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European Committee B

POVERTY ERADICATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Wednesday 4 November 2015

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chair: MR ANDREW TURNER*

† Abbott, Ms Diane (*Hackney North and Stoke Newington*) (Lab)
 † Ansell, Caroline (*Eastbourne*) (Con)
 † Benyon, Richard (*Newbury*) (Con)
 † Colvile, Oliver (*Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport*) (Con)
 † Evennett, Mr David (*Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury*)
 † Foxcroft, Vicky (*Lewisham, Deptford*) (Lab)
 † Grady, Patrick (*Glasgow North*) (SNP)

† Green, Damian (*Ashford*) (Con)
 Hoey, Kate (*Vauxhall*) (Lab)
 Hussain, Imran (*Bradford East*) (Lab)
 † Shapps, Grant (*Minister of State, Department for International Development*)
 † Sharma, Mr Virendra (*Ealing, Southall*) (Lab)
 † Zahawi, Nadhim (*Stratford-on-Avon*) (Con)

Dr Anna Dickson, *Committee Clerk*

† **attended the Committee**

European Committee B

Wednesday 4 November 2015

[MR ANDREW TURNER *in the Chair*]

Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development

[*Relevant documents: European Scrutiny Committee, 1st Report of Session 2015-16, HC 342-i, Chapter 2, and 5th Report of Session 2015-16, HC 342-v, Chapter 8.*]

8.55 am

The Chair: Before we begin, I will briefly outline the procedure. First, a member of the European Scrutiny Committee may make a five-minute statement about the decision to refer the documents. The Minister will then make a statement of no more than 10 minutes, and questions to the Minister will follow. Once questions have ended, the Minister will move the motion. Debate takes place upon that motion. We must conclude our proceedings by 11.25 am. Does a member of the European Scrutiny Committee wish to make a brief explanatory statement?

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Turner. Let me, as is customary, explain some of the background and why the European Scrutiny Committee recommended this Commission communication for debate.

Members will no doubt recall that, in 2000, the United Nations agreed eight millennium development goals: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; to achieve universal primary education; to promote gender equality; to reduce child mortality; to improve maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; to ensure environmental sustainability; and to develop a partnership for development. Each goal had associated targets and benchmarks to measure progress, with a deadline of the end of 2015. Those eight MDGs and their 21 targets are now to be replaced by 17 new sustainable development goals and 169 targets, which incorporate and follow on from the MDGs, the Rio+20 UN conference on sustainable development and the financing for development conferences.

The communication, which was published on 5 February 2015, sets out the Commission's views on a new global partnership to deliver the sustainable development goals. It was designed to inform EU positions in preparation for the financing for development conference in Addis Ababa in July 2015 and the UN summit in New York in September 2015. The coalition Government said, when the communication was first published, that the principles and key components were broadly in line with the established positions, although it was not formally agreed with member states. The Government described it as a good overview of what was needed for effective implementation of the post-2015 development agenda and for laying the groundwork for more specific policy development. The communication is not controversial in itself, though it is of undoubted political importance.

The new 2030 agenda for sustainable development—a global framework to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development by 2030, based on the 17 SDGs—

was formally adopted by the international community at a dedicated UN summit between 25 and 27 September. The Addis Ababa action agenda agreed in July also forms an integral part of the 2030 agenda by setting out tools, policies and resources that need to be put in place to ensure that it can be implemented.

All three earlier, ground-laying Commission communications were debated in European Committees. It has always been the European Scrutiny Committee's intention that, once this point was reached, this Commission communication should likewise be debated. The intention is to enable the House to be provided with and to discuss the Government's analysis of the outcome of both the Addis Ababa financing for development conference and the September UN summit. That is particularly apposite now that there has been an opportunity for informed comment on those outcomes—for example, whether replacing the eight MDGs and 21 targets with 17 SDGs and 169 targets will stretch development budgets too far and not provide value for money. The Committee's hope is that there can now be a wide-ranging debate on the most effective ways for the EU, in its own right and in conjunction with member states, to contribute to the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

The Chair: I congratulate the Member on his introduction. I now call the Minister to make an opening statement. I remind the Committee that interventions are not allowed during a statement.

8.59 am

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Grant Shapps): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Turner. I strongly welcome today's debate, which is an opportunity to reflect on the outcome of the two major international events this year that my right hon. Friend has described. Together with the UN financing for development conference held in July in Addis Ababa and the outcomes of the UN global goals summit in New York in September, we have established a new approach to poverty eradication and development that is universal, comprehensive, integrated and leaves no one behind.

