



Annual Report

BOARD OF TRUSTEES' REPORT
AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

2023

Company number:

02489161

Charity number:

1048335



Company information

Committee Members (Trustees)

Stephen Edwards
Dina Hashem
Nadim Houry
Joanne Mariner
Scarlett MccGwire
Kieran McEvoy
Muriel Paasch
Wilder Tayler
Miqdaad Versi

Chair

Stephen Edwards

Treasurer

Muriel Paasch

Company Number

02489161

Charity Number

1048335

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TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

For more than 30 years, Rights & Security International (RSI) has worked collaboratively to document and end human rights violations that governments commit in the name of national security. We find the facts, create innovative new policy ideas based on evidence, defend human rights in court, and help others understand how to use human rights law as a practical tool for change.

Our principled, expert work ensures that the important protections of international human rights law remain in place for everyone, and helps stop governments from sliding into secrecy, impunity and oppression. We have a particular focus on challenging religious, racial, gender and other bias in national security policing.

Our charity was originally established in the early 1990s to address torture, killings and arbitrary detention in Northern Ireland. Following the 9/11 attacks and rise of Islamophobic rhetoric and policing tactics in the UK, we expanded our work to focus on Great Britain as well as Northern Ireland. In 2020, we became an international organisation that promotes respect for human rights when governments act in the name of countering terrorism or extremism anywhere in the world. Our current organisation-wide strategic plan covers the period from 2022 through the end of 2024.



Under our constitution ('memorandum of association'), our goals are:

Goals:

1

The promotion by means of education and research of the proper observance and maintenance of human rights in Britain and Ireland and elsewhere in the world with particular reference to the conflict in Northern Ireland;

2

The promotion and dissemination of knowledge, information and understanding of such human rights by writing, publishing and distributing articles, reports, books and other documents and assisting in the same, by arranging and providing lectures and seminars, and by all other means of providing and exchanging information;

3

To procure the abolition of torture, extrajudicial executions, and arbitrary arrest, detention and exile.

In 2023, we increasingly worked with local partner organisations in the UK and around the world to achieve these goals. We help our partners take advantage of opportunities to connect with one another and raise their voices on the global stage, drawing the attention of the United Nations and the media to rights violations that are harming them.

We ensure that all of our work aligns with our organisational values:

1. In all we do, we seek to learn lessons from past experiences, especially in Northern Ireland, to better inform the way forward.
2. We act with integrity, protecting our independence and objectivity.
3. We strive for excellence in all aspects of our work.
4. Our work is considered and practical in approach.
5. We strive to be forward-looking, anticipating the changes and challenges that will affect human rights in the field of national security.
6. We work collaboratively both internally and with our partners.

All of our projects follow specific 12-month plans developed by the Executive Director and other staff in consultation with the other Trustees/Directors.

This annual report and the accompanying financial statements have been prepared and approved by RSI's Committee, which is the Board of Directors of the charity for company law purposes and trustees for charity law purposes ('the Board'). The Board confirms that this annual report and the accompanying financial statements comply with current statutory requirements in England and Wales, the requirements of RSI's governing document and the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice - SORP FRS 102 taken together with the applicable Update Bulletin 1.



Our projects, achievements and public benefit in 2023

In 2023, our programmes of work fell into three categories:

		
<p>Promoting the observance of human rights in the United Kingdom, including in Northern Ireland.</p>	<p>Promoting the observance of human rights overseas by the UK government.</p>	<p>Increasing global knowledge of human rights related to national security, counterterrorism and emergencies.</p>

We had three overarching goals as we carried out these programmes of work:

		
<p>Ensure that national security laws and policies, especially those of the UK, respect human rights.</p>	<p>Ensure that civil society groups in the UK and elsewhere in the world can safely and effectively raise concerns at UN level about respect for human rights</p>	<p>Ensure that those who have carried out human rights abuses are held to account.</p>

We achieved these goals by:

1

Working to ensure that the methods government officials and police – especially in the UK – use to fight terrorism and ‘extremism’ are in line with international human rights law.

2

Promoting independent and effective oversight of government activities on counter-terrorism and counter-extremism. This includes seeking greater transparency, for example by submitting freedom-of-information requests.

3

Helping civil society groups in Global Majority countries connect with one another to take advantage of advocacy opportunities at UN level, and to advocate for improvements in how the UN engages with activists.

4

Promoting accountability and redress for individuals who have suffered human rights abuses as a result of a government’s conduct in the course of counter-terrorism or counter-extremism operations.



