Written evidence submitted by Fire AID

Introduction

FIRE AID is an alliance of UK charities and rescue services with a mutual interest in providing ethical and sustainable donations of fire and rescue aid and training to those at greatest risk. FIRE AID was formed in 2012-13 by a group of like-minded organisations that have been successfully donating equipment, training and expertise for many years to over thirty low and middle-income countries.

FIRE AID and its members believe strongly that more should be done to promote the preparedness of communities at risk to cope with emergency situations. The poorest communities are also those most threatened by natural disasters, hazardous living conditions, violent injury (particularly due to road crashes) and a lack of capacity to respond to these risks. It is our belief that the future UK approach to development should include a much greater emphasis on building resilience in these communities rather than disaster relief after the fact. This is in line with the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 and the UN Decade of Action on Road Safety 2011-2020.

UK fire and rescue services are already doing excellent work in this area on a charitable basis donating their time, equipment and expertise. Modest support for their work would enable them to do a great deal more and help to build capacity in communities at risk. This would not require large budget outlays, but better coordination with DfID local offices and policy-makers.

FIRE AID

FIRE AID is a UK association of rescue organisations carrying out humanitarian projects around the globe to reduce fire risk and improve road crash response. Among other areas of work, FIRE AID provides guidance and best practice for donation projects, manages an equipment database and website, and provides a forum for discussion for its members. It has received core support for its development from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in recognition of the vital role carried out by UK fire services and NGOs in donating equipment and training to communities in need.

FIRE AID is chaired by former Fire Minister Jim Fitzpatrick MP and is managed by a Steering Committee of its founding members: the UK Rescue Organisation, World Rescue Organisation, Operation Florian, Staffordshire Emergency Services Humanitarian Aid Association (SESHAA), Bangladesh/England Safety and Fire Education (BESAFE), Fire Safety Friends of Russia, Eastern Alliance for Safe and Sustainable Transport (EASST), Blythswood Care, Asian Fire Service Association and Kent Fire & Rescue Service. Its Patron is the Rt. Hon. Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, Chairman of the Commission for Global Road Safety. FIRE AID is in the process of developing its membership network and formalising registration with the Charity Commission.

Poverty and Risk
Fire and road safety risk are concentrated in poorer countries and pose a severe development risk. Preparedness for fire and effective day-to-day emergency response is vital for both preventing and responding to disasters. This is most needed in low-income countries, where both fires and road casualties are a significant preventable source of violent death and injury.

UK Fire & Rescue services are well placed to deal with both of these development challenges. They are the main agency dealing with road crash extrication on UK roads, and play an active role in fire prevention and education as well as fire fighting.

According to the WHO, 5.8 million people die each year as a result of violent injury – 32% more than the number who die from malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS combined.\(^1\) Road traffic injuries account for nearly a quarter (23%) of these fatalities, while around one in seven violent deaths is due to fires.

Road casualties are a major development challenge. Over 90% of the world’s fatalities on the roads occur in low and middle-income countries, even though these countries have half the world’s vehicles. Road crashes are the leading cause of death in every world region for young people aged 15-29 and the leading cause of violent death for women of all ages. They are also a major cause of family poverty. Typical economic losses to developing countries from road traffic injury are between 1-3% of GDP – more than many receive in aid.\(^2\)

Some 8 million fires are reported worldwide every year, accounting for approximately 80,000 fire related deaths and up to 800,000 injuries.\(^3\) Over 95% of fatal fire-related burns occur in low- and middle-income countries. Fire-related deaths rank among the 15 leading causes of death in children and young adults (5-29 years). The total economic costs of fires amount to around 1% GDP in most advanced countries, but are far greater in low- and middle- income countries. For example, in the UK there are 0.75 fire fatalities per 100,000 population, while in Eastern Europe and Central Asia many countries experience death rates of 5-9 per 100,000 people.\(^4\)

A major reason for these high fatality rates is the lack of adequate equipment, training, and effective strategies for responding – including coordination between emergency services and local communities. For example, until this year in Moldova two thirds of all fire appliances were between 25 and 40 years old, and only 7% conformed to the government’s standard for fire appliances. There were just 12 fire service vehicles with crash extrication capacity in the entire country of 4.4 million people, with whole regions lacking road crash rescue equipment. There was also a lack of strategic governance, and poor joint inter-agency training and incident management.\(^5\) These factors contributed to a fatality rate of over 11% of road casualties. Compared with the UK rate of 0.9%, this is unacceptably high.

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Building Capacity to Respond to Day-to-day Emergencies

Addressing the capacity of communities to respond effectively to day-to-day emergencies is essential. It is recognised that natural disasters take an enormous toll on developing countries, and much donor money has gone into disaster relief. Since 1991 the international community has spent $69.9 billion in disaster response, but just $13.5 billion in risk reduction. Of this latter sum, little has been devoted to building resilience - improving governance, training and equipment. If communities at risk lack the capacity to respond to everyday emergencies they will also be unable to cope when disaster strikes.

Aid agencies are increasingly embracing the idea that capacity building is necessary to protect communities at risk:

“Whereas conventional disaster risk management aims to effectively remove the hazard or reduce its impacts though structural/hard-engineering solutions (such as sea walls to guard against storm surges), building resilience aims to anticipate risk and develop strategies that can cope with disruptive events if and when they occur, which emphasizes anticipation, preparedness and recovery rather than prevention and hazard risk mitigation.”