As a world leader in international development, and one of only a handful of donors to have met the commitment of 0.7% of gross national income for official development assistance, ensuring that these events were a success was a priority for the UK. On 16 July, at the first of the summits, the third international conference on financing for development was successfully concluded and the international community agreed the Addis Ababa action agenda: the AAAA. This historic international deal has fundamentally changed the conversation on development financing. It makes it clear that, while aid remains crucial, particularly for the world's most vulnerable countries, harnessing private sector investment and developing countries' own domestic resources, including tax revenues, is also absolutely essential for development.

In Addis, the international community committed to fostering the right policy and institutional environments at the local, national and international level to encourage and enable investment, provide security and justice, and, ultimately, allow every development pound to go further in helping to lift people out of poverty. Crucially,

the AAAA underlines that all countries must take responsibility for eradicating poverty. That is not to say that rich countries should be let off the hook, but the commitment should be made and the Addis action agenda is very clear that aid remains crucial, particularly for the poorest countries in the world.

Aid alone will not be sufficient to deliver the new global goals agreed at the UN in September. The UK was clear that Addis should be about unleashing all the resources available to fund development: international and domestic, public and private. Addis recognised that aid needs to be increasingly used as a catalyst to unlock the private finance that is needed to drive economic growth and create jobs in developing countries. Ultimately, it is jobs, inclusive growth for women and men, and enterprise that will really defeat poverty.

The new financing agenda recognises that developing countries need to take action to tackle corruption, embrace transparency and create effective tax systems so that growth, when it happens, benefits everyone, not just the few, and so that growth produces tax receipts for investment in essential services, such as health and education. Of course, developed countries must also continue to put their own houses in order on issues such as tax transparency. The UK has taken a leading role internationally on these issues since our G8 presidency in 2013.

In Addis, we committed to doing even more. The UK will join the ground-breaking Addis tax initiative, and will double the amount of support that we give to help partner countries to improve tax systems and to raise more revenue. Under that initiative, developing countries also commit to step up their work on tax reform to improve the fairness, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of their tax systems.

Additionally, the UK has announced a £735 million capital increase to the CDC Group—the UK's own development finance institution—to invest in businesses to create jobs in the world's poorest places. That will allow more investment in Africa and south Asia. Our capital is now supporting 666 businesses in Africa and 367 businesses in south Asia. Together, those businesses have created nearly 1.3 million direct and indirect jobs.

The second key moment this year was the summit on 26 September at the UN in New York when leaders from around the world adopted the 2030 global goals. The new global goals aim to finish the work that the millennium development goals started and will aim to go beyond those goals in the next 15 years. Over their lifetime, the millennium development goals have driven some of the most dramatic improvements that the globe has ever seen. I think these remarkable changes should be on the front pages of every newspaper every day. The target to halve extreme poverty has been met; many more children are in school; and deaths from malaria, the biggest killer disease in human history, have reduced by more than half.

Despite that progress, there are still 836 million people living in extreme poverty, although it is interesting to note that the numbers have fallen to the lowest percentage that the world has ever seen. Although population has increased, absolute numbers have stayed roughly the same. They are some of the hardest-to-reach, most marginalised people on earth. Many of them are girls and women who live in conflict states, many of which I have visited in the past six months.

Improving the lives of those people requires a broad approach incorporating peace, security, economic development and gender equality. Over the past three years, the UK has lobbied hard in international negotiations to ensure that the global goals cover the areas not reached by the original millennium development goals and ensure that nobody is left behind. We successfully pushed for a stand-alone goal on gender equality that includes targets against early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation and—against strong resistance—sexual and reproductive rights. To lock-in the economic progress made since 2000 and enable people to work towards their own prosperity, the UK helped to secure a goal on peace, security and good governance, which are the building blocks of stable, successful societies.

Despite being absent from the original MDGs, energy has featured strongly in the new set of global goals, which recognise the fundamental importance of energy in homes. That issue is particularly close to my heart. It is ludicrous that we expect countries to develop when, for example, two out of three Africans have no energy in their own homes. They live in one of the sunniest climates in the world, and it seems to me that solar energy is the way forward. The week before last, I launched Energy Africa with Kofi Annan, Bob Geldof and others in London to try to address that issue.

