working on coastguard training, where we have had good engagement from the GNA in providing an initial group of 90-odd trainees

[1] The UN refugee agency.

who were well engaged with the programme. Al-Sarraj, the leader of the GNA, has had his own engagement at political level, talking to the Italians in particular about co-operation. Some of that is quite long-term stuff. We are not going to be able to deliver a lot of change in the short term, but we have to be active now both to see what we can do in the short term, such as those voluntary returns, and to prepare for what we can do in the longer term.

**Lord Horam:** To what extent do you regard this as a holding operation until you can get a political settlement, as opposed to something real, trying to deal with the issues now?

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** There are definitely things we can do right now. We are doing stuff to try to improve the humanitarian situation for migrants in Libya. We are doing things to help migrants leave Libya safely. We are doing things to try to build a coastguard, which will carry out activities with respect to human rights, and will prevent smugglers and rescue migrants at sea. There are things that we can do in the short term. They are limited in their scope and they do not go to the core of solving the overall problem, which is the broader political and security instability that generates an environment in which there is a migration crisis.

**Lord Horam:** Do you want to answer on this, Mr Jones?

***Mr Simon Jones:*** I do not think I have a great deal to add other than to endorse everything that Ed has just said. We obviously see the EU's role through Operation Sophia, as Nick said, and through other activities, including the European Union Border Assistance Mission in Libya, where the EU Common Security and Defence Policy is able to contribute as part of a wider approach. We consider that Operation Sophia had some initial significant successes, but we recognise that in order to play a fuller role in breaking the smugglers' model we need it to move forward to the next phases. At this time, it is unable to do so because of the political and security conditions on the ground, which is why we are focusing very much at the moment on making a success of the training of the coastguard, which is challenging, but moving forwards. There are issues around funding and so on, but progress is being made in relation to that training.

Q17 **Lord Stirrup:** In 2016, over 181,000 migrants used the central Mediterranean route compared with just under 154,000 in 2015. Last year, this Committee concluded that Operation Sophia faced "an impossible challenge" in the implementation of its mandate, given its inability to operate in Libyan waters or onshore in Libya. We must recall that Operation Sophia is essentially there to break the business model of the people smugglers. It is doing other things. We are training coastguards and we are rescuing people from the water, but you do not need Operation Sophia for that; you do not need the kind of assets in Operation Sophia for that. The key purpose of this particular operation is to break that business model. I would be particularly interested to know—I suspect from some of the things we have already heard that I know what the answer will be—how you would judge the efficacy of that

business model today compared with when Operation Sophia was launched.

***Mr Simon Jones:*** In relation to the efficacy of the business model, I would probably defer to others, other than to say that we recognise that the business model is evolving, and has been doing so since the inception of Operation Sophia. With regard to your question about the purpose of the mission, we very much agree that the right purpose for the mission is to break the business model of the smugglers. As Ed has said, there is an ongoing review and we understand that a report will be published by the European External Action Service in April for consideration by Member States.

We recognise that the mission has not yet achieved that objective. It has achieved some significant successes that fall short of the overall objective, but, as we said, we need to focus on the medium and longer-term sustainable objective of enabling the Libyans themselves to manage their own maritime borders. That is why the training of the coastguard is so important, building on the initial successes in the first phase of Operation Sophia.

**Lord Stirrup:** Would you agree that the business model can only be broken on the land, not at sea?

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** Shall I answer that, as a broader migration question? First, a few statistics about what Operation Sophia has achieved. It has destroyed 414 boats, arrested 109 smugglers, which was part of an enforcement action that helps to break the model—

**Lord Stirrup:** What size of boats are we talking about and what sort of people were arrested?

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** That is a very good question. As the people are still in the legal system, I am not sure that I can comment in too much detail, but my understanding, not being a law enforcement expert, is that the people who were apprehended were mainly lower down the food chain in criminal groups. The model, of course, has responded to the people being detained and the boats being apprehended by using different kinds of boats, not getting as far as where Operation Sophia is, and not sending them out with escorts from the smuggling group. The model has responded to Operation Sophia, and that is why we need to look at the review and see how we can respond in turn. You are right that Phase 3 of Operation Sophia, which is on-land operations, would be able to have far greater impact against smuggling groups. Our aspiration is to get there, but we need the right partner, which goes back to your first couple of questions.

