



House of Commons  
Foreign Affairs Committee

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# **The UK's response to hurricanes in its Overseas Territories**

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**Fifth Report of Session 2017–19**





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**Fifth Report of Session 2017–19**

*Report, together with formal minutes  
relating to the report*

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## The Foreign Affairs Committee

The Foreign Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its associated public bodies.

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The following Members were also members of the Committee during the Parliament:

Ms Nusrat Ghani MP and Nadhim Zahawi MP

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Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/facom](http://www.parliament.uk/facom) and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Chris Stanton (Clerk), Zoe Oliver-Watts (Second Clerk), Hannah Bryce (Clerk), Dr Ariella Huff (Senior Committee Specialist), Ashlee Godwin, Dr Eoin Martin and Nicholas Wade (Committee Specialists), Clare Genis (Senior Committee Assistant), Alyna Poremba and Zara Wootton (Committee Assistants) and Estelle Currie (Media Officer). Tino Nieddu (on secondment from the National Audit Office), was also on the staff of the Committee during this inquiry.

### Contacts

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## Summary

In September 2017, the Caribbean was hit by some of the most ferocious Category 5 hurricanes the region has ever seen. Hurricanes Irma and Maria were responsible for widespread devastation across the British Overseas Territories of Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands. The FCO coordinated the UK Government response to the hurricanes, working with the MoD, DFID and several other departments to provide skills, assistance and funding to the territories. We recognise the huge efforts made by civilian and military personnel in the UK and in the region, alongside the determination and fortitude of the inhabitants of the Overseas Territories in the face of this disaster.

While the UK's response was considered to be swift and strategic by some of those islands affected, there are lessons to be learned. Given the frequency of hurricanes in the Caribbean, the UK Government should seek to develop an international strategy for disaster relief which allows for the best use of resources in time-critical disaster situations. The Government relies heavily on the Royal Navy for crisis response, and in discussions over the future of the fleet it needs to take the vulnerability of the Overseas Territories into consideration.

The hurricanes caused extensive damage to homes, properties and infrastructure across the Overseas Territories. Recovery efforts are under way, but much remains to be done. The FCO are embarking on a series of measures in partnership with the Overseas Territory governments and the private sector to build resilience in the infrastructure and economies of the Overseas Territories.

The constitutional relationships between the UK and each of its Overseas Territories are complex and unique. Since 2012, when the last Government White Paper on the Overseas Territories was published, the UK has had two General Elections and a referendum to leave the European Union. Clarity is needed on a number of issues, several of which have been brought to the fore by the hurricanes, such as access to development aid. Close, effective working relationships between Overseas Territories governments and the FCO are important and should be based on mutual trust and respect. It is not clear what recourse is available to the Overseas Territories should those crucial relationships deteriorate.





# 1 The immediate hurricane response

1. In September 2017, a series of devastating hurricanes passed through the Caribbean, resulting in the loss of life and the destruction of homes and property across the region. The British Overseas Territories of Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands were struck by Hurricane Irma, a Category 5 storm with wind speeds of over 180mph. We recognise and commend the remarkable efforts of civilian and military personnel, both in the Caribbean and in the UK, who mobilised to help those affected in the region. We also applaud the determination and fortitude of the residents of the affected Overseas Territories under these appalling circumstances.