What is striking about the new global goals is that they take into account vital issues, such as energy, that have not been high on the international agenda previously. They are universal and inclusive, and are focused on ending chronic poverty for ever, for everyone, everywhere. The most marginalised and vulnerable people, whether disabled, hard to reach or affected by conflict, will not be left behind by the goals.

The UK is proud to have played a leading role internationally in securing such a forward-looking agenda. The goals balance lessons learned from the MDGs, reflect the challenges of today's world and are ambitious in their reach. The global goals are universal goals for everyone, which means that the United Kingdom has to achieve them as well. A strong international commitment to the global goals is vital, and over the next 15 years the UK will not step back from the leading role it has played over the past three years.

I am proud to say the UK is clear that the global goals will be the starting point for the Department for International Development's work. We will ensure there is a clear line of sight between the way we work as a Department and the goals. We will prioritise where we focus on, based on our comparative advantage as a Department and a country, and we will work with our multilateral partners.

It is still early days, and there are still elements of the agenda to be resolved, but DFID is already working to move forward strongly and confidently with our international partners. I am having many discussions and meetings about the agenda. It is also important to note that it is an agenda not just for DFID, but for all parts of the UK Government and the best of British institutions. We will all work together, along with the Office for National Statistics, which will play a key role in reporting on the UK's progress. DFID will work closely with other Government Departments to ensure a joined-up approach, which will require us to think increasingly beyond aid over the next five—and, indeed, the next 15—years.

[Grant Shapps]

In conclusion, the UK has been at the vanguard of building these agendas, and will play a strong role in their implementation. We believe in being a country that shapes the world, both because it is the right thing to do and because it is firmly in our own national interest. This is an inspiring year for the UK and the world. I am glad we have the opportunity to debate these vital issues. I again thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford, and I look forward to the valuable points that will be raised in the debate.

The Chair: We now have 47 minutes for questions to the Minister. I remind Members that their questions should be brief. It is open to a Member, subject to my discretion, to ask related, supplementary questions. I will usually allow one question and one supplementary, and then move on to somebody else.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to scrutinise these important documents on the global partnership for poverty eradication and sustainable development. We broadly share the Government's approach. I simply want to ask two questions.

These new development goals build on the original millennium development goals. We cannot go forward until we properly understand what happened previously. Will the Minister provide a full report on our delivery of the millennium goals, because I think that will provide the only sound basis for going forward to a new set of goals?

The global goals will be goals that we have to implement nationally. Some of them, in relation to broad development issues, are relatively achievable. However, do the Government have a plan specifically to take action on reducing inequalities in the UK, which is one of the new global goals?

Grant Shapps: The big difference with the original millennium goals was that they referred to developing countries. The global goals apply to us all, as the hon. Lady's question implies.

We are absolutely determined to learn lessons from the original millennium goals. A huge amount of work has gone into this. When I was in New York for the UNGA and the launch of the new global goals, I attended many sessions that dealt with the extent to which the millennium goals have been implemented. I spent a lot of time looking at the relative success of DFID in the countries that we work with, particularly in Africa, and at their achievements against those goals. A large body of work was involved in that and I am very happy to write to the hon. Lady with further details on the extent to which we judged the millennium goals had been met.

The hon. Lady is right to say that the new global goals affect us all. We have signed up just as much as any of the African countries I was talking about. All the goals apply to us. It is early days, as I mentioned in my speech. The UK will be developing a framework for the way in which the goals will be judged. The Office for National Statistics will play a key role in that process and is currently working on it.

The hon. Lady specifically mentioned the issue of inequality. The Government are passionate about dealing with inequality. We believe that the best way to deal with it is to make sure that, for example, in this country, unemployment levels are kept low. We have half the unemployment level of our nearest similar economy, France—exactly half its unemployment level. Inequality is best tackled by making sure that people have work.

Inequality is certainly one of the areas that will be judged by the new global goals. Members will have more detail shortly on how that will be put into statistics.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I associate myself with the remarks welcoming the opportunity for debate. Can the Minister say what discussions or communications he has had with the devolved Administrations about the implementation of the goals—the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly have an outreach and international development presence; I believe Northern Ireland is considering a similar role—and about the domestic application of the goals?

Grant Shapps: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. As he knows, I am always very keen to engage with the devolved Administrations. He and I have had many conversations, particularly about the excellent partnership between Malawi and Scotland, which has been so important to the UK's development role in that country. I will certainly be taking those discussions forward with him and Members of the other devolved Administrations.

