



NATIONAL
POLICY
FORUM
2021
International



MEMBERSHIP 2021

HM Opposition

Lisa Nandy MP*

Preet Gill MP

John Healey MP

NEC

Kathy Abu-Bakir*

Yasmin Dar

George Howarth MP

Carwyn Jones MS

Mish Rahman

CLPs and Regions

Charlotte Austin – Northern Region

Mohammed Azam – North West Region

Paul O’Kane – Scottish Policy Forum

Bryony Rudkin – Eastern Region

Carol Turner – London Region

Tom Unterrainer – East Midlands Region

Adrian Weir – London Region

Sophie Williams – Welsh Labour Party

Affiliates

Tony Dale – Usdaw

Sonny Leong – East & South East Asians for Labour

Gordon McKay – UNISON

Len McCluskey – Unite

David Quayle – Unite

Elected Representatives

Georgia Gould – Association of Labour Councillors

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The work of the International Policy Commission

The International Policy Commission has held several discussions based on a work programme of key themes and events, including international summits. Alongside this, there were regular updates from the shadow frontbench teams and discussions on current affairs. Below is a summary of those discussions.

Kashmir

The Commission raised on several occasions the continuing reports of lockdown in Kashmir, with allegations of human rights abuses and vaccine denial. The ongoing communications blackout is disrupting the work of medical agencies and prevents families knowing about the safety of their relatives. The shadow frontbench made clear that they condemn the violence against Kashmiri civilians, and violence committed against Indian forces.

The Commission acknowledged that Kashmir is a disputed territory and respects the democratic rights of the people of Kashmir who must have a say in determining their own future. The Commission agreed that Labour should seek the restoration of human rights including the freedom of speech and communication, the lifting of curfews, and entry into the region of humanitarian aid organisations and international observers.

Labour recognises and supports previous United Nations (UN) resolutions on the rights of the Kashmiri people. We maintain that if we are to find a lasting settlement to end this ongoing conflict, this can only be achieved by India and Pakistan working together, with the people of Kashmir.

Israel and Palestine

The Commission discussed the recent cycles of violence in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, condemning both Israeli air strikes that caused more than two hundred civilian casualties, including dozens of children, and the indiscriminate rocket attacks by Hamas and other militant groups that targeted Israeli cities and killed Israeli civilians.

The Commission agreed that the deterioration in living conditions that many Palestinians have suffered in the last year is not due to a conflict of equals but is a result of the continuing military occupation. There will not be a just, lasting peace until the occupation is brought to a permanent end, where both Palestinians and Israelis enjoy security, dignity and human rights.



The Labour frontbench reiterated in commission meetings that there must be a negotiated, diplomatic settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on a two-state solution: a safe and secure Israel, alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. The Commission condemned all actions that are making that goal more difficult, including illegal moves to expand settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, forced evictions of Palestinians, and disproportionate use of force.

The Commission welcomed Shadow Foreign Secretary Lisa Nandy MP's reaffirmation of Labour's commitment to recognising Palestine as a state, and the strong support for the Palestinian people reflected in the submissions received. The Commission discussed the wide range of views expressed about how to support the resolution of the conflict and the end to the blockade of Gaza, including suggestions for an international fund for Israeli-Palestinian peace and the use of more coercive measures, such as sanctions.

Human rights abuses

The Commission held further discussions about human rights violations that are taking place within ongoing humanitarian crises and conflicts, including evidence from the Acting UK Director of Human Rights Watch, Ben Ward. The discussion emphasised the need for a human rights-led foreign policy that priorities peace, equality and justice.

Within the discussions, the Commission particularly highlighted instances of grave human rights abuses in East Asia against Muslim majority populations, including the Uyghur in China and the Rohingya in Myanmar. The Commission noted that Labour has called on the UK Government to formally support the Gambia's case of genocide against Myanmar in the International Court of Justice. Labour has also called on the UK Government to work with the Bangladeshi Government to ensure that those Rohingya who have fled to Bangladesh receive the support they require, including UK aid.

The Commission condemned the crackdown against pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong, the ongoing oppression of Tamil communities in Sri Lanka, and expressed serious concern about reports of foreign interference in Venezuela, and that people in Colombia continue to face persecution and death for being members of trades unions.