## *The UK Government's immediate response to Hurricane Irma*

2. Hurricane Irma made landfall on Anguilla and the British Virgin Islands on 6 September 2017 and passed over the Turks and Caicos Islands on 7 September. Hurricane Maria, despite initial concerns, did not move directly over the British Overseas Territories affected by Hurricane Irma but did make landfall on Dominica on 19 September. The FCO worked closely with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Department for International Development (DFID) to provide a response that was judged by the Government of Anguilla to be “swift and strategic.”<sup>1</sup> The Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship, *Mounts Bay*, was positioned in the region in July, prior to the hurricane season, embarked with humanitarian aid supplies and a disaster relief team comprising 40 military personnel including Royal Engineers and Royal Logistic Corps.<sup>2</sup> *Mounts Bay* arrived in Anguilla on 8 September.<sup>3</sup> On 7 September, the Secretary of State for Defence directed the MoD to prepare a Joint Task Force for deployment to the region. The task force comprised an Operational Liaison and Reconnaissance Team, headquarters, transport aircraft, the Royal Marines Lead Commando Group, a Royal Engineer Unit, and HMS *Ocean* with nine helicopters embarked. HMS *Ocean* arrived in the region on 22 September.<sup>4</sup> At its height, 2000 military personnel were deployed to the region alongside 40 UK aid experts, 50 UK police officers, 40 prison officers and 80 FCO staff.<sup>5</sup> As of January 2018, 25 personnel remained in the British Virgin Islands, 16 in the Turks and Caicos Islands and no more remained in Anguilla.<sup>6</sup>

## *Availability of immediate resources*

3. Unlike Anguilla's neighbouring island, Saint Martin, which is divided between the French overseas collectivity of Saint-Martin and Sint Maarten, a constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Caribbean British Overseas Territories do not host a military or police presence from their parent country. The governance arrangements and nature of the relationship between the local and national governments also differ between

1 Q48

2 Ministry of Defence ([HUR0001](#))

3 Oral evidence taken before the International Development Committee on 31 October (2017–18) [HC487](#), Q26 [Lord Bates]

4 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([HUR0002](#))

5 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([HUR0002](#))

6 Lord Ahmad ([HUR0005](#))

all three territories.<sup>7</sup> Despite the presence of military and police personnel, media reports suggested both the French and Dutch sides of Saint Martin experienced looting, and that the short-term responses of both parent governments were criticised.<sup>8</sup> The subsequent aid negotiations between Sint Maarten and the Netherlands resulted in the resignation of Sint Maarten's president following two votes of no confidence in parliament.<sup>9</sup> Anguilla's submission said that a lack of a garrison had no bearing on the effectiveness of the UK's hurricane response, and Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State with responsibility for Overseas Territories, noted that the French and Dutch garrisons were themselves affected by the hurricanes.<sup>10</sup>

4. Storing supplies and skilled personnel on the *Mounts Bay* instead of the Overseas Territories themselves offered mobility but, as the affected islands are approximately 1000 miles apart, the immediate response was dependent on travel times and weather conditions.<sup>11</sup> But we were also told that, with six territories (Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos and Bermuda) in relatively close proximity, the pre-positioning and accommodation of materials, equipment and skilled personnel on the territories might have saved both time and money in the immediate response and allowed the islands to help one another.<sup>12</sup> Lord Ahmad told us that discussions were under way to identify assets in the region which could be shared:

This is not just about one OT [Overseas Territory] on its own or the OTs in the Caribbean as a collective, but about other parts of the independent Caribbean—and, indeed, other nations. We are engaged in direct discussions with international partners to ensure that we can identify assets in the area—the hurricane season will be upon us again in June—and that whatever assets different countries have can be deployed.<sup>13</sup>

### Recovery funding announcements

5. The UK Government made several announcements during and immediately after the storms' passing through the region, many of which included pledges of relief and recovery funding.<sup>14</sup> In an International Development Committee evidence session on 31 October 2017, the Minister of State for International Development, Lord Bates, said that the first tranche of funding was equivalent to £62 million:

£62 million was made up of allocations from different budgets. 33%—total £21 million—was allocated to DFID to be used for emergency relief and building supplies, contract of staff on the ground and contributions to the cost of local relief organisations. 58% of the total was allocated to cover

7 The French collectivity of Saint Martin is represented in the National Assembly and Senate (for instance). It is also considered by the European Union to be an outermost region of France, while Dutch Sint Maarten and Anguilla are classified as overseas countries and territories of the EU.

