Written evidence submitted by The Conscience Campaign Ltd also known as Conscience: taxes for peace not war and as Conscience

Conscience is a London-based, Quaker inspired NGO that campaigns for a progressive increase in the amount of UK tax spent on peacebuilding and is therefore interested in protecting and promoting international peacebuilding projects. Conscience is currently lobbying for reform of the Conflict Pool: the largest UK government fund that invests in non-military peace and security. Key to those reforms is greater transparency, so that NGOs, journalists and academics are able to scrutinise how money is being spent to protect and develop peace in unstable parts of the world which may impact on our own security. We also campaign for the legal right of those with a conscientious objection to war to have the entire military part of their taxes spent on peacebuilding.

Conscience has no objection to this written submission being published in whatever form the IDC deems appropriate.

Executive summary

- UK peacebuilding initiatives to address the causes of conflict in fragile states, via the Conflict Pool (CP) have had some success: Conscience believes that much more could be done in the future to develop sustainable peace and security.

- An expansion in funding of the Conflict Pool to £1B has been announced for 2015-16. Conscience questions whether management structures are adapting with sufficient speed not only to maintain but to improve the effectiveness of the CP.

- Two external reports on the CP by NAO and ICAI were very critical of the CP. Conscience has seen a written statement by the Prime Minister that all of the recommendations have been accepted but we have been unable to monitor progress because of the absence of published sources.

- To external NGOs such as Conscience the operation of the CP appears shrouded in mystery despite written statements about encouraging external scrutiny: for example, the CP has not produced an Annual Report since 2010.

- BSOS contains a large number of valuable ideas and principles which could be used to direct the work of the CP but Conscience has been unable to find out how these ideas are being put into effect.

- A major flaw in the CP is that so many small projects are funded that CP staff appear not to be able to monitor and evaluate these and hence there is a lack of coherent strategy for future planning. FoI requests from Conscience produced some rather incoherent lists of projects which suggested there is no agreed method by which projects are overseen.

- CP Strategic Guidance was published in April 2013 but Conscience is unable to find out how this has been implemented.

- The inclusion of the UK’s Peacekeeping budget within the CP has in the past undermined funding for peacebuilding projects when funds were removed to cover overspends in our Peacekeeping obligations. Conscience argues that the Conflict Pool would be more effective if it focussed solely on non-military projects and that Peacekeeping became funded from the MoD budget.

- We sense a growing mood of war weariness in the UK. Military “solutions” are becoming regarded as very much a last resort and demonstrate the failure of other means of settling disputes. The UK has a position in
international relations that is long, respected in many places, and can be used with great effect to broker peaceful settlements between parties with international disputes.

- *Conscience* urges the DfID Select Committee to re-visit the reports on the CP by NAO and ICAI and to ask for specific evidence from the relevant Minister about how the recommendations in these reports are being introduced and what plans he has to prepare for the large increase in budget allocation next year.

**Main Submission**

1. The Conflict Pool (CP), managed jointly by DfID, FCO and MoD, is the UK’s main mechanism to provide support for conflict prevention in fragile states in which we have a strategic interest. The most recent (2010) Annual Report on its work showcases projects on the rule of law, justice and security, civil society, governance and peacekeeping in Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and Western Europe plus strategic support to international organisations. The budget in 2009-10 was £171M, a tiny proportion (0.4%) of the UK’s then military budget of £41B.

2. The finance of the Conflict Pool has grown year on year: funding in the current year (2014-15) we estimate to be around £300M (excluding peacekeeping) still well under 1% of the MoD budget of around £35B. A large expansion in funding to £1B has been announced for 2015-16 under the new name of the Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), to include some involvement by our intelligence services. Despite enquiries of MPs with whom *Conscience* has communicated, we have not been able to discover whether management structures of the CP are adapting to this growth with sufficient speed, not only to maintain, but also to improve the effectiveness of our taxes spent by the new CSSF.

3. A report on the CP by the National Audit Office (NAO) published in March 2012 was very critical of the effectiveness and efficiency of the CP. This report was based on only two visits to in-country projects Lebanon (budget £1.24M) and Sierra Leone (budget (£4.6M) and thus represented only about 2% of the CP budget at that time. However the NAO felt sufficiently concerned about the management of the CP to make a number of specific recommendations about Governance, Strategy, Management, over-lengthy bureaucracy in the bidding process, lack of focus on outcomes, an absence of performance measurement and monitoring, and incoherent reporting systems.

4. In that same year the Independent Commission on Aid Impact (ICAI) published a report which was also based on two in-country visits: Pakistan (£13M in 2010-11) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (£2.8M in 2010-11) which between them represented about three times the budget allocation monitored by the NAO report. The ICAI report was also very critical of the CP and made several recommendations to improve key performance in areas such as development of a
coherent strategy, management of projects, tackling volatility of funding as a result of Peacekeeping overspends, leveraging projects with other partners, developing risk management and a monitoring and evaluation system.

5. We have seen written statements by both the Prime Minister and the then relevant Minister at DfID confirming that all of the recommendations made by both NAO and ICAI will be accepted and adopted but we have been unable to monitor the implementation of these recommendations.