Humanitarian crises

The Commission received regular updates from the shadow frontbench regarding ongoing humanitarian crises, and the particularly devastating impact Covid-19 is having on states already fractured by conflict and with inadequate health infrastructure.

The Commission condemned the Government's decision to cut aid to Yemen by 60 per cent, while the country is at risk of the worst famine the world has seen in decades, and believes that slashing life-saving support to the largest humanitarian crisis in the world, in the middle of a pandemic, is appalling.

The shadow frontbench also made clear in discussions that as a penholder for Yemen at the UN Security Council, the UK has a particular duty to act to end the brutal conflict. That is why Labour has called on the UK Government to bring to an end to offensive arms sales to Saudi Arabia for use in the ongoing conflict.

Global vaccines and health inequalities

The Commission heard how Covid-19 is still killing thousands of people every day around the world. The growing gulf between countries like the UK, where more than two-thirds of adults have had their first jab, and many countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean where vaccination programmes have barely begun, has left billions of people unprotected.

The Commission agreed it is unacceptable that some of the poorest countries are being expected to prioritise debt repayments over the safety of their citizens during the world's worst health crisis in over 100 years.

The Commission welcomed Labour's 10-point plan to boost global Covid-19 vaccine production, the world's largest ever coordinated investment programme – in partnership with the pharmaceutical industry – to ensure that these new facilities have the skills, technology and supplies they need to enable the safe and efficient mass production of vaccines.



UN and International Law

The Commission held a session on the importance of upholding international law, hearing from Shadow Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Minister, Lord Ray Collins, on his review into the UK's role at the UN. He noted how the UN is popular globally, and discussed how the UK as a founding country has significant influence on strengthening the UN, as well as the value of multilateralism but also the dangers when it is not present.

The Commission discussed the Overseas Operations Bill recently passed through Parliament, with concessions won against the Government by a Labour-led coalition to protect international law and human rights.

The Commission also welcomed the shadow frontbench's robust response to the Government's change in position on nuclear doctrine, and called for a new generation of multilateral arms control treaties, covering more advanced weaponry in the domains of cyber technology and space. The Commission also discussed the Treaty of the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, with members noting its official ratification and some calling for consideration of its adoption by the UK.

Global trade unions

The Commission hosted the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and Lord John Hendy for a discussion on the global trade unions movement. There were discussions on how to communicate trade union rights and collective bargaining as a universal principal rather than an ideological one; the role of trades unions in conflict resolution, noting the many labour law treaties that emerged out of conflict; and the need for further legislation on forced labour and modern slavery.

The Commission also heard how many countries work with international unions as important vehicles for international development and democracy building. The Commission also expressed solidarity with working people across the world, and condemned attacks on trades unions in Latin America and the Middle East.

Integrated Review

The Commission held a discussion on the Government's Integrated Review, taking evidence from the British Foreign Policy Group on the perceptions of British voters on foreign policy threats, and on how better to connect the global with the local.

Throughout the year, the Commission discussed the shadow frontbench response to the Integrated Review, noting the Shadow Defence team's opposition to 10,000 cuts to the Armed Forces and concerns over the so-called pivot to Asia-Pacific taking priority of our commitments to NATO.

The Commission also heard from the shadow frontbench teams on increasing state-based threats, including Russia and China, the emergence of continuous competition in the so-called "grey-zone", and the need for a more coherent defence strategy. The Commission expressed disappointment in the Review's inadequate proposals on wider human security threats, most importantly from climate disaster.

The Commission also expressed disappointment in the lack of any meaningful focus on Britain's future relationship with Europe within the Integrated Review.

Climate justice

The Commission heard from SERA, Labour's Environment Campaign and Shadow Development Minister Anna McMorrin MP on plans in the lead up to COP26, and the decision for Labour to form an International Climate Justice Network, giving a platform for the voices of those experiencing the greatest impacts of the climate crisis. The network will work collaboratively to put in place green recovery plans to give us the best chance of tackling the global climate crisis.

The Commission discussed how Britain must use its standing in the world to encourage other nations within the G7 and COP26, but also within the G20, to move towards a greener world.