8 [Emmanuel Macron pledges €50m to help Irma-ravaged Caribbean territories](#), The Guardian, 12 September 2017; [Macron to visit Caribbean as France defends hurricane prep](#), The Chicago Tribune, 10 September 2017

9 [Dutch Saint Martin's leader quits over Hurricane Irma aid controversy](#), Deutsche Welle, 24 November 2017

10 Government of Anguilla (HUR0004) page 4; Q43

11 [UK stands by Caribbean and Overseas Territories](#) Department for International Development press release, 18 November 2017

12 Government of Anguilla (HUR0004) page 10; Government of Anguilla (HUR0004) page 3

13 Q11

14 For example ["UK aid continues to arrive for Hurricane Irma victims"](#) Department for International Development press release, 15 September 2017

MoD costs in respect of this. These were estimated according to the standard marginal costs calculators. The remaining 9% of the fund, which was £5 million, was allocated to the FCO, Home Office, Ministry of Justice and Department of Health, mainly for staff deployment costs in the immediate response.

In terms of the materials, a lot of the supplies that were being drawn on and being placed upon the C-17, other facilities and HMS *Ocean* were prepurchased stock of supplies that we actually have. In the full accounting process, once that has worked its way through the system, that will come into the total as well, but that is how the £62 million is broken down at the present time.<sup>15</sup>

Evidence from the Government of Anguilla suggested that it was not made explicitly clear that the funding being announced was being transferred amongst UK government departments, to pay for emergency supplies and staff deployment costs for instance, rather than in direct recovery aid for the territories themselves.<sup>16</sup>

### ***The deployment of a Senior Civilian Representative for Relief and Reconstruction***

6. On 14 September, a week after Hurricane Irma hit, the Foreign Secretary agreed to the appointment and deployment of a Senior Civilian Representative for Relief and Reconstruction, also referred to as Head of UK Taskforce on Hurricane Irma and Maria.<sup>17</sup> Chris Austin from DFID was selected for the role to “oversee civilian and military operations as part of the UK’s response”.<sup>18</sup> It was suggested this was a lesson learned from the 2014 Ebola crisis.<sup>19</sup>

## **Conclusions**

7. **As acknowledged by Lord Ahmad, there are a number of lessons to learn from the UK Government’s crisis response to the hurricanes that hit the Caribbean Overseas Territories in September 2017. While we welcome the FCO launching an exercise to identify regional and international assets that could be used in response to major natural disasters in future, it is regrettable that this had not been done previously as part of wider crisis planning, in addition to the welcome deployment of RFA *Mounts Bay* to the area in July. Given the Caribbean’s vulnerability to hurricanes we would have expected the FCO already to have had a good understanding of the resources available and an agreed collaborative international strategy in place. *The FCO should work with regional and international partners to share best practice, disaster preparation plans and relief sites and develop an international strategy for disaster relief which will avoid duplication of efforts and make best use of nearby resources.***

15 Oral evidence taken before the International Development Committee on 31 October (2017–18) [HC487](#), Q31 [Lord Bates]

16 Government of Anguilla ([HUR0004](#)) page 4

17 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([HUR0002](#))

18 “[UK aid continues to arrive for Hurricane Irma victims](#)” Department for International Development press release, 15 September 2017

19 Oral evidence taken before the International Development Committee on 31 October (2017–18) [HC487](#), Q29 [Richard Montgomery]

8. The UK Government's crisis response remains heavily reliant on naval assets such as RFA *Mounts Bay* and HMS *Ocean* to provide immediate strategic support and transport capabilities. The Defence Committee has recently drawn attention to the implications of the decision to withdraw HMS *Ocean* from service for the UK's ability to undertake such operations in future. *The FCO should ensure that the needs of Overseas Territories, many of which are regularly vulnerable to natural disasters, are considered as part of the decisions to be made within Government about the future of the UK's naval fleet and that assets are dedicated to the disaster response role.*

9. *Anguilla told us that it was not able to get clarity from the UK Government quickly about the availability and nature of crisis recovery funding. Although such funding is not wholly within the control of the FCO, as the lead department for international crisis response, and the one responsible for the Government relationship with the Overseas Territories, the FCO should seek to ensure clear Government communications and messaging on such important matters in future.*

