

TOM PURSGLOVE MP
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

19th July 2019

Jean Constance,

RE: HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS.

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of human rights defenders and EDM 2232; your comments upon which I read with great interest.

I have general concerns about the effectiveness and expense of the EDM system, and I have attached a copy of an excellent article written by my colleague, Chris Heaton-Harris MP, which I feel succinctly sets out those concerns. I hope that this will be of interest to you, and essentially, I think it is much more effective to raise concerns directly with Ministers, both verbally, and in writing, rather than signing EDMs.

However, you are right to raise this important issue. Regrettably, human rights defenders face unprecedented attack in many parts of the world. In 2018 alone, I understand that more than 300 such defenders were killed, and thousands more imprisoned, attacked, or tortured around the world.

I am assured that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) puts human rights and human rights defenders at the heart of its work. The FCO learns from human rights defenders, as well as advocating for them and seeking to protect and strengthen the work that they do. Human rights defenders are also essential to the UK's work to promote good governance, media freedom, to deliver equality; whether it be gender or LGBT equality; and importantly to end the death penalty and torture.

Support is provided to human rights defenders through the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy, most of which is allocated for the implementation of projects by human rights defenders and civil society organisations. The FCO also highlights repression of human rights defenders in its Annual Human Rights Report. I understand that the FCO is also publishing guidelines for its embassies around the world about support for human rights defenders, to aid clarity and consistency.

The UK has followed Azza Soliman's case closely. She was released on bail in December 2016 and the UK has highlighted her case on several occasions as well as expressing concerns about the arrest of activists, bloggers and journalists in Egypt.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes

TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Chris Heaton-Harris: Why Early Day Motions are politically impotent

Writing exclusively for PoliticsHome, Conservative MP Chris Heaton-Harris describes Early Day Motions as 'politically impotent', and warns he is 'not going to waste time and money on sponsoring or signing EDMs'.

Since being elected last year, a number of my constituents have asked me to sign Early Day Motions (EDMs). I'm afraid I haven't signed any yet and don't plan on changing that in the future as I think they are pretty much politically impotent and too costly in their current form.

I'm not alone either, quite a number of the 2010 intake all independently decided to do the same thing and I would imagine that if the rules around EDMs don't change at the next election, even more MPs will join the "just say no" bandwagon.

Supposedly EDMs cost around £500 a go and we have already had 2423 tabled in this Parliament. Looking through the titles of the EDMs you'll see many a worthy political cause being lauded, people recently passed away remembered and an abundant amount of motherhood and apple pie. Yet even the most benign EDM rarely gets more than 50 signatories; indeed, many barely scrape into double figures.

I really do think that we need to change how EDMs can be sponsored before too many MPs decide to call it a day on them. Surely a sensible solution would be to say that an individual Member should not be allowed to table an EDM? We should at least try to separate the more popular ones by asking that there be at least ten MPs proposing for it to be accepted as being tabled and thus, opened up for others to sign.

Considering there are MPs out there who tend to sign a large number of EDMs (Sir Peter Bottomley and Alan Meale, please take a bow) surely setting an entry point of ten signatures is not an oppressive barrier if you really do care about a subject?

One of the main reasons (if not the main reason) why so few people sign EDMs is that in the last few years they have turned into the tool of the crap lobbyist. Sitting in a meeting room trying to work out how to justify their Client's retainer, many believe that if they can get a few signatures on an EDM he has done his or her job. Even better if you can persuade your client to run a campaign to get more MPs to sign up; more money for you to set up pointless meetings to talk about a pointless campaign to try and get more than a dozen signatures for a pointless motion that will be ignored by Government and just about everyone else too.

If you are a business, charity or NGO and your Public Affairs outfit recommends an EDM - fire them immediately! Few people take any notice of them and so they are really no more than political graffiti.

So, to my Constituents I say if you are writing to me, please don't ask me to sign an EDM. I'll happily raise subjects with Ministers, ask questions in the House or try to have a Westminster Hall debate - in other words, do things that actually count - but I'm not going to waste time and money on sponsoring or signing EDMs.