0.7%

The Commission condemned plans to make the UK the only G7 nation to cut aid, breaking a manifesto commitment to support the world's poorest and most vulnerable people. Labour and Parliament have repeatedly made clear their opposition to aid cuts and that Britain must not turn its back on the world's poorest.

The shadow frontbench made clear in the discussions that the UK's allies and detractors are already taking note, and this has already weakened the UK's position at the G7 summit, and will continue to do so for upcoming summits on education and COP26, which we are hosting later this year. Labour has committed to a reversal of the aid cuts from 0.7% to 0.5% of gross national income and supporting low income countries to increase their financial resources to tackle the continued health and economic crisis.

Equalities

The Commission also hosted a number of equalities sessions hearing from Party affiliates. Disability Labour gave powerful evidence on the extreme challenges people with disabilities face in conflict zones and for refugees fleeing disaster. The Commission expressed solidarity with these people and called for more to be done to investigate the specific challenges and needs for innocent people with disabilities caught up in conflict.

East and South East Asians for Labour discussed the alarming rise in Sinophobia in discussion of foreign policy towards China and how this spreads to the wider East and South East Asian communities.

The Shadow International Development team launched a consultation on achieving gender equality in development, led by Shadow Minister Yasmin Qureshi MP and held a number of policy roundtables for Party members and NGOs.

Principles

In 2019-20, the Commission held a consultation with party members to draw up 10 guiding principles that will underpin Labour's international policies; this list was developed further in 2020-21.

1. Putting people first, Labour's international policies will be independent, human rights-led, standing up to abuse, oppression, and those who seek to undermine our peace and freedom; utilising conflict prevention and resolution as key tools of foreign policy.
2. The first duty of government is to protect its people; our international policies will bring an end to knee jerk decisions, and ensure a properly planned and funded national defence, based on a strategic, long-term view of shifting power bases, a wider understanding of security threats and the national interest.
3. Fighting the climate emergency will inform everything we do, from working to eradicate poverty and economic inequality, to dismantling systemic injustices around the world. Labour will never penalise low-income countries or population segments in the fight for climate justice.
4. Policies will be focused on the future, harnessing the possibilities of new technologies, new ideas and new alliances, while becoming more vigilant to emerging threats that we have not seen before.
5. Through our assessment of global challenges, Labour will be unafraid to put forward radical ideas that address the root causes of deprivation and inequality. This approach will be founded on the belief that societies are better defended through common values and collective solutions.



6. Recognising that all levels of government need to work together for an international policy that is coherent and supportive of our core objectives as a Party, we will closely tie our international and domestic priorities, supporting British industry, jobs and regional economies. Labour will champion international labour rights by seeking their application in the UK and equitable trade agreements with human rights and environmental due diligence across supply chains.
7. Labour will take a values based approach to our international relationships. We will not shy away from speaking out for the rule of international law and pursuing truth and justice in the face of opposition, even from our allies. We will strive to always bring light not might in our diplomacy around the world to push for greater implementation of human rights obligations across the world.
8. Labour's decision-making processes will be transparent and open to proper public and parliamentary scrutiny. We will push for greater transparency from businesses and organisations who help to facilitate Britain's global role in development aid and trade.
9. Defending the rights of nations and communities of all colours, cultures, and faiths to determine their own futures and livelihoods. Our policies will promote the UN-led rights of equality, end systemic injustices for women, and champion the rights of minorities such as LGBTQ+ people, BAME people, and people living with disabilities.
10. Representing the interests of all those who call the UK home on the global stage means our diplomatic and armed forces personnel must be as diverse as those they seek to champion and defend.

A strategy for veterans

In 2021 the Policy Commission launched a consultation called 'A strategy for veterans' as a starting basis for a policy that will ensure Labour can make Britain the best place for the Armed Forces and their families to grow up and grow old in.

In response, the Commission received many submissions and heard views in an online roundtable with party members, veterans, and elected local government officials. The overriding message was that veterans just want a fair deal, with several themes emerging on what can be done to support those veterans who struggle going back into civilian life. With the proportion of working age veterans projected to increase from 37% in 2016 to 44% by 2028, a greater emphasis will be needed on successful transitions to civilian life and making a success of the skills built in the forces.