## 2 Recovery and resilience

### *The state of infrastructure in the affected Overseas Territories*

10. Lord Ahmad told us that while infrastructure across the affected Overseas Territories was “in repair”,<sup>20</sup> much remained to be done. FCO evidence was that as of January 2018:

- Anguilla has had its electricity restored, its airport recertified and most hotels and restaurants have either reopened or plan to do so shortly. Work on other public infrastructure, including schools, still needs to be completed.
- In the British Virgin Islands power is available in 70% of homes. Approximately 90% of customers have access to (currently non-potable) water. Of 20 state schools, 9 have reopened. The international airport on Tortola has reopened and most sea ports and ferry services have resumed operations. There is still much progress to be made on housing repairs and prison facilities remain fragile.
- Much progress has been made in Turks and Caicos; the island of Providenciales is “back to normal”. Airline services have resumed. Grand Turk is still without internet connectivity and general telecommunications coverage is poor. Prison facilities also remain fragile.<sup>21</sup>

### *Government and private sector recovery funding*

11. The affected Overseas Territories are ineligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA), having been removed from the list of recipient countries by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD in 2000 (British Virgin Islands), 2008 (Turks and Caicos Islands) and 2014 (Anguilla).<sup>22</sup> In October 2017, the DAC agreed to request its secretariat to develop proposals for a mechanism to reinstate ODA eligibility for states and territories that suffer a persistent drop in per capita income, for example as a result of natural disaster or humanitarian crisis, and to examine the short-term financing mechanisms available to such places that suffer catastrophic humanitarian crisis.<sup>23</sup>

12. At the Joint Ministerial Council in November 2017, the Prime Minister announced £70 million of UK Government grant funding, alongside £300 million of loan guarantees, for recovery and reconstruction support.<sup>24</sup> Lord Ahmad told us that the Overseas Territories governments had determined their own priorities but were working with the UK Government and private sector partners to ensure their priorities were “identified, costed and supported financially.”<sup>25</sup> The UK Government has asked former Diageo executive William Bullard to “coordinate a private sector Task Force to ensure business plays a prominent role in the reconstruction in the Caribbean”.<sup>26</sup>

20 Q2

21 Lord Ahmad ([HUR0005](#))

22 OECD, [History of DAC lists of aid recipient countries](#),

23 OECD, [DAC HIGH LEVEL COMMUNIQUÉ: 31 OCTOBER 2017](#), 31 October 2017, para 21

24 [Millions more in support for hurricane-hit Overseas Territories](#), Prime Minister's Office, 27 November 2017

25 Q1

26 Department for International Development, [The latest on the UK's hurricane response](#), 15 October 2017

### *Other sources of recovery funding*

13. We were told that the Government of Anguilla lacks the ability to service debt and does not have financial reserves.<sup>27</sup> Apart from UK funding, it has received:

- An aid package from the development arm of the European Union, totalling €3.6 million.
- An insurance pay-out of \$6.7 million from the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility.<sup>28</sup>
- Interest rate payment holidays from the Caribbean Development Bank.<sup>29</sup>

A joint UN-Caribbean Community (CARICOM) donors conference was held in New York on 20–21 November 2017, during which \$1.4 billion of pledges were made to Barbuda and Dominica. We were told that the Government of Anguilla was not given permission by the UK Government to receive any donations during this conference.<sup>30</sup>

### *Improving hurricane resilience*

14. The FCO informed us that “OT governments are responsible for providing resources to reduce the vulnerability of public infrastructure to hurricane damage.”<sup>31</sup> Julia Longbottom, Director of Consular Services, FCO, told us that “[a] lot of our focus is on supporting them to make their own preparations and have their own disaster infrastructure in place, and stepping in in extremis, when they ask us to, and when that help is required.”<sup>32</sup> Evidence from the Government of Anguilla, however, suggested that building hurricane-resilient infrastructure was not possible without funding from the UK.<sup>33</sup> It told us that it was “unable and unauthorised to source funding from third parties” and, had the hurricanes not hit, the need for funding to improve key infrastructure would have “continued to be ignored.”<sup>34</sup>