Beyond that, what else are we doing to tackle and break the business model? It is not just the NCA. Immigration Enforcement and the Border Force—some bits of the Home Office and some bits of National Crime Agency—and the Crown Prosecution Service are deployed across both north Africa and central Africa in operations to tackle organised

immigration crime. We have deployed about 17 individual officers over the last year and a half to take action further upstream. There is a clear overlap between work that we do on modern slavery and human trafficking and trying to tackle groups closer to the source.

A lot of people come to Libya through Mali and from Nigeria, and operational work is done there, in particular by the NCA and then with the CPS, trying to build up the ability to have laws and prosecutions that also deter smugglers. We are doing something similar and very challenging in Ethiopia and Sudan, where there is a smaller number of people coming from that side to Libya, but the numbers are still relevant. That is an important part of the overall response, not just of the UK, although there are UK resources, but of the EU. The Khartoum centre is an EU centre, for example, that is building capacity there, which is challenging from the human rights perspective, but is still possible for us to do that and to intercept people-smuggling groups. So we are taking action on land outside Libya. To be able to take it in Libya would be an important bit of progress.

**Lord Stirrup:** But at the moment Operation Sophia has had no significant impact on the business model.

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** It has altered the business model, but it has clearly not reduced the numbers. It is very rare for boats coming out now to have, for example, hundreds of people—100 people on a boat would be a maximum. They are inflatable boats being picked up 12 miles off the coast, generally speaking, rather than larger vessels of maybe 500 or 600 people that get to the centre of the Mediterranean. Those boats have been stopped by Operation Sophia acting at that level.

The model is not broken, but it has responded. I said that there were 109 arrests. Of those arrests, one is particularly significant—an Eritrean people smuggler. I cannot comment too much on the case because it is subject to a legal process in Italy, but we believe that we have at least one leader.

***Mr Simon Jones:*** A small point worth adding is that the Operation Commander himself has said that he considers Operation Sophia to have had a deterrent effect against the smuggling networks, which in his view can no longer operate with impunity in international waters.

**Lord Stirrup:** They do not have to, because all they need to do is push the people out and let Operation Sophia pick them up.

**Lord Dubs:** It is a bit of an optimistic comment, given that numbers are going up.

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** There is a counterfactual argument that we just do not know how much the numbers would or would not go up if they were able to push larger boats into the central Mediterranean, but Lord Stirrup, of course, is right: the model has changed. They are pushing boats out,

which is why the coastguard training is the next phase of response, because you can take action there.

Q18 **Lord Dubs:** That leads to my question about the coastguard training, which was mentioned, I think, under the EU joint communication last year. How much of that coastguard training has started, and, if it has, what has been the impact of the training? Is it being measured, and can the Libyan coastguard absorb the high level of training and assistance being proposed?

***Mr Simon Jones:*** Package 1 of the training was started on 26 October 2016 and has now been completed. That package focused on enhancing Libyan naval coastguard capability in undertaking search and rescue activities alongside disrupting smuggling and trafficking in Libya. It covered basic seamanship skills as well as search and rescue procedures, and included an emphasis on the treatment of migrants and human rights. As Ed said earlier, that training has been completed and 93 members of the Libyan naval coastguard have been trained.

Package 1 took place at sea in international waters on Operation Sophia ships, whereas package 2, which is now starting, is taking place within the Member States. It is under way. It began in October 2016 and consists of roughly three-week modules in different Member States. It builds on package 1, but includes more specialist skills for senior leaders of the coastguard. It is probably too early to judge the overall success of the training, but a report issued by the operational headquarters found that there had been satisfactory results and good engagement from the Libyans; in particular, the process had managed to identify trainees who had the potential to go on to be trainers themselves, which is a really important sustainability point that plays to the medium to longer-term objectives of the training.

**Lord Dubs:** I have a map of Libya here called *A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players*. Does the coastguard training concentrate on a particular area of Libya, based on who is in charge there?

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** The coastguard training is of the naval coastguard. There are two coastguards, and there is an interior ministry operation. The majority of departures from Libya are from the west at the moment, which is an area where there is greater GNA authority and greater authority from the Libyan naval coastguard that we are training.

To add to what Simon was saying earlier, we are in Phase 2 now. We would not expect actual outcomes from the training until Phase 3, which is sea training on the vessels that the naval coastguard will operate, and will take place later this year, following Phase 2. We are not seeing a direct impact yet, but we hope to see it after Phase 3. I cannot remember the exact number, but I think there are five Libyan naval coastguard vessels—offshore patrol vessels—in Italy at the moment, which, as part of the training, will then be returned. We expect them mainly to operate in the west where people are currently departing.