6. An oral evidence hearing of the IDC in July 2013 on the ICAI Annual Report for 2012-13 spent a few minutes at the end of this session examining the ICAI report on the Conflict Pool referred to above. Unfortunately Questions focussed on the differences between these reports rather than probing common themes of weaknesses in management, monitoring and evaluation. A gloss from the NAO report was used to discredit, albeit inadvertently, the ICAI findings. This appears to be the last occasion on which the Conflict Pool has been the subject of any public scrutiny.

7. To an NGO such as Conscience the operation of the CP appears shrouded in mystery despite written statements about rigorous external scrutiny. The CP has not produced an Annual Report since 2010: the reason given for this in the ICAI report was that “It was found to be burdensome on the Conflict Pool Secretariat to produce and was discontinued.”

8. An over-arching strategy document, Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS) was published in 2011. BSOS contains a large number of valuable ideas and principles which could be used to direct the work of the CP but Conscience has been unable to find out how these ideas are being put into effect. BSOS included this statement on “tackling instability and conflict”: “Our focus on results, transparency and value for money…. will be supported by rigorous internal and external challenge and evaluation. We will report on progress annually…” Conscience has been unable to find any public report on the project work of the CP since the ICAI report of 2012.

9. BSOS concluded with the paragraph: “We will introduce expert challenge panels comprising a range of external experts e.g. NGOs and academics, to review our analysis. We will also look for new innovative ways to review our overall approach……, we will help to develop an independent assessment of the Government’s overall conflict prevention performance.” Conscience is unaware of any external review panels despite our search for documents on the CP over the past two years.

10. Conscience has seen for itself the problem faced by the CP Secretariat with so many small projects being funded that CP staff appear not to be able to monitor and evaluate these and hence there is a lack of coherent strategy for future planning. FoI requests from Conscience produced some rather incoherent lists of projects which suggested there is no agreed method by which projects are tracked and monitored.
11. CP Strategic Guidance (CPSG) was published in April 2013 but again we at Conscience are unable to find out how this has been implemented, if at all. It contains the statements: “we will communicate the numerous examples of effective work and impact across the Pool more vigorously within the three Departments and externally.” “The BSOS will continue to welcome regular external and internal scrutiny and challenge and will act on it. As well as programme evaluations and formal reviews such as those in 2012 by the NAO and ICAI, this means active outreach and interaction with civil society organisations working in the field of conflict and with parliamentarians.” In our communications with MPs over the past eighteen months we have found a worrying lack of appreciation of the work of the CP: it will be of significant help to UK peacebuilding efforts if the relevant Select Committees raise the profile of the Conflict Pool and so increase awareness of its work amongst MPs.

12. The inclusion of the UK’s Peacekeeping budget within the CP has in the past undermined funding for peacebuilding projects when funds were removed to cover overspends in UK’s Peacekeeping Treaty obligations. Conscience argues that the Conflict Pool would be more effective if it focussed on non-military projects and that Peacekeeping is transferred to the MoD budget. The original rationale for including Peacekeeping within the CP such that demand for the former would fall as the latter became effective has been shown to be over-optimistic, perhaps because of under-estimates of funding required for effective peacebuilding.

13. Conscience senses a growing mood of war weariness in the UK. Military “solutions” to international conflicts are now rightly regarded as very much a last resort and demonstrate the failure of other means of settling disputes. The UK has a position in international relations that is long, respected in many places, and can be used with great effect to broker peaceful settlements between parties with international disputes if used wisely and without recourse to military threats.

14. The scourge of warfare has been described in great detail and most eloquently elsewhere, none more cogently than in the foreword to BSOS. Peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution as part of non-military security measures are more effective in terms of human outcomes and cost effectiveness than recourse to war or the preparations for war.

15. Conscience urges the DfID Select Committee to re-visit the reports on the CP by NAO and ICAI and to ask for specific evidence from the relevant Minister about how the recommendations in those reports have or are being introduced. Conscience also asks how the commitments to transparency and rigorous external scrutiny are being put into effect. Conscience would also like to know what plans the Minister has made to prepare for the large increase in budget allocation next year.

16. DfID, as one of the three partners currently managing the CP, and overseeing what Conscience consider to be effective peacebuilding projects funded by UK tax payers, has a key role in persuading both MoD and FCO to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of CP management. Conscience urges
DfID to take more of a lead in developing the UK’s role in addressing the causes of conflict around the world and so work more actively towards creating a more peaceful, secure and just life for all humanity.
References


2. Ibid p. 1

3. See p. 50 in MoD Consolidated Departmental Resource Accounts 2009-2010

4. Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis July 2014 Table 1.4

5. HM Treasury Spending Round 2013 Executive Summary p.7


8. Private correspondence with constituents who are supporters of Conscience.

9. Oral Evidence taken before the IDC Tuesday 9 July 2013. See especially Q 26 and 27.
   http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmintdev/566/130709.htm

10. International Commission on Aid Impact (2012) (Ref 7) para 2.78


12. Ibid para 6.4

13. Freedom of Information requests to DfID, FCO and MoD Jan/Feb 2014


15. BSOS vide supra Introduction para 1.1 – 1.3

The Conscience website has links to some of the reports listed above and also to our in-house reports on the Conflict Pool and peacebuilding projects.