15. Lord Ahmad told us that measures were being taken to improve both infrastructure and economic resilience in the affected Overseas Territories. Tourism is Anguilla’s main source of economic activity, focusing on low-volume, high-yield traffic.<sup>35</sup> Given the level of damage to the island, unemployment spiked immediately and the costs of a lost tourist season, which usually runs from November to April, are still to be accounted for. When asked about broadening the economic bases of the affected Overseas Territories, Lord Ahmad gave the example of Montserrat, which he said he would be visiting with a private sector partner to develop the natural mineral water industry.<sup>36</sup>

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27 Q53

28 CCRIF is a regional catastrophe fund for Caribbean governments, designed to limit the financial impact of devastating hurricanes and earthquakes by quickly providing financial liquidity when a policy is triggered. CCRIF operates as a public-private partnership, and is set up as a non-profit ‘mutual’ insurance entity in the Cayman Islands.

29 Q53, Q56

30 Q59

31 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([HUR0002](#))

32 Q44

33 Q61

34 Government of Anguilla ([HUR0004](#)) page 7

35 Government of Anguilla, [Anguilla & Hurricane Irma: Recovery, Resilience and Prosperity](#) (Autumn 2017), page 10; Government of Anguilla ([HUR0004](#)) page 6

36 Q36

16. The Minister said that the UK Government would help the affected Overseas Territories set up effective building regulations:

One of the priorities that has been highlighted to me by the Premier of Turks and Caicos is the need to build housing that is sustainable against hurricanes. It was interesting: there was a stark contrast with the tourist elements of those territories that have had much more foreign and private-sector input in development. They withstood a large part of the battering from the hurricanes. Tragically, the housing stock did not. We are working, in very practical terms, to ensure that we engage with the right private sector organisations.

If I can be very candid with you, one area we touched on earlier is capacity, and we are building on that with the Overseas Territories, but they require support on how to set up effective building regulations. On a cross-Government basis, I have ensured that our own experiences and learnings on this can be shared.<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusions

17. **The principles of self-sufficiency and self-governance are of great importance to the affected Overseas Territories, and we heard no calls for them to become direct dependencies of the UK Government.<sup>38</sup> However, as the case of Anguilla shows, the Overseas Territories have differing capacities to invest in the resilience of their critical infrastructure to deal with major natural disasters. We welcome the Prime Minister's announcement of £70 million of grants and £300 million of loan guarantees for recovery. However, greater preventative investment by the UK Government, in cooperation with the affected Overseas Territories, in the resilience of infrastructure might have been more cost-effective.**

18. **We welcome the Government's commitment to working in partnership with the affected Overseas Territories to restore infrastructure and broaden their economic bases, while ensuring recovery funds are spent effectively. It is regrettable, however, that measures as straightforward as sharing building regulation expertise were not already in place. We can take little comfort from the fact that Montserrat has yet to recover fully from the volcanic eruption 20 years ago. *The FCO should be more active in making the Overseas Territories as resilient as possible to major natural disasters, economically as well as in terms of their physical infrastructure. The FCO should provide us, by 1 September 2018, with an update on the recovery status of the affected territories and a strategy for widening their economic bases which includes ambitious deadlines for implementation.***

19. ***The Government should press the OECD Development Assistance Committee to bring to an early conclusion its work to develop proposals to reinstate ODA eligibility for states and territories that suffer a persistent drop in per capita income, and its examination of the short-term financing mechanisms available in response to crises. It should inform interested Overseas Territories as soon as possible of the consequences for them of the outcomes.***

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37 Q31

38 Q61

***20. We call on the Government urgently to clarify the position of Anguilla and other Overseas Territories with regard to both the continuation of current EU-funded programmes and access to future development assistance from the European Union.***



## 3 Institutional and constitutional issues

### *Overseas Territory policy papers*

21. The last White Paper on the British Overseas Territories was published by the Coalition Government in June 2012.<sup>39</sup> Since then, the UK has had two General Elections and a referendum to leave the European Union, resulting in a significantly different political landscape.