**The Chairman:** You are talking of numbers. What are the numbers of people being trained up?

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** Package 2 has a target of 500 people and package 1 was 93. I am not certain, but I imagine they are grouped together to go through the third phase, which is the sea training. I think that is quite practical, having talked to the Italians about it directly. It is about how to operate and maintain the ships effectively before they are returned.

**Lord Dubs:** Am I right in saying that the Libyan coastguards only work at sea? They do not work on land.

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** Yes, I think you are right. On land, there is a department for immigration management—

***Mr Simon Jones:*** Countering illegal migration.

***Mr Hobart:*** Thank you. The Department for Combating Illegal Migration –DCIM and the Ministry of Interior police tackle smugglers.

Q19 **Baroness Suttie:** Last year, monitoring of the UN arms embargo was added to the mandate for Operation Sophia. How successful or effective has that been in practice?

***Mr Simon Jones:*** Since May 2016, Operation Sophia assets have hailed 372 vessels in order to establish their business and have conducted 41 friendly approaches to gain further information. There has been one boarding, but so far there have been no seizures of arms under that task.

**Baroness Suttie:** Would you regard it as a successful outcome if there has been no seizure?

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** From the Libya perspective, the honest answer is that it is difficult to know, but the hope is that it has had a deterrent effect on people who are thinking about trying to get arms into Libya in contravention of the arms embargo, or indeed people trying to move arms from one bit of Libya to another by sea, which has been an issue in the past.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** Do you think that most arms are moved by sea?

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** I am not sure we feel we have a hugely full picture of that, but I suspect the answer is probably no. Probably a lot of the stuff comes by land, not least through the south because those are very porous borders, which are not particularly well managed.

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** Arms and people.

Q20 **Lord Stirrup:** The mandate for Operation Sophia expires on 27 July. Have the UK Government thought about their stance with regard to renewing it or to changing the nature of the mission? There are, of course, alternatives to what is happening at the moment. It could be a search and rescue mission as opposed to the high-end, military

capabilities that are there at the moment. As part of that, are the UK Government giving thought to the possibility that Operation Sophia is perhaps being used by some in part as a fig leaf to suggest that something is being done about the migrant problem, when the real issue is the political situation in Libya, and until that is addressed none of this is going to work, frankly? Discuss.

***Mr Simon Jones:*** I will kick off on the question of the mandate. As we discussed before, the strategic review document will be published in April. The Government will need to consider their position in the light of that review, and that will inform the discussions on the mandate renewal in July. As you will be aware, we have been a very strong, indeed leading, contributor to Operation Sophia, which is a reflection of the importance that the Government attach to the work they are doing and the work that we want them to do as and when the political and security conditions allow.

On your question about a fig leaf, we have discussed the limitations of what Operation Sophia has been able to achieve, but we have also emphasised the importance of seeing that as part of a wider, comprehensive approach. It has a role, and we want it to do more.

**Earl of Oxford and Asquith:** Can I ask a supplementary? I quite understand what you are saying. You also said that you were considering on-land operations. Will those on-land operations inevitably develop into a political role? Are you saying that Operation Sophia will develop beyond its naval focus?

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** Operation Sophia will look at how it will support law enforcement operations. You can argue that everything is political, particularly somewhere like Libya, but it is trying to work with the police and the Ministry of Interior on understanding the intelligence angle. Of course, Operation Sophia brings some intelligence from the sea, but we could also bring intelligence on the land about how smuggling groups are working. Then there are skills in investigation, et cetera. Finding the right partner in Libya to do that is very difficult. It is something that we are looking at bilaterally, as well as through Operation Sophia, to see whether there are ways we can understand the smugglers' model better and take action in or beyond Libya in order to limit their effectiveness.

**Earl of Oxford and Asquith:** I absolutely agree with what you say. To make it effective, and to disrupt the smugglers' operations, you have to go to the internal borders. Will that be part of Operation Sophia's remit or completely separate?

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** It is Phase 3 of Operation Sophia's remit. I think we have to go back to the UN Security Council to get that mandate endorsed, but the plan is for Phase 3. Phase 2A is where we are at the moment, and Phase 2B would be taking operations into Libyan territorial waters. In effect, we are doing some of Phase 2B by training the coastguard to act in their own territorial waters. That is also more acceptable from a Libyan perspective.