Transition support

The present system is letting some veterans slip through the cracks because the process of moving from service to civilian life appears to be fragmented and inadequate, with specialist support left almost entirely to service charities. Most veterans move seamlessly into civilian life and go on to be leaders in their field; however, rather than just welcoming these successes, veterans with experience of succeeding in civilian life could utilise their experience to help their peers. A veterans strategy must provide for longer-term preparation for leaving service, provided by the Ministry of Defence from the point of recruitment into civilian life, including a greater set of core life-skills built into basic training.

Skills and lifelong learning

More could be done to reacclimatise service leavers to civilian life and give service personnel a better understanding of the career opportunities and the education options to translate their military experiences into a rich, fulfilling civilian life. Many submissions suggested, from personal experience, that service personnel would welcome the opportunity to expand on the skills they have picked up during their military careers and ensure they have proper civilian accreditation for these skills.



Policy options suggested include pre-transitional placements in work, looking at what careers veterans can get, but also what they can offer civilian work places; and non-military professionals could also be involved in “Pathfinder” workshops to help veterans understand better how their skill sets can translate into civilian applications.

Public services

In many cases the provision of basic public services for veterans must be improved. For instance, on housing the schemes for service families who have no home to go to need to be examined for the way they are accessed. Existing medical screening is often reported to be unfair, particularly for hearing loss, and more should be done to provide veterans injured in conflict with the support and training needed to find a career with a disability.

Many submissions made clear that medical records are a key problem, with a suggestion that at the beginning of the resettlement period a veteran’s medical record should be transferred to a Veteran’s file or store to make the record more easily accessible.

Armed Forces Covenant

Currently the services provided under the Armed Forces Covenant are a post code lottery. The Covenant must be a binding moral commitment between government and service communities, guaranteeing them and their families the respect and fair treatment their service has earned. This begins by putting the Armed Forces Covenant fully into law.

Submissions to the consultation

Transition support

Submissions made clear that while the vast majority of veterans go on to lead very successful lives, the transition from the Armed Forces to civilian life is a challenging one.

“17 years having full wrap around, knowing how everything worked, where I fit into the picture, what was expected of me hour by hour, day by day. Then suddenly I’m a veteran, driving home without an understanding of the world, as my life education from 18-35 had all been military.”

ONLINE ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANT

Submissions reflected the wide array of experience from Labour Party members who have served both as full time and regulars, providing positive policy suggestions that recognise the quality of skills possessed by veterans; but these may need 'translating' into civilian life, and this is best assisted by veterans themselves with knowledge of the process:

“An end of service 'reverse boot camp' should be run by the armed forces and industry partners. This would serve to reacclimatise service leavers to civilian life and give an understanding of the opportunities available, career paths, salary expectations and education on how to translate their experiences to the civilian job market.”

OTHELLO, LABOUR PARTY MEMBER

“A community based transitional service, staffed by veterans perhaps along the lines of the Expert Patient Programme could act as a stepping stone between military and civilian life and empower veterans to negotiate these stresses effectively, reducing the risk of difficulties spiralling out of control.”

KATE, SOUTH WEST



Education and Skills

In a similar vein as above, many submissions discussed the need not to 'reskill' veterans, but to provide greater support and advice for service leavers on how best to utilise the skills developed in the forces.

"A Graduate Recruitment scheme – where relevant skills and experience are matched with the most appropriate type of jobs and businesses? This process would start 6 to 12 months before end of service to provide enough time for transition."

ONLINE ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANT

Numerous submissions also suggested the creation of career pathways into civilian careers that are likely to value the skills developed by service personnel.

"Often personnel serving leave for industry and their long experience is lost. A direct pathway to the civil service could increase diversity in that arm and offer a way to retain skills."

TIM, LABOUR PARTY MEMBER

Services

Most of all, submission reflected the need for the better provision of key services for veterans. This included examples in healthcare:

"We need the MOD to take much more care of ex service personnel, making mental and physical health care a priority."

KEVIN, EAST OF ENGLAND

"Veteran referral hubs, run by Forces doctors, should be set up to ensure priority service for hearing, mental health and other assessments. Some orthopaedic doctors already do this on the NHS."

