

Statement: Civil Society Perspectives on Global Britain

Final version, 27th February 2019

Introduction

This statement sets out how UK civil society organisations working on global issues believe that Britain should be positioned in the coming years, as ‘Global Britain’. It results from two roundtables involving 30 UK based international organisations convened in October 2018 and January 2019 by the Joffe Charitable Trust with the Policy Institute at King’s College London and the Coalition for Global Prosperity. Participants included NGOs, think tanks, campaigning organisations, coalitions and others.

The statement summarises the common ground among many significant civil society organisations. It can be used for internal or external purposes. Organisations are not asked to make formal public commitments to it.

Statement

As Britain changes its relationship with the EU, government, business, civil society and others should come together to restate what Britain stands for in the world in the decades ahead.

Britain is a global actor with unique standing. Our assets range from the vigour of our economy, media and democratic institutions, our seat at the UN Security Council, our respected role in international development and our armed forces, to our extraordinary academic, civic and cultural vitality. We helped create the rules-based international order that has kept much of the world safe. Our current status is rooted in our imperial history, which also shapes how others perceive us. We cannot ignore the past as we define the future.

But the world is changing fast. New powers are rising, new technologies are transforming society and new challenges are faced by all nations, crossing old boundaries. The world is more connected than ever before. The old institutions, approaches and politics are not working well enough for too many people. Democratic progress is under threat. We need to come together to fight for what we believe in and create the new world we want to see rather than allow it to emerge from chaotic forces.

In the years ahead, Britain can create more opportunity for citizens across the four home nations and be a major force for good in the world, if we position ourselves appropriately. We can be a champion and upholder of human rights and fairness in international relations. We can actively tackle the rising inequality and climate change which blight so many people’s lives and fuels insecurity. We can help all nations make progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, including leaving no one behind, and set an example by doing so ourselves.

Our positioning as 'Global Britain' must recognise that domestic and global issues are more linked than ever before. As we develop a clearer sense of who we are as a nation in the 21st century, we will be able to play a clearer role on the world stage. This should be based on core values, re-applied for the new world that is taking shape, including:

- Democracy, the separation of powers, human rights and free media.
- The rule of law, justice for all, fair play and fair rules.
- Individual liberty, opportunity and equality, including political freedoms.
- Religious tolerance and mutual respect.

To develop and pursue this vision requires inclusive and evidence-led public engagement. As a starting point, we propose the following policy choices:

- Clamp down on corruption, tax abuse and odious debt enabled by the UK, and play a leading role in tackling corruption, tax abuse and debt internationally.
- Ensure business and the economy balance the interests of all stakeholders, wherever they live, and work towards 1.5 degrees global warming.
- Continue to be a leader in the fields of international development and tackling climate change, influencing others around the world.
- Protect the environment at home and support others to protect it abroad.
- Promote gender equality and respect for all minority groups by actively protecting human rights and tackling all forms of discrimination.
- Ensure diplomacy, defense and development policy are aligned to support the Sustainable Development Goals. Promote peace and seek to prevent conflict.
- Update the outdated aspects of our democratic and political structures in the UK, and vigorously promote democratic values and appropriate approaches internationally, avoiding 'cookie-cutter' institutions.
- Ensure media freedom, plurality and appropriate regulation in the UK, and promote media freedom, plurality and regulation internationally. Promote transparency in all areas of government.
- Meet our obligations to welcome refugees and asylum seekers, and defend their rights around the world. Uphold the shared responsibility to protect people wherever they are from mass atrocities.
- Negotiate international trade deals that reflect our values, for instance incorporating environmental and social protections for citizens in all countries.
- Promote the rules-based international order and actively engage in multi-lateral institutions, such as the UN, and encourage reform for the modern world, enabling people from all countries to have a fair say.
- Support innovation and new technologies that bring new solutions and cross old boundaries, appropriately regulated for the benefit of all.

As civil society, we embrace our role in realising this vision of Global Britain. We recognise the need to continue to reform our organisations and strategies to model new forms of collaboration and activism, bringing people together across divides to tackle the most urgent social and environmental issues of our times.