Q21 **Earl of Oxford and Asquith:** Let me take you up on that. We recently heard that the mayor of Zuwara said that Libya has lost control of its coastal policing—to fuel smugglers, not migrants. The training of coast-guards goes beyond just migrants.

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** Our training of coastguards is for migrants. That is the Operation Sophia mandate, but I imagine that if you have a coastguard that is acting more effectively, with assets that it is able literally to manage and maintain effectively, it can have a wider positive impact as well.

May I comment, Lady Chairman, on the search and rescue function? Lord Stirrup knows better than me that the assets deployed in Operation Sophia are not best suited to search and rescue operations. That is not their primary task. They have rescued 23,830 people since the operation started, and about a third of those were on British vessels, but it is not the primary mandate. There is an EU and an Italian mission that runs search and rescue, by which the majority of migrants are picked up—Operation Triton, the FRONTEX mission—and the Italian coastguard controls and co-ordinates a wider range of NGO activities. British coastguard cutters were involved in that; they are in the Aegean at the moment but they were previously in the central Mediterranean. That is what we are trying to achieve in the humanitarian search and rescue response. There are better ships to do that—not only cheaper but more suitable—and that is the response that we have at the moment.

Q22 **Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** Can we move to your assessment of the treatment of migrants in Libya? Are the Government confident that, with support from the EU and UK, conditions for migrants in centres in Libya can be improved to an adequate humanitarian level? What is the position of the Government on the prospect for returning migrants from international waters to Libya?

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** I can respond to the first part of your question. Clearly, the current situation for migrants in Libya is very difficult. We have all seen lots of evidence of that. We as the UK, working with and through other partners, are trying to improve that situation, in particular through the work that we do to improve conditions in detention centres, and through the work that Ed mentioned on giving people the opportunity for voluntary return if they decide they want to leave Libya. The best figure we have for the number of detention centres in Libya is around 46 or 48, of which we judge that around 34 are under the control of the department that Ed mentioned, the Department for Combating Illegal Migration. They are far from perfect, but they come under the remit of the Government. The area where we focus our assistance is in trying to improve conditions in those detention centres. Clearly, it is a big task because the conditions are not good.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** How many would there be in each detention centre?

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** That is a good question. I am afraid I do not know what the average size is, but perhaps we could take that away and come back to you with the information. The programmes we are funding are aimed at trying to improve conditions; there are also human rights compliance aspects—the training, the understanding and the skills that people running those centres have—because at the moment the picture is very mixed. The International Organisation for Migration assessment is that, of the migrants currently in Libya, around 250,000 are considered vulnerable, so that gives you a sense of the scale of the problem.

Q23 **Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** Are the UK Government funding that from the Department for International Development?

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** There is humanitarian funding that comes through DfID. There is also funding that comes through our Conflict, Stability and Security Fund that is not necessarily DfID; it is cross-government funding that flows from that pool as well.

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** It has been quite successful on voluntary returns. We had a target of 800 from October until about now, and we have made over 1,000 returns. It is a good piece of working upstream in the source country. The largest group of migrants to arrive in Europe last year from Libya were Nigerians. We clearly have lots of strong relationships with Nigeria, not least on returns from the UK, and we have been able to work with the International Organisation for Migration and the Nigerian Government to facilitate return flights. There was an article in the *Daily Mail* over the weekend about it—we do not often get praise for our work in the *Daily Mail*. There were a lot of women and children.

As part of that process, because of our relationship with the Nigerians, we have been able to work with them to identify people who may have been victims of trafficking. Joining up our Nigerian operation with the Libyan operation, using the return centre that we established in Abuja to help resettle people, is for me an area where we and the EU are rightly looking to expand as much as we can in the next few months. We understand that 25% of people want to return. We have all seen and discussed the fact that there are not many things we can do in the short term, but if we are able to move thousands of people back home to places where they are safe again, that would be at least some success.

Q24 **Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** You mentioned that there were 34 detention centres where we were involved. That leaves about 12 where we are not. I would be interested in what they are doing and in how the UK Government are monitoring what is happening to migrants in Libya. Are we able to monitor, and what is our attitude to the humanitarian issues and the human rights issues that are undoubtedly coming up and that we hear from NGOs and so on are really quite horrendous?