ROSALIND, LABOUR PARTY MEMBER

There were also clear calls for more to be done to support those who are significantly injured in combat during their service, both in the recent to near term and longer, legacy cases:

"Nuclear test veterans should be paid compensation."

RUTH, GREATER LONDON

"If servicemen are injured in the service of the state such as for example losing an arm, then the state has a moral obligation and duty not only to provide remedial and convalescence facilities for those injured servicemen or women but also training so that they can eventually get suitable employment even with a disability."

ROBIN, GREATER LONDON

Submissions – wider issues and principles

Party members, supporters, local party motions and affiliates have sent in submissions covering a wide range of global challenges from peace and justice to the climate emergency. The submissions were discussed by the Commission and formed the basis of the 10 principles.

Human rights

Many submissions reflected the desire of members to call out human rights abuses.

"Be consistent in standing up for human rights and democracy in all countries."

JASMINE, SOUTH EAST

Many submissions raised the case of Palestine, in which members voiced their concerns that international law and human rights are being violated:

"Labour must stand in full opposition to the Israeli government's declared intention to annex great swathes of the West Bank and to build many more settlements, moves that are completely illegal according to international law; and support actions to build a broad coalition against the Israel annexation and settlement building, and to continue to campaign for a two state solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as the only viable solution to the unstable situation."

RICHMOND PARK CLP

Members also raised concerns for the peace and freedom of Kashmiris, highlighting concerning incidents of harassment of journalists, human rights abuses and violence.



“As an internationalist party committed to the values of human rights, social justice, equality, and democracy, it is imperative that the Labour Party recognises the Kashmir conflict as both an international political dispute underpinned by outstanding aspirations for self-determination, as well as a humanitarian issue characterised by systematic and prolonged violations of human rights.”

LABOUR FRIENDS OF KASHMIR

Submissions also included condemnations of human rights abuses in Colombia, farmers protesting in India, the Uyghur and protestors in Hong Kong,

“This meeting views with increasing alarm the arrest on Wednesday 6th January 2021 of 50 known pro-democracy and pro-human rights activists in Hong Kong”

OXFORD WEST AND ABINGDON CLP

Inequality

Many submissions called on the Party to challenge structural drivers of inequality as part of our central mission:

“The empowerment of women is an essential part of the fight for global justice.”

HIGH PEAK CLP

In response to the Shadow International Development consultation, the commission received many submissions that proposed radical solutions to gender inequality:

“A transformative policy to tackle gender inequality must address macro-level economic policy making. Far too often, gender equality strategies either ignore economic justice altogether or focus only on micro level interventions, often addressing the needs of women entrepreneurs, without addressing structural causes.”

GENDER DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

Submissions also covered a much broader array of inequalities issues across the globe, many of which have been exacerbated by Covid-19 and show how far is still to go to eliminate economic and health inequality around the world:

"It is a moral imperative to ensure all countries are equally protected against disease, regardless of wealth. The Covid-19 pandemic must be a catalyst for change in how we tackle all infectious diseases."

STEVENAGE CLP

Peace and justice

Many of the submissions received also reflected Labour campaigns for peace and justice around the world.

"Support for a peace and reconciliation initiative between Israel and Palestinians, including the right of return for Palestinians."

DANNY, LABOUR PARTY MEMBER

Additionally, Labour's affiliates and trades unions suggested means by which the UK can do more to stamp out unethical trade, modern slavery and unnecessary damage to our environment:

"A new law applying to all businesses operating in the UK: a "failure to prevent" law requiring companies and public bodies to undertake 'human rights and environmental due diligence' across their supply chains, and to hold companies to account when they fail to prevent harms to human rights and the environment."

UNISON

Climate justice itself was another central theme, with submissions focusing on important meetings like the G7 and COP26 to face the crisis head on:

"The UK needs to show urgent leadership on minimising climate change catastrophe. Even though the COP26 has been delayed till Nov 2021 every country still needs to submit their Paris Pledges (Nationally Determined Contributions) to the UN with actions that are sufficient to keep the world to 1.5deg of warming."

HORNSEY AND WOOD GREEN CLP