22. Lord Ahmad told us that he considered the residents of the Overseas Territories to be British: “I feel very passionately that they are British. They are part and parcel of what defines global Britain, and we should do our utmost to provide them with the exact same service that we offer any citizen.”<sup>40</sup>

### *The UK-Overseas Territory constitutional relationship*

23. The Joint Ministerial Communiqué 2017 said of the UK-Overseas Territory constitutional relationship:

The UK and the Overseas Territories have a unique constitutional relationship, built on a shared history, common values and a spirit of collaboration and partnership. We agreed that the fundamental structure of our constitutional relationships was the right one—powers are devolved to the elected governments of the Territories to the maximum extent possible consistent with the UK retaining those powers necessary to discharge its sovereign responsibilities. We agreed the need to continue our engagement on these issues to ensure that constitutional arrangements work and develop effectively to promote the best interests of the Territories and of the UK.<sup>41</sup>

Evidence we received from the Government of Anguilla highlighted areas of concern in this relationship:

- The status of Anguilla as a contingent liability.<sup>42</sup>
- The lack of an independent political voice.<sup>43</sup>
- Access to the UK's international development budget.<sup>44</sup>

### *Individual relationships*

24. Blondel Cluff, the UK representative of Anguilla, told us that the current leadership, behaviour and line-up of Foreign Office representatives dealing with Anguilla was very good and that the governorship of the recently-appointed Tim Foy was exceptional.<sup>45</sup>

39 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [The Overseas Territories Security, Success and Sustainability](#), Cm 8374, June 2012

40 Q9

41 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council: 2017 communique](#), December 2017, para 3

42 Q59

43 Q59

44 Q51

45 Q52

However, the high turnover of civil servants and Ministers could have a detrimental impact on the UK Government's understanding of the territories.<sup>46</sup> Anguilla's evidence also suggested that the relationship was dependent on the personalities and priorities of key individuals, such as FCO civil servants and FCO Ministers, with no effective means of remedy outside the FCO if these were unsatisfactory.<sup>47</sup>

### **Brexit negotiations**

25. The Joint Ministerial Council 2017 Communiqué noted the position of the UK Government in relation to the Overseas Territories and the UK's exit from the European Union:

The UK is responsible for representing the Overseas Territories' priorities in exit negotiations. A clear objective of the negotiations is to achieve a deal that works for all parts of the UK family. We will seek to ensure the security and economic sustainability of the Overseas Territories is preserved and, where possible, strengthened post Brexit. The UK will also take all steps to ensure continuity and legal certainty in arrangements between the UK and the Overseas Territories.<sup>48</sup>

Many of the Overseas Territories, such as Gibraltar, have unique concerns about the future of UK and the European Union post-EU exit. Anguilla relies extensively on the frictionless passage of people, goods and services, such as fuel and hospital diagnostics, with the French and Dutch territories on Saint Martin. This makes Anguilla particularly vulnerable to EU exit negotiations concerning borders and trade which might jeopardise transactions.<sup>49</sup> In addition, 36% of Anguilla's annual capital funding comes from the European Union.<sup>50</sup> Asked about the FCO's consideration of the impact of Brexit on Anguilla, Lord Ahmad told us that there were discussions underway but that it would be "premature" for him to comment on how they would be determined post-Brexit.<sup>51</sup> Written evidence from the Government of Anguilla claimed that the FCO, leading on Brexit for the Overseas Territories, had not taken the "fragile, vulnerable position of the people of Anguilla" into proper consideration.<sup>52</sup>