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** Part of the challenge on the detention centres that are not under the control of the Libyan government department is that we do not have very good visibility of what is going on there, but our working assumption is that the situation could well be worse, because

they may be run as criminal enterprises. That is clearly a concern. As I said, we have taken a conscious decision to focus our funding on centres that are under the control of the Department for Countering Illegal Migration. I am not sure—I would have to check—whether the work we are doing is producing activity in all those centres or whether we are focused on a smaller number.

On your question about our understanding, and the visibility of what is happening and monitoring the situation, UK personnel make some visits to the centres, so we get some first-hand evidence and experience of what conditions are like. We also rely on our partners—for example, the UN or the International Organisation for Migration, third parties who are present in the detention centres—to give us a sense of what conditions are like and whether they are improving as a result of the work we are doing.

**The Chairman:** Can I come back on that? We give a lot of funding and we need better co-ordination in places where we are not present ourselves but others are delivering. If we do not have that dialogue going, I think you will find that a lot of perpetrators are doing a lot of bad things that do not get reported and we are therefore putting a lot of children—particularly children—at risk. It would be interesting to know what more, as a Government, we are doing to push others, particularly through the agencies you have just mentioned, on being able to monitor and then respond in areas where we know violation has gone on. You cannot fund and not let it be accountable.

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** We are not funding centres; we are funding people such as the Danish refugee camps or the International Organisation for Migration and the UNHCR to support people who are in centres. Children, women and men are at risk in Libya in centres and outside centres. There are 250,000 potentially vulnerable migrants and displaced people in Libya. This is activity to do our best to try to improve circumstances in the detention centres, and provide a route out through Assisted Voluntary Return. We have a very visible output and outcome as regards people returning home and in providing humanitarian assistance as well. We are very careful to make sure that what we spend money on does no harm, but that does not necessarily mean that it will resolve the situation there at the moment.

If I understand it, part of your concern is the question of co-ordination and understanding what is happening when you are not there visibly. We make quite a few visits to the centres, and it looks to me as if we will be able to visit more, because in the last couple of weeks some roads have opened up towards the west, where many of the departures are. We work very closely with EU allies, mainly co-ordinated in Tunis around projects and work that we do. The EU has a £200 million trust fund for north Africa, much of it focused on Libya. A lot of the work that it is starting to pick up is work that we started a few months ago, such as the voluntary returns work and the protection work, so we are able to seed-fund stuff

and bring European money in afterwards to try to ensure that we have a co-ordinated and not overlapping set of activities.

Q25 **Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** The EU has identified the importance of supporting the GNA to manage Libya's borders, but the EU Border Assistance Mission is currently stationed in Tunisia—we have begun some discussions on that today—and the security situation remains dangerous. In our Government's view, what can be done by the EU and its Member States to help improve border security, both in the interior and on the coast? I should tell you that we have been hearing evidence that we have to look at this differently in countries such as Libya, where they have a different tradition in how they monitor borders.

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** I will say a word about EUBAM, the EU Border Assistance Mission. As you rightly say, it is currently in Tunis, not in Libya. It left Libya in 2014 and has not gone back because of the difficult security situation. My understanding is that the review of Common Security and Defence Policy missions, which will cover Operation Sophia, will also look at the future of EUBAM and options for what EUBAM could do once it returns to Libya, but that is contingent on the security situation. My underpinning point, and apologies if I sound like a stuck record, is that the best way to improve border management and internal security in Libya is to have a political deal that delivers a government whose writ extends throughout the country.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** Do we think that we can do things to work with the House of Representatives?

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** The House of Representatives is part of the political architecture of Libya. It is part of the Libyan Political Agreement. It will need to be part of any political deal, but it is the legislature rather than the Executive, on the basis of the current structure. We certainly need to be talking to the House of Representatives and working with it on a range of issues, including migration.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** Yes, but the Executive does not have a legislature.

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** We are in a strange situation in Libya—it would never happen here—where the legislature is largely in disagreement with the Executive.

**Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top:** I do not know about that. We are working on it.

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** The HoR is the legislature for the GNA, but we have a dysfunctional political situation at the moment that we need to try to resolve.

Your point about different traditions is well made. The reality is that, even if we manage to achieve an inclusive political deal that resolves the current impasse, the situation in the south of Libya on the borders of Libya will continue to be very challenging from a migration and a security

point of view, particularly as those are vast, sparsely populated areas. In many places, it is not obvious, unless you have a map, where the border is. It would be hugely challenging to police and patrol those borders. That will be an ongoing challenge, even if we can secure the political progress that we seek.