As I have mentioned, the goals were only put in place in September. Ensuring that we have a proper 15-year plan for their implementation, including the involvement of our devolved Administrations, is top of our agenda. Before anyone says, "Why isn't this happening more quickly?" in the case of the millennium goals, I think the world was rather too slow in coming together. It took several years before people woke up to the fact that we were in danger of missing many of the goals and then things really got going. We are determined that that will not be the case here. The hon. Gentleman and others can expect to see a huge amount of activity by us as we frame how best to deliver the goals both domestically and internationally.

The Chair: If no more Members wish to ask questions, we will proceed to the debate on the motion.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Committee takes note of European Union Document No. 5902/15 and Addendum, a Commission Communication: A Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development after 2015; welcomes this document as a contribution to a debate that is central to sustainable development policy; and supports the Government's approach to the post-2015 development agenda.—(Grant Shapps.)

9.15 am

Ms Abbott: I broadly welcome the Government's approach to the new global goals, but it is important to make the following points. We welcome the Government's response and willingness to accept the Europe-wide policies in relation to implementing the global goals. In particular, we are glad that the Government welcomed the communication's remarks on climate change. Given

that initially they did not support the establishment of climate change as a stand-alone global goal, that represents progress. We hope that that will mean that the UK pushes with real vigour for a global deal next month at the UN climate change conference talks in Paris.

We regret the Government's refusal to adopt the principle of burden sharing in relation to migrants and refugees before the Commission has come to its conclusions. There are a number of ways to go about burden sharing. We are not pushing for the UK to become part of Schengen, but, in the end, the migrant crisis we face is a European crisis. Whatever particular treaty obligations we think we have, we should step up in principle as a member of the European family of nations.

We welcome the Government's positive response to the communication and we note that the UK is already meeting the 0.7% commitment, which is commendable. The Committee will forgive me for referencing the role of past Labour Governments—and Gordon Brown in particular—in creating the political conditions for a broad acceptance that we had to step up to that 0.7% commitment. However, we have to go further to eradicate poverty and ensure sustainable development.

We also have to go even further to ensure that aid money is spent effectively. I am an absolute supporter of the 0.7%, but there is still a debate to be had about how it is spent. There are questions about aid money being spent on budgetary support and what happens to that money. There are still questions about how much of that money goes to large NGOs rather than local NGOs, which may be more effective.

I welcome the Government's commitment to 0.7%, but it is not just a question of getting the money out of the door in the easiest and quickest fashion. The reader of the *Daily Mail* and the woman on the high street in Accra share the same interest in aid and development funding: they want to know where the money goes and whether it is being used effectively.

Reservations about the global goals and how many of them there are were reflected in our earlier discussion, but they are widely regarded in the international community as a triumph that represents a bottom-up rather than top-down approach to development. It is hoped that they will cement and shape how we approach development for lasting change.

I welcome the Minister's offer to write to me about our achievements in relation to the millennium development goals, but I feel strongly that there is a job of work to be done on the Opposition side of the Committee on tracking and challenging what happened to them. It is not enough to say that moneys were spent on certain aspects or that support was given for certain international institutions. We want to know about the outcomes—how was poverty reduced and development aided? I welcome the offer of a letter, but I believe we will still have to ask for a full report and a debate on the goals on the Floor of the House. We cannot look forward until we have looked back. There needs to be honest assessment of our successes and failures.

In addition, our experience in delivering aid and development programmes is the best way to ensure effective implementation of the global goals. Unlike the millennium development goals, we need to implement the global goals nationally; the Opposition will take a keen interest in that. The existence of this Committee

and the response from various Departments to this communication are signs of collaboration and responsiveness, but we are keen to see how the Department for International Development takes the lead in developing a cross-Whitehall approach to the implementation of the global goals.

On the question of climate change, the Opposition are concerned that the UK Government appear to have rolled back many major national climate change policies. The commitment to zero-carbon homes has been cancelled, the green deal appears to have been scrapped and the climate change levy exemption for zero-carbon energy has been removed, to name but a few.

The only commitments that we have made leading up to the Paris talks are as part of the European position. It is good to see that Europe-wide consensus and we welcome it, but it falls short of our own Climate Change Act 2008, brought in by the previous Labour Government. The UK is going into those climate change talks saying we will deliver less than our own legislation demands. We believe that the 2008 Act sets an international standard that we must live up to. The UK should be saying that Europe is not ambitious enough, and using our influence to ensure a global deal that will impact on the lives of thousands. The Government appear to have no concrete position or plan to push for a global deal, and we are but a month away from Paris.