### **Conclusions**

**26. We recognise that the constitutional relationships between the UK and each of its Overseas Territories are complex and unique. In the case of Anguilla, this has led to some confusion about its status in relation to, for instance, development funding or third-party aid in times of crisis. The Government has more to do to demonstrate that it meets the Minister's ambition to provide residents of Overseas Territories with the same service as British citizens. We intend to examine the FCO's relationship with the UK's Overseas Territories in more depth later in 2018.**

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46 Q48; Government of Anguilla ([HUR0004](#)) page 8

47 Government of Anguilla ([HUR0004](#)) page 18

48 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council: 2017 communique](#), December 2017, para 9

49 Government of Anguilla ([HUR0004](#)) page 11

50 Q54

51 Q45

52 Government of Anguilla ([HUR0004](#)) page 17

27. We are pleased that the relationship between the Government of Anguilla and the Governor, FCO Ministers and FCO officials is currently considered effective, particularly in light of the strains placed on them in responding to September's hurricanes. However, we are concerned that there is no obvious formal mechanism outside the FCO by which the Overseas Territories can raise matters of poor performance on the part of, or resolve disputes with, the Government. *The FCO should explore the possibility of establishing an independent, formal channel through which Overseas Territories can provide feedback on the FCO's performance and their relationships with the FCO. It should also consider publishing, in the longer term, an updated policy paper with detailed consideration of the changing circumstances of the Overseas Territories including, but not limited to, the implications for them of the United Kingdom's planned departure from the European Union.*

## Conclusions and recommendations

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### The immediate hurricane response

1. As acknowledged by Lord Ahmad, there are a number of lessons to learn from the UK Government's crisis response to the hurricanes that hit the Caribbean Overseas Territories in September 2017. While we welcome the FCO launching an exercise to identify regional and international assets that could be used in response to major natural disasters in future, it is regrettable that this had not been done previously as part of wider crisis planning, in addition to the welcome deployment of RFA *Mounts Bay* to the area in July. Given the Caribbean's vulnerability to hurricanes we would have expected the FCO already to have had a good understanding of the resources available and an agreed collaborative international strategy in place. *The FCO should work with regional and international partners to share best practice, disaster preparation plans and relief sites and develop an international strategy for disaster relief which will avoid duplication of efforts and make best use of nearby resources.* (Paragraph 7)
2. The UK Government's crisis response remains heavily reliant on naval assets such as RFA *Mounts Bay* and HMS *Ocean* to provide immediate strategic support and transport capabilities. The Defence Committee has recently drawn attention to the implications of the decision to withdraw HMS *Ocean* from service for the UK's ability to undertake such operations in future. *The FCO should ensure that the needs of Overseas Territories, many of which are regularly vulnerable to natural disasters, are considered as part of the decisions to be made within Government about the future of the UK's naval fleet and that assets are dedicated to the disaster response role.* (Paragraph 8)
3. *Anguilla told us that it was not able to get clarity from the UK Government quickly about the availability and nature of crisis recovery funding. Although such funding is not wholly within the control of the FCO, as the lead department for international crisis response, and the one responsible for the Government relationship with the Overseas Territories, the FCO should seek to ensure clear Government communications and messaging on such important matters in future.* (Paragraph 9)

### Recovery and resilience

4. The principles of self-sufficiency and self-governance are of great importance to the affected Overseas Territories, and we heard no calls for them to become direct dependencies of the UK Government. However, as the case of Anguilla shows, the Overseas Territories have differing capacities to invest in the resilience of their critical infrastructure to deal with major natural disasters. We welcome the Prime Minister's announcement of £70 million of grants and £300 million of loan guarantees for recovery. However, greater preventative investment by the UK Government, in cooperation with the affected Overseas Territories, in the resilience of infrastructure might have been more cost-effective. (Paragraph 17)
5. We welcome the Government's commitment to working in partnership with the affected Overseas Territories to restore infrastructure and broaden their economic

bases, while ensuring recovery funds are spent effectively. It is regrettable, however, that measures as straightforward as sharing building regulation expertise were not already in place. We can take little comfort from the fact that Montserrat has yet to recover fully from the volcanic eruption 20 years ago. *The FCO should be more active in making the Overseas Territories as resilient as possible to major natural disasters, economically as well as in terms of their physical infrastructure. The FCO should provide us, by 1 September 2018, with an update on the recovery status of the affected territories and a strategy for widening their economic bases which includes ambitious deadlines for implementation.* (Paragraph 18)