Human rights in Northern Ireland

In 2023, we continued expanding our work on human rights in Northern Ireland (NI), aided by a part-time Northern Ireland Human Rights Officer role we added in 2022. Our other staff have also greatly increased their knowledge of NI human rights issues and, throughout 2023, consulted both in person and remotely with numerous civil society organisations in the region. We also continue to receive assistance from a Northern Ireland-based human rights consultant with decades of experience in promoting rights—and, particularly, police accountability—in the region.

In September 2023, we published a detailed report on current 'security'-related human rights issues in NI, including their gendered and racial aspects. We had commissioned the report to assist charities that are based outside NI and might want to engage in collaborative advocacy, but fear doing so because of an inadequate knowledge of the local context. We will evaluate uptake of the report after 12 months to determine whether such tools are effective.

One of our most important successes was that for more than a year, we and our partners delayed the adoption of the 'Legacy Act' for Northern Ireland, which halts both civil and criminal cases concerning killings, torture and other serious alleged crimes committed in the context of the 'Troubles' prior to the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

In our view, this legislation damages peacebuilding while creating a deeply problematic model for the rest of the world.

Collaborative work was crucial to our advocacy regarding the then-bill, as we shared intelligence on developments in Westminster and locally in NI, and determined what research and resources RSI could most effectively contribute. In late 2022, we had become the first group to tackle broad provisions in the bill that will allow the government to retain biometric data belonging to people who are (or have been) in NI, resulting in a formal parliamentary question. We also submitted an analysis to Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR), which quoted us and agreed that the Legacy Bill would likely violate international law.

By the time the bill passed in December 2023 (following important resistance in the House of Lords), we had carried out direct advocacy with a range of political parties including Alliance, Sinn Féin, the DUP and Labour.

In 2024, the new Labour government committed to repealing large parts of the act, noting that these had been opposed by survivors of the violence and families of those killed. Meanwhile, the Belfast High Court has ruled that the act violates human rights.

We are confident that our advocacy with UK parliamentarians contributed directly to the new government's decision to seek a repeal of parts of the Legacy Act.

Our advocacy on the then-bill also included direct pressure on the US and Irish governments to demand that the UK comply with its rights obligations. With the help of a Washington, DC-based political consulting firm, we advocated with the US Congress, the Biden Administration, the Irish embassy in DC and US-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to discourage the UK from moving forward with the bill. Our work achieved bipartisan letters from Members of Congress on the issue as well as greater knowledge among the US NGOs we convened, while the Irish government has challenged the Legacy Act before the European Court of Human Rights (as we had encouraged).

As we held further conversations with NI-based groups in 2022 and 2023, we identified an under-scrutinised issues that we are now researching: the allegedly disproportionate policing of protests on behalf of progressive causes (such as racial justice and reproductive rights) under NI's 'security' laws. We began this research in 2023 and expect to publish a report in 2024.