On migration and the Government's apparent refusal to adopt the principle of burden sharing for migrants, the British public have seen and read about the appalling conditions in which Syrian migrants find themselves. We commend the Government on the money they are spending on the camps in the region. We urge the Government to get the other EU Governments to step up to the example we have set on funding those camps. However, it remains the case that tens of thousands of Syrians are crossing borders through the Balkans into Greece every month. We are seeing a steep climb in those numbers as Syrian refugees seek to escape the onset of winter and Russian bombing.

It is not enough for the Government to say that we are doing well in giving money to the camps. The Government must say what it is doing for the unfolding crisis we see in the Balkans, Greece and Italy. It is extraordinary that the Greek Government, and the Greek people in particular, have done so well in relation to the migrant crisis. The fact remains that of all the EU nations, the Greeks, due to their long-standing economic issues, are not best placed to provide systematic processing and support for migration. They need more help.

As this crisis gets worse and spikes with the onset of winter, we believe it is unreasonable and irresponsible for the UK not to adopt the settled principle of burden sharing, whether or not we are members of Schengen. As the communication states, the global partnership should be based on principles of shared responsibility, mutual accountability and respective capacity. We believe we cannot pick and choose when we adhere to each of those principles.

Members from both sides have said that the proposal for taking a capped number of 20,000 refugees up to 2020 is both pitiful and unacceptable. We have yet to hear how many Syrian refugees have actually entered the country under this process. Members challenged the Secretary of State on that question yesterday and did

[Ms Abbott]

not receive a reply. We understand that we are expecting 1,000 before Christmas, but we do not know how many Syrian refugees have come in thus far.

Other European countries have taken as many refugees in a week as we are proposing to take in a year, and they have committed to taking thousands more. Until we hear the figures on the numbers of Syrian refugees who have entered, a question mark is cast on the Government's proposals. After all, long after the refugee crisis is off the front pages there will be a need for a sustainable, Europe-wide strategy. It cannot be right for Italy, Greece and the Balkan states to be left alone to deal with all the migrants and refugees. The Government need to look at a more sustainable strategy that is more genuine about working closely with our European neighbours, because hundreds of thousands of lives depend on it.

Members would have been saddened to hear the mayor of Lesbos, one of the Greek islands receiving thousands of migrants day by day, say that there was no more room on Lesbos to bury Syrian refugees. How can it be that in 2015 a member of the European family of nations can have that said and not be able to look to Europe-wide support?

Broadly, we support the Government's approach on the communication. We want to work closely with them to move towards implementation of the global goals. However, we still want detail on what was done to deliver the millennium development goals, we think that more can be done on climate change and we are concerned about inadequate Government proposals to meet the challenge of the Europe-wide migration crisis.

9.24 am

Patrick Grady: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Turner. I declare something of an interest, because until the May election I was the vice-chair of the Network of International Development Organisations in Scotland. I also sat on the Scottish working group on the SDGs, which I might speak about briefly later.

I welcome the opportunity to debate the papers before us and the SDGs more broadly. I welcome the broad consensus behind finding the right way to implement the global goals and I echo a number of the points made by the Labour spokesperson, the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington. The Scottish National party fully supports the SDG framework, as do the Scottish Government. The Scottish First Minister announced over the summer that the Scottish Government intended to adopt the goals in full for both international and domestic policy.

The opening statement of the report before us touched on the number of the goals. When we debated the SDGs in a Back-Bench debate on the Floor of the House a while back, I said—and I repeat now—that, first, the goals have been agreed, so the debate ought to move on. Secondly, the number of goals is probably for a reason; it probably reflects the kind of holistic approach necessary if we are to end world poverty and to do so in a way that genuinely leaves no one behind.

I associate myself in particular with the comments made about welcoming goal 5 on gender equality—we want to ensure that that is at the heart of the development

agenda over the next 15 years—and with the emphasis in the goals on climate change. Again, I highlight the work of the Scottish Government, who passed the highly ambitious Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and established the innovative climate justice fund to support people in developing countries to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

I thank the Minister for his response to my question about the role of the devolved Administrations. Co-operation across these islands is important to take the agenda forward. I highlight the work of the Scottish Government and of the working group, with its innovative approach over 18 months or more. I note that DFID officials are represented on the group, which is an excellent example of cross-stakeholder co-operation: it also includes NGOs, business community representatives, academics and representatives from the domestic anti-poverty organisations. There is a lot to learn.