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** Therefore, we have to have a broader approach. It cannot just be about closing borders in those cases, because those borders are historically very difficult to close. I mentioned earlier that we have a migrant law-enforcement Organised Immigration Crime centre being set up by the EU in Khartoum. In Agadez, in Niger, which was the main hub of people moving from the west, there is an Internatinal Organisation for Migration centre that has been quite productive in providing information to migrants so they are better informed about where they are going and what the risks are. Libya has been a traditional destination for migrants for some time—a destination, not a transit place. Understanding that that is no longer the case and the risks that they face there is really important. I think 15,000 people last year were returned from Agadez to other places in west Africa.

It starts beyond communications in source countries. It starts by trying to address the root causes. What are the aspirations, either economic or security, that we need to address, to enable people to fulfil them where they started out, rather than having to move? Are there ways they can move legitimately in the region? ECOWAS is a good example. Do they understand the risks of the journeys they might be about to embark on? What can we do on that in our strategic communications? We are doing quite a lot of work in Eritrea, for example, that may or may not have had an impact. There needs to be information on the route, as well as protection along the route, because closing the border cannot be the only solution. We are also taking action with law enforcement in places like Niger to understand how the smugglers are working.

Q26 **The Chairman:** I have a quick question, and then we will go on to Lord Dubs' question. We put great emphasis on people understanding what dangers and challenges there are, but do we have a deep enough understanding of some of the historical cultural differences, of some of the historical baggage that has travelled for many centuries along those routes? If we do not, how do we rectify that vacuum on our side to be able to be much more informed in the debate on the other side—if that makes sense?

***Mr Edward Hobart:*** Yes, it does make sense, not least because we recognise that although we have some knowledge about people moving, it has become a more important issue both from a humanitarian development perspective and a political perspective. DfID in particular is doing a lot of work at the moment in understanding the motivations for migration. There are economic and political security drivers. A lot of the humanitarian drivers tend not to move people as far as Libya and Europe; they tend to displace people within the region. People who are travelling tend to have the resources and aspirations of a slightly more educated—middle-class might be the wrong word—background.

There is a change in the profile of people who live in lots of the very young and expanding countries in sub-Saharan Africa or, for that matter, in Asia. It is about understanding those demographics: people have the resources to move, they have connectivity and they understand what they might be able to get somewhere else. They also have people selling them journeys, not always traffickers—they might be smugglers. Do they understand what the risks are?

The risks in Libya are very significant, and that is why we see people going to Libya and then wanting to return, but it is quite hard to get back. We are doing a lot of work in west Africa to understand the drivers and to understand how people migrate. A lot of the people who migrate to Libya from west Africa spend two years getting to Libya. It is not quite the same from the Horn, where the journeys tend to be shorter, so they might have just moved to one place and then the next.

Understanding aspirations is really important as well. Is your aspiration to earn enough money to pay for your dowry or to buy your farm, or to support a family of this size? If we can understand some of those things, we will have a better idea about what response might manage migration more effectively.

Q27 **Lord Dubs:** Can I go back to Libya for the last question? Quite a lot of work is being done by the EU and the UK to support local stabilisation efforts, help conflict resolution and implement agreement between conflicting parties in Libya. How effective is all that?

***Mr Nicholas Williams:*** You are right. There is quite a lot of activity going on in that stabilisation area. Nationally, the UK is contributing in particular to stabilisation efforts in the Sirte area, the location from which Daesh was fairly recently expelled. There is a humanitarian objective, but there is also an objective to make it clear to the population that they are better off now Daesh has left, so that there is no lingering anxiety to have Daesh back.

More widely, other stabilisation efforts are under way. The EU is spending quite a lot of money—I think around €26.5 million—on activity related to stabilisation, spanning activities from de-mining through to encouraging and facilitating political dialogue between communities. From our point of view, stabilisation work is important for two main reasons: there is a humanitarian rationale, and these are confidence-building measures. They are the sorts of measures that can help encourage and underpin the broader political dialogue and negotiation that we hope we can get under way in Libya.

**The Chairman:** Thank you very much for coming in and giving us your thoughts in this evidence session. It has been very helpful and useful for us. Before we come out of the public session, I repeat that transcripts will be sent to you. If you feel there need to be corrections, please put them in and send them back to us. We are extremely grateful for your attendance today. It has helped us in a very difficult debate and given us some more food for thought. We may well see you again. Thank you, Mr

Jones, Mr Williams and Mr Hobart.