Increased transparency about the controversial 'Prevent' programme

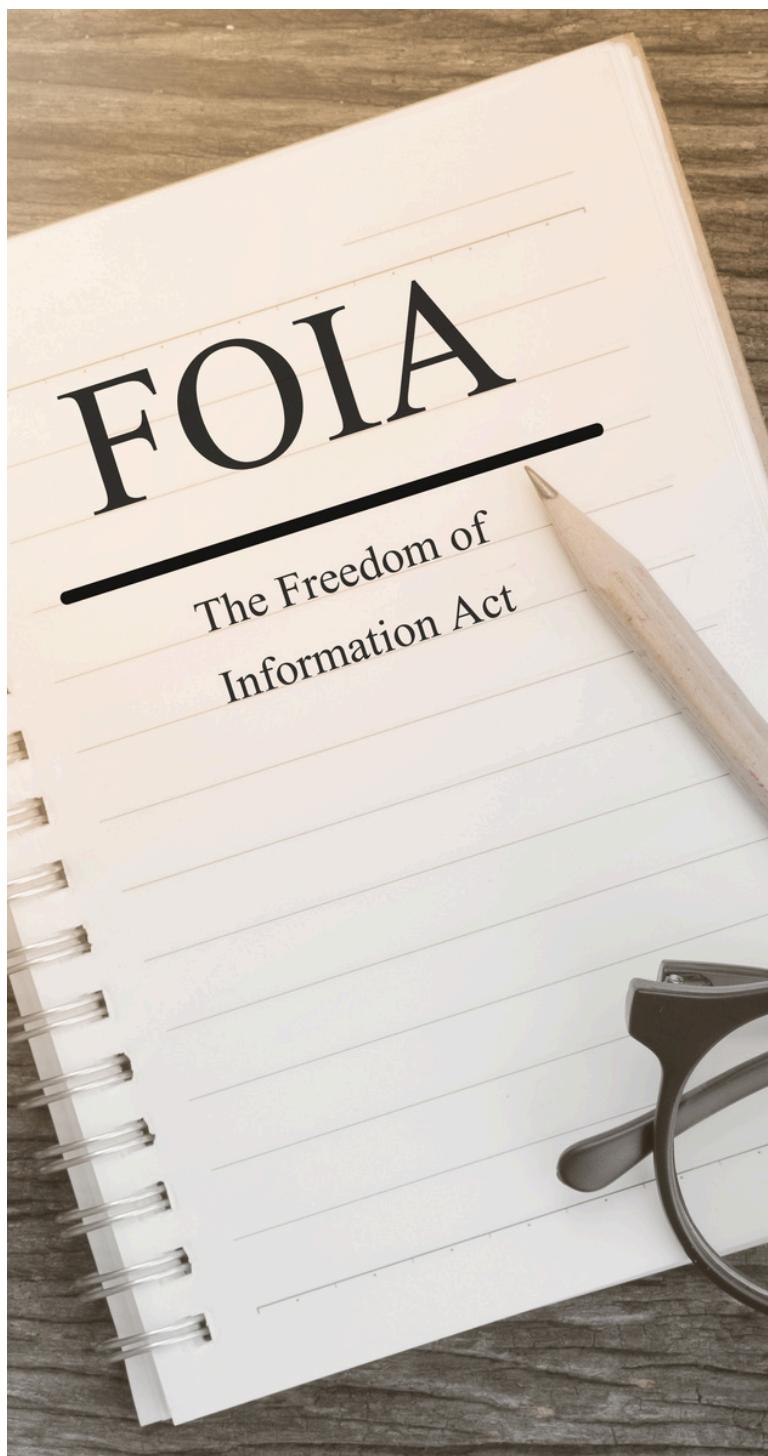
Our work to promote accountability and human rights compliance in the UK also included extensive research and advocacy regarding the rights-violating 'Prevent' counter-extremism programme, which charities, academics and community groups in the UK have long accused of Islamophobia and racial discrimination. Experts and community groups have also expressed concerns about whether Prevent disproportionately affects neurodiverse people.

In 2023, we pursued freedom-of-information (FOI) requests concerning the racial/ethnic impact of Prevent, leading us to publish important new Home Office disclosures of statistics; those statistics suggest that British Asians referred to Prevent may be facing disproportionately heavy consequences.

We continue to pursue follow-up requests with major UK policing bodies about the racial impact of Prevent and have taken pre-litigation steps regarding government's failure to do equality monitoring.

Another FOI request we filed uncovered emails indicating that the Independent Review of Prevent had not been independent, as required by law, and we took pre-litigation steps that revealed additional information.

We also began mapping how police and other government authorities share sensitive personal data under Prevent, and we expect to publish a report before the end of 2024.



Migration and citizenship

Throughout 2023, we continued our advocacy for the return of all British citizens and former citizens from camps in northeast Syria where (in our analysis) both adults and children are being detained in life-threatening conditions amounting to torture.

We continued to update our path-breaking 'repatriations tracker', a tool that makes it easy for journalists, impacted families, legal experts and the public to see how many repatriations various countries have carried out from the camps. The figures are disaggregated by gender and adult/child status, and a wide range of partners and media outlets have been relying on this tool. In early 2024, the UK began repatriating some children and women from the camps, and we believe our work—along with our partners'—contributed to this development.

We also increased our advocacy regarding citizenship deprivation as well as barriers to gaining UK citizenship in the first place. We pursued a freedom-of-information case against the Home Office seeking the disclosure of statistics about the genders of people the UK has deprived of their British citizenship in recent years, with a view to exposing any gender-based discrimination, as well as the number of children affected.

Although we learned in early 2024 that we had lost before the First-tier Tribunal, our case established that there is a strong public interest in knowing this information—setting the stage for a potential human rights challenge.

As a step toward reforms, we held a roundtable in London for UK, French and Danish lawyers and academic experts who compared citizenship deprivations in the three countries, which are all parties to the European Convention on Human Rights (meaning that lawyers can usefully compare strategies). The participants learned about cases from the other jurisdictions and gained information that could prove valuable in court. We also carried out advocacy in Geneva on citizenship deprivation as part of the UN's Universal Periodic Review of the UK.