The Minister also mentioned the co-operation that exists between the Governments of Scotland and Malawi. This week we marked the 10th anniversary of that co-operation agreement, so I take this opportunity to put my congratulations on the record, in case I am not able to in the Chamber before the end of the week.

The motion that we are debating finishes with the idea that the Committee

“supports the Government's approach to the post-2015 development agenda.”

We cannot oppose that motion, but, like the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington, my party intends to keep scrutinising the Government's approach. Achieving the 0.7% target is only the beginning of the process if we really are to leave no one behind, adopt a truly person-centred approach to development and achieve the goals. They are achievable; it is purely a matter of having the political will to build the world free of poverty that they envisage.

9.30 am

Grant Shapps: I thank again my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford for bringing this matter to the Committee for debate. It is an important issue with many wide-ranging consequences, as we heard from the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington, stretching to many areas that are not immediately obvious from the 17 goals and 169 targets in the agenda. Our debate could range widely, but I will restrict my closing remarks to the points that have been raised.

As I have said, the agenda is one not just for Department for International Development, but for all parts of Government. We will play our important supporting role in trying to ensure that the global goals are delivered. Climate change was mentioned, along with the extent of the United Kingdom's commitment on that. If my memory serves me correctly, £3.89 billion was dedicated to the International Climate Fund in the previous spending round. That figure has recently been increased by 50% to £5.9 billion. Although not doubling down, 50% is a pretty big addition to a budget designed to do exactly what the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington talked about, namely to continue to work on climate change.

On the more intricate details, the hon. Lady questioned whether we were still committed to zero-carbon homes. As she will know, I was Housing Minister at one point,

so can tell her that back in the 1990s homes built in the UK were emitting enormous amounts of carbon and were very energy inefficient, whereas the level of efficiency is now so close to zero-carbon that off-site allowances finish that off. I would not want Members to think that we were in any way watering down the targets; in fact, the United Kingdom will meet its national obligations, and is also putting enormous amounts of money into trying to meet international obligations.

Our wide-ranging debate strayed on to the migrant crisis and burden sharing. No country in Europe has done as much as the United Kingdom, not just during the crisis that hit everyone's TVs this summer, but in the longer-running crisis, over three or four years, of the Syrian war. Over £1.1 billion has been invested in Syria to help people to stay in or close to home. I am not sure that the wisest approach is to encourage people to make life-endangering journeys. Britain has a proud record on this matter. It is absolutely right that we have been in there helping a lot earlier than other Governments.

Ms Abbott: No one is talking about encouraging people to make life-threatening journeys. The fact is that tens of thousands of people have already made those journeys and are attempting to live in terrible conditions in Greece and Italy. It is not about encouraging anyone; with winter coming and people fleeing Russian bombing, the question is, what are we going to do to support the people who have already made those journeys?

Grant Shapps: Although this goes beyond the subject of the global goals, it is none the less important to consider whether Germany's opening of the doors to a million people will then encourage a further million people to make that journey, thereby putting people's lives at risk, and whether it is therefore better to tackle the problems people are experiencing at their root, in and around Syria. That is why I make the point that Britain has not suddenly joined the relief effort this summer; we have been involved for many years and have spent well over £1 billion. That is a proud record. As the hon. Lady knows and recognises, we have also launched a scheme to help 20,000 people come to this country. Of course we can debate the numbers and the rest of it, but I believe Britain stands tall in the world for having done more than any other country in Europe to prevent people from making that dangerous journey—and, by the way, in doing so, we have prevented a brain drain of the most fit, able and bright people from crisis-hit areas.

The hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Glasgow North mentioned the 0.7% target and how the money is spent. We will rigorously ensure that the 0.7% is spent properly and appropriately, and I welcome their keen eye on this. The House is absolutely right to want to see in great detail how that money is spent. In fact, this is an area in which transparency improves every aspect of international development. I genuinely believe that when we can see how money is spent and when people can challenge the process, we spend the money more wisely and get better outcomes. Within the Department for International Development, we will do everything possible to ensure that the books are as open as possible. We are one of the most scrutinised Departments, and I welcome that.