6. *The Government should press the OECD Development Assistance Committee to bring to an early conclusion its work to develop proposals to reinstate ODA eligibility for states and territories that suffer a persistent drop in per capita income, and its examination of the short-term financing mechanisms available in response to crises. It should inform interested Overseas Territories as soon as possible of the consequences for them of the outcomes.* (Paragraph 19)
7. *We call on the Government urgently to clarify the position of Anguilla and other Overseas Territories with regard to both the continuation of current EU-funded programmes and access to future development assistance from the European Union.* (Paragraph 20)

### Institutional and constitutional issues

8. We recognise that the constitutional relationships between the UK and each of its Overseas Territories are complex and unique. In the case of Anguilla, this has led to some confusion about its status in relation to, for instance, development funding or third-party aid in times of crisis. The Government has more to do to demonstrate that it meets the Minister's ambition to provide residents of Overseas Territories with the same service as British citizens. We intend to examine the FCO's relationship with the UK's Overseas Territories in more depth later in 2018. (Paragraph 26)
9. We are pleased that the relationship between the Government of Anguilla and the Governor, FCO Ministers and FCO officials is currently considered effective, particularly in light of the strains placed on them in responding to September's hurricanes. However, we are concerned that there is no obvious formal mechanism outside the FCO by which the Overseas Territories can raise matters of poor performance on the part of, or resolve disputes with, the Government. *The FCO should explore the possibility of establishing an independent, formal channel through which Overseas Territories can provide feedback on the FCO's performance and their relationships with the FCO. It should also consider publishing, in the longer term, an updated policy paper with detailed consideration of the changing circumstances of the Overseas Territories including, but not limited to, the implications for them of the United Kingdom's planned departure from the European Union.* (Paragraph 27)

## Formal minutes

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**Tuesday 27 February 2018**

[Afternoon sitting]

Members present:

Tom Tugendhat, in the Chair

Chris Bryant	Priti Patel
Mike Gapes	Andrew Rosindell
Stephen Gethins	Mr Bob Seely
Ian Murray	Royston Smith

Draft Report (*The UK's response to hurricanes in its Overseas Territories*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 27 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Fifth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 6 March at 2.00pm]

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

**Tuesday 16 January 2018**

*Question number*

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**, Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN, **Julia Longbottom**, Director, Consular Services, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, **Ben Merrick**, Director, Overseas Territories, FCO, and **Ben Saoul**, Head, Crisis Management Department, FCO

[Q1–47](#)

**Blondel Cluff**, Anguillan Representative to the UK and EU and Special Adviser to the Chief Minister of Anguilla, and **Charlie Wheeler**, Chargé d'Affaires, Government of Anguilla London Office

[Q48–64](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

HUR numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Department for International Development ([HUR0003](#))
- 2 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([HUR0002](#))
- 3 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([HUR0005](#))
- 4 Government of Anguilla London Office ([HUR0004](#))
- 5 Ministry of Defence ([HUR0001](#))

## List of reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

### Session 2017–19

First Report	Violence in Rakhine State and the UK's response	HC 435
Second Report	The future of UK diplomacy in Europe	HC 514
Third Report	Kurdish aspirations and the interests of the UK	HC 518
Fourth Report	2017 elections to the International Court of Justice	HC 860
First Special Report	The United Kingdom's relations with Russia: Government Response	HC 332
Second Special Report	The UK's relations with Turkey: Government Response	HC 333
Third Special Report	'Political Islam', and the Muslim Brotherhood Review: Government Response	HC 334
Fourth Special Report	Violence in Rakhine State and the UK's response: Government Response	HC 868