In early 2023, we carried out parliamentary advocacy against provisions in the Illegal Migration Bill (now Act) that will prevent most asylum seekers and human trafficking survivors from ever becoming British citizens, leading to lifelong vulnerability. We briefed members of Parliament and now await opportunities under the new government to obtain the removal of these provisions from the law.

In mid-2023, we began investigative research into the 'good character' requirement for naturalisation as a British citizen, which we suspect the Home Office has been using disproportionately to prevent Muslims in the UK as well as people from certain racial/ethnic minority backgrounds from becoming citizens. Our consultations with immigration solicitors suggest that this is an important and under-examined issue, and we aim to publish our research by the end of 2024.

Other victories regarding UK legislation

In 2023, we also successfully collaborated with partners to oppose the Bill of Rights Bill, which would have gutted the Human Rights Act – the set of laws that make the European Convention on Human Rights a real source of protection in the UK. We provided crucial education to partners based in Great Britain about the bill's consequences for Northern Ireland and met with MPs about the issue of impunity for overseas military operations—an issue we also flagged for the JCHR, which quoted us in its report.

We also did extensive advocacy with Parliament—including by testifying in person—regarding provisions about police surveillance in the Data Protection and Digital Information (No 2) Bill, which our work helped delay and which the government ultimately dropped during the 'washing up' period prior to the July 2024 election. This was a significant (and rare) legislative victory for the human right to privacy as well as police accountability.

Protecting and promoting international civic space

We continued to coordinate and support the Rise Coalition, a network of organisations in Global Majority countries that work together to share knowledge and take action when governments harm people's rights in the name of 'security'. In 2023, we held:

- A public webinar on re-thinking securitised approaches to climate-linked migration, featuring the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change.
- A public webinar on effective investigations into state-linked killings, featuring speakers from Northern Ireland and Brazil.

Rise Coalition members in Kenya and Indonesia issued a joint press release in May 2023 calling on Indonesia to repeal criminal defamation laws that the government uses to target civil society – a promising example of South-to-South advocacy.

Through a major two-year global research project on civil society engagement with the UN regarding issues of counter-terrorism and human rights, we helped Rise Coalition members from around the world connect with other international coalitions and take roles of meaningful power in shaping and reviewing the research.

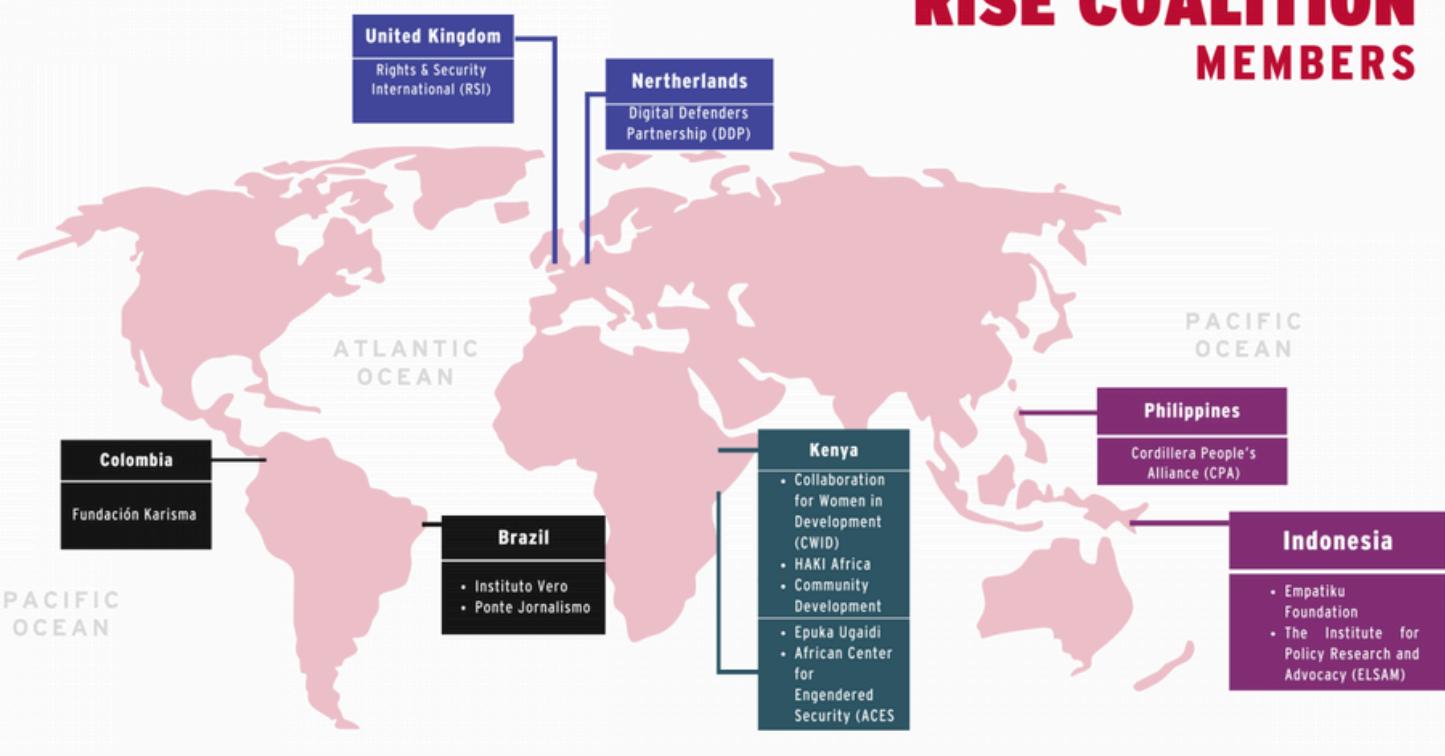
Protecting and promoting international civic space