Ms Abbott: Does the Minister agree that transparency is not only important to the British taxpayer? It is also important, in our relationship with the countries to which we are giving aid quite generously, that the populations of those countries have transparency about how British aid money is being spent and whether it is really being spent to their benefit, rather than only to the benefit of local elites and the aid industry.

Grant Shapps: I absolutely agree. What the hon. Lady describes is, of course, the golden thread, which is about ensuring money is spent wisely and for the broadest possible spread of the population. Transparency enables people to see that their institutions are serving the broad mass of people rather than the elites, as she suggests.

The hon. Lady reminds me of a point she raised in her initial intervention about direct budget support. There is now almost no direct budget support through the DFID programme. In fact, I spend much of my time meeting Governments who are pleading for direct budget support. In many cases, we do not think that is a suitable way to spend money, not least because it tends to lack the transparency that she and others have called for, as we cannot see how those systems are spending the money. I agree that it is important to ensure that money is spent transparently. That takes many different forms, and she and I are on exactly the same page in terms of the golden thread and ensuring money is spent to the benefit of the masses, not the elites.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): In that spirit of transparency, will the Minister suggest to people in his Department that putting up a sign or putting something on equipment provided by the UK's aid budget is a good thing? Other countries do it all the time. Those of us who have been round the world will have seen fantastic projects delivered by the British taxpayer, but the vast majority of people have no idea that it is happening. We go down the road, however, and see signs saying, "A gift from the people of the United States," or, "A gift from the people of Germany," or, "A gift from the European Union." We never make enough of what we give.

Grant Shapps: I absolutely agree. That is one of my greatest frustrations, and I would go further: just putting up a sign saying, "A gift of the British people through UK aid," is not enough. I was driving back from taking my son to football the other week. We live in Hertfordshire, and my son pointed out that underneath the county's sign, it says, "County of Opportunity." I have lived in Hertfordshire nearly all my life and have never even noticed we have that slogan. That suggests to me that a sign saying, "A gift of the people of the UK and UK aid," is not enough; we need to do more.

My hon. Friend makes a serious point. I have so far visited seven countries in Africa that we support directly, and my greatest reflection is that I would be hard-pressed to discover where the money comes from. Often, it is spent through international partners and therefore there is simply no branding at all. If the point of aid is to bring influence in the world—in other words, to ensure that people not only look favourably at the United Kingdom, but favour our approach to great administration, a strong civil service, civil society and the rest of it—then it is important, not just for our own PR purposes, but for spreading exactly the kind of broad-based Government

[Grant Shapps]

that the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington and others have talked about. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I am on to this, and we will continue to press the point. Indeed, when I now approve new programmes, one of the questions I ask is not just, “How we are going to badge it?”, but how that will be made meaningful to the people who are in receipt of our development assistance.

There was a comment about scrutiny, which we have covered, but let me say again that we will ensure that the 0.7% commitment is the most open to scrutiny of any country in the world. Indeed, we are the only country in the European Union and the only major country in the G7 who spend the 0.7%. I know it is difficult to get people excited about accountancy awards, but the Department has won top awards for openness and transparency on this subject for more than one year running—I think for two or three years running. Long may that continue.

I want to make a further point about our enthusiasm for working with the devolved Administrations. As the hon. Member for Glasgow North knows, and as I mentioned, we worked with the devolved Administrations throughout the process of agreeing the 17 goals and 169 targets. It is absolutely our intention to make sure that we continue to do that.

Finally, let me deal with the development effectiveness of the millennium development goals. I want to reassure the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington

that the development effectiveness is measured constantly by the United Nations. This is a programme that we back very strongly, and I would certainly welcome any debate or discussion and any lessons to be learned from those millennium goals, because without that, I do not think it is possible for us to ensure that the new sustainable goals finish off the job correctly. We will continue to call on and support developing countries to take all the actions that those goals enshrine, on things such as tax transparency, anti-corruption and creating the right environment. However, we will also do more through our support for all the goals, which we support equally. Britain leads in some places—for example, on goal No. 7, which is on energy. I launched a campaign on that alongside Kofi Annan, and we will also work with our American partners, Power Africa, to make sure we can maximise the British impact on helping to bring power to two thirds of Africans who do not, at this stage, have power.

We will ensure that the United Kingdom is at the forefront of the new sustainable goals in all those areas. We look forward not only to the support, but to the analysis and to, I hope, the whole House holding our feet to the fire. I thank the Committee and my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford once again for securing today’s debate.

Question put and agreed to.

9.43 am

Committee rose.