Where risks are greatest, the ability to respond to incidents is poorest. Strengthening response to everyday fire and road risks will not only save lives, it will improve the overall ability of communities at risk to respond to emergencies.

FIRE AID and the UK Role in Fire & Rescue Humanitarian Aid

The UK is one of the largest global donors of fire & rescue equipment, but most donations are made on an ad hoc basis by NGOs and volunteers without support from the UK government. These initiatives can be transformative for the destination countries, leading to lasting improvements in emergency response capacity. They are cost-effective – making good use of redundant UK equipment much needed by developing countries. They contribute to better local governance and social outcomes through long-term training and capacity building. They are highly beneficial too to UK rescue services – enhancing their experience and expertise.

Concern about terrorism and misuse of ‘trojan’ vehicles has made it riskier for UK fire services to sell redundant equipment, leading to wasteful and environmentally damaging disposals. FIRE AID has made use of the availability of high-quality, redundant fire fighting and road crash extrication equipment donated by UK fire services, with well-researched needs in destination countries working in partnership with local people. Donations are accompanied by top-quality training for trainers, and form part of a sustainable local fire prevention, injury reduction and road safety strategy. FIRE AID has adopted an Ethical Donations Policy to ensure sustainability and effectiveness, and to prevent any waste of resources.

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7 International Institute for Climate and Development, ‘Understanding the nature and scale of urban risk in low- and middle-income countries,’ 2013, p.37.
FIRE AID projects demonstrate how a relatively small sum of money, used correctly, can hugely benefit a local community – increasing the ability to respond to incidents and ensuring that personnel with the right skills and equipment are able to save saveable lives.

The example was given earlier of Moldova, where a lack of equipment, training and strategic management has resulted in high death rates from road collisions. Facilitated by FIRE AID, a group of UK rescue services and charities have joined together to address this problem. In May 2014, four fully equipped fire fighting appliances were delivered to regional fire and rescue units in Moldova, each with a full complement of road traffic collision (RTC) extrication equipment. The donations are part of a five-year programme of capacity building among the emergency services, including working with local ‘casualty reduction partnerships’ to improve their emergency response strategy.9

Following a scoping exercise in October 2013, the equipment was officially donated by FIRE AID members to the Civil Protection and Emergency Situations Service of the Republic of Moldova. It was accompanied by a two-week training programme delivered by UK professionals to internationally recognised standards, with a particular focus on improving the response to road traffic collisions. Training for the Moldovan personnel included fire fighting and operating techniques, standard RTC training, first aid and trauma care training. Four further fire appliances have arrived in Moldova this month with follow-up training. Monitoring will take place in November to check on outcomes.

The Moldovan project illustrates the cost-effectiveness of working with fire & rescue services to build capacity. The British Embassy in Moldova, the Embassy of the United States and the FIA Foundation sponsored the 2014 donation programme at a total cost to these donors of less than £25,000.

FIRE AID members are engaged in similar projects around the world, and would be happy to provide the Select Committee with further examples.10

FIRE AID members have also done important work hoping to reduce fire risks in refugee camps. An example of this is the work of Operation Florian in the world’s largest refugee camp, the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. In 2011 Dadaab was home to around half a million refugees, and while some have since been repatriated the population is still huge. Fires are not unknown in the camp. In 2012 a market fire burnt down 80% of the camp marketplace, while earlier this year a fire destroyed the

8 http://www.fireaid.org/sites/default/files/Fire%20AID%20Ethical%20Donation%20Statement%20V3%2020171013%20APPROVED%20FINAL_0.pdf

9 http://www.easst.co.uk/news/news/454

10 http://www.fire-aid.org/projects/projects-map
medicine stores of Medicins Sans Frontieres along with $700,000 worth of supplies. More fires have occurred in recent weeks.

Operation Florian were invited by UNHCR to the Dadaab camp to carry out an assessment of the fire risk and make recommendations. Their report found that:

- Past assessments of fire risk in the camp have not been acted upon;
- The many NGOs working in the camp do not have a single coherent fire strategy, and most do not have fire plans for themselves;
- Equipment for fighting fires is extremely poor;
- The high turnover of international staff means there is no continuity in emergency response strategy nor is the knowledge gained from past (minimal) training passed on to new staff.

Refugee camps are particularly prone to fire risk due to overcrowding, the haphazard layout of settlements, poor quality of construction and close proximity of habitations. Cooking is mainly by small stoves that are a huge source of risk. Flammable supplies are kept close to cooking/heating facilities, causing additional hazards.

The report by Operation Florian makes a number of recommendations that would greatly reduce risk without costing a great deal. Operation Florian and other Fire AID members would like to be able to assist with these solutions, but will require some small support to enable this to happen.

**Recommendations**

- DfID has given very welcome start-up funds to enable FIRE AID’s development. FIRE AID hopes this support will continue along with specific support for projects to enhance local resilience in emergency situations.

- Local DfID offices should consider to the possibilities for collaboration with Fire AID, and make available small budgets for local project funding.

- Both fire and road risk should be considered in the design of future DfID projects, with attention given to building the capacity of emergency response services.

- Positive encouragement should be given by UK government to local authorities to donate equipment of use to developing countries as part of an ethical and sustainable donations strategy.

FIRE AID, September 2014