The advisory committee that we and our research partner recruited for this project included activists and academics from around the world, and they now form an active and engaged network poised for further action. In a first for RSI, we also organised and led in-person conferences for numerous civil society organisations in Cartagena, Colombia (for groups in Latin America) and Nairobi, Kenya (for groups in East Africa) as part of this project. We and our main partner launched the final research report at UN headquarters in New York in May 2024.

In January 2023, we made a submission to the UN Special rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights regarding the impact of anti-terrorism and anti-extremism laws on civic space.

We are now revisiting the mission and functioning of the Rise Coalition as we carry out our strategic planning for 2025 and beyond.

RISE COALITION MEMBERS



Our public benefit

Our Board confirms that it has paid due regard to public benefit guidance published by the Charity Commission. The public benefits of the RSI's activities include, for example:

1

Raising public awareness about the human rights impacts of governments' national security laws and policies -for example, by obtaining and publishing new information, and by holding public events.

2

Advocating for reforms to better protect the human rights of people in the UK and elsewhere in the world.

3

Educating members of the UK Parliament about the potential human rights consequences of bills so they can make informed decisions on behalf of the public.

4

Building knowledge of human rights in communities and regions that are heavily impacted by national security laws and policies.

5

Obtaining greater transparency and accountability about activities the UK government undertakes regarding national security, for example by filing freedom-of-information requests on issues of public interest in this area.

6

Submitting expert analyses to government, UN and other bodies seeking to evaluate human rights matters, such as all-party parliamentary groups, Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights.

7

Promoting respect for the rights of victims of human rights abuses allegedly carried out by the UK government, including killings, torture, arbitrary detention and exile.

8

Developing educational documents about government policies and human rights for public audiences, for example university students.

Structure, Governance and Management

Our charity is managed by the Board, which meets at least once per quarter, four times per year; in July 2023, the Board decided to begin meeting bimonthly, six times per year. RSI is a private company limited by guarantee (company number 02489161) and is registered as a charity with the Charity Commission (registered number 1048335). Our governance is managed by a body referred to as the 'Committee.' The Committee is comprised of elected trustees, also known as 'committee members', as well as the Executive Director. The responsibilities of the Trustees of RSI are set out in the charity's governing documents, which are its memorandum of association and articles of association. Broadly speaking, the trustees of RSI have independent control over, and legal responsibility for, the Charity's management and administration.

The Trustees/Directors ensure that all of RSI's actions are undertaken in pursuance of the purposes for which it was incorporated and act at all times in a manner which they consider would be most likely to promote our success. At all times, Trustees/Directors take adequate steps to ensure that any conflict of interest or loyalty do not fetter their decision-making and identify and declare any such conflict at the beginning of any Committee meeting or annual general meeting (as appropriate).

There are no restrictions in the Articles stipulating either a maximum or minimum number of individuals who may be appointed as committee members at any given time. All the Trustees/Directors, except the Executive Director, must retire at every annual general meeting.

However, retiring Trustees/Directors remain eligible for re-election, and may be re-elected if it is so agreed by two-thirds of all Trustees/Directors present and voting at the annual general meeting. There are no maximum terms for the Trustees/Directors. All decisions made by the Committee should be made either at a Committee meeting or at the annual general meeting. All matters for consideration at a Committee meeting are approved by a simple majority of the trustees present and voting, except for the appointment of trustees, which must be approved by two-thirds of all trustees present and voting. In the event votes are equal, the Chairperson has a second casting vote.

RSI's Trustees/Directors are responsible for our charity's funds. The Trustees/Directors put in place a budget and keep accurate records of RSI's income and expenditure, including through the preparation of monthly management accounts by a third-party accountant. The Executive Director of RSI is a Director who has been appointed to an executive office within the charity and has entered into an employment contract with the charity. The powers of the Executive Director are set out in her employment contract and otherwise agreed with the trustees. The Executive Director, along with the Treasurer and the Chairperson, are responsible for the review of monthly spending reports, which are then shared with the other Trustees. The Executive Director is responsible for all operational matters.

Institutional strengthening

In 2023, we continued to increase our number of programme staff, helping us deliver our work more effectively. We also retained our previous nine Trustees.

We continually review our salary bands to ensure fairness and to address the cost of living crisis as best we can. We also continued adjusting our recruitment processes to increase our diversity, equity and inclusion: for example, we began using a system that anonymises all applications for open positions.

Financial and business review

At RSI, we achieve a great deal of impactful work even with relatively modest funding, and we continue to aim for sustainable growth.

Our income from grants, individual donations, bequests and investments (e.g. bank interest) during this period remained stable, growing slightly from £550,455, in 2022 to £574,383 in 2023. At the same time, the value of services donated to us by our solicitors and barristers, who work pro bono or at steeply discounted rates on our freedom of information requests and on other cases or potential cases, increased significantly from £47,214 in 2022 to £107,481 in 2023. This increase in donated services means that our total income increased from £597,669 in 2022 to £681,864 in 2023.

We continue to anticipate that our longstanding support from the Oak Foundation will draw to a close in 2024 and have been diversifying our sources of foundation funding and formulating new business plans to ensure our sustainability.

We are making progress toward establishing an individual giving programme and maintain a dedicated Fundraising Officer role to ensure that we secure adequate funds for our activities.

Our expenditure increased from £417,813 in 2022 to £673,620 in 2023 (with the value of donated services counted as an expenditure), and we carried £44,624 in restricted funds forward into 2024. We also carried forward £432,864 in unrestricted funds into 2024 (designated £254,812; free reserves £177,661), a figure that partly reflects our receipt of a large grant instalment from the Oak Foundation relatively late in the year, as well as strategic decisions to ensure stability in 2024 while our foundation funding experiences a shift from relatively large core funding to smaller project grants. Where appropriate, the policy of the Board of Trustees is to invest the amount that it has available and grants received.

Risk management and reserves policy

The Board has considered the risks to which the RSI is exposed and has taken steps to mitigate those risks.

We aim to hold the equivalent of three to six months of unrestricted funds not committed or invested in tangible fixed assets in reserves, currently £141,420 (3 months). The free reserves (i.e. the unrestricted funds carried forward less the restricted fixed assets and designated funds), at 31 December 2023, were £177,661. These unrestricted funds included unrestricted grants whose terms remained ongoing.

TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

The excess reserves held as of 31 December 2023 are due primarily to a large unrestricted grant instalment being received late in the year; the expenditure of this is planned for 2024.

Funding

The Charity gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the following, who made donations or commitments in 2023 or whose grants from 2022 extended into 2023:

- The Oak Foundation
- Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust
- Open Society Foundations
- Baring Foundation
- Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust
- Global Center on Cooperative Security
- John Ellerman Foundation
- A B Charitable Trust
- Aziz Foundation
- All Ways Network
- Individual friends of RSI in the UK

Public benefit statement

The Board of Trustees confirms that it has complied with its duty to have due regard to the guidance on public benefit published by the Charity Commission in exercising its powers or duties.

Statement of the Board of Trustees' responsibilities

The Board of Trustees are responsible for preparing our annual report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice. Company law requires the Board of Trustees to prepare financial statements for

each financial year that give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of RSI and of the surplus or deficit we have for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the Board of Trustees is required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgments and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The Board of Trustees is responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy the financial position of the company, to enable them to ensure that the accounts comply with the Companies Act 2006. The Board is also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the company and, therefore, for taking reasonable steps to prevent and detect fraud or other irregularities.

Small company exemptions

This report of the Board of Trustees has been prepared taking advantage of the small companies exemption of section 415A of the Companies Act 2006.



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