



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

13th March 2021

Dear Constance,

RE: HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS (HRDs)

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of human rights defenders (HRDs), and the recent report by Amnesty International; your comments upon which I have read with great interest.

Regrettably, HRDs face unprecedented attacks in many parts of the world. Indeed, according to the NGO, Frontline Defenders, 304 HRDs' were killed in 2019 alone.

The UK is a proud champion of human rights and a strong supporter of those around the world who dedicate their lives to defending them. British officials and ministers regularly assess how we can enhance our ability to assist HRDs to carry out their work safely and without fear, including in the context of the increased risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am assured that the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) puts human rights and their defenders at the heart of its work. The UK recognises the essential role HRDs play and in July 2019 published a report titled *UK Support for Human Rights Defenders*, which publicly underlined the UK's commitment to protecting them.

Support is provided to HRDs through the 'Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy', most of which is allocated to projects by HRDs and civil society organisations. The FCDO also monitors repression of HRDs in its *Annual Human Rights Report*, the most recent of which was published last July. That report paid tribute to the courageous work of HRDs and listed support for them as a UK international policy priority.

As I expect you are aware, the upcoming *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development & Foreign Affairs* will inform the strategy for the UK's international policy in the decade ahead, including those of the FCDO. Given the review is yet to conclude, I would be happy to take this forward to the Foreign Secretary on your behalf to the effect you suggest.

I am proud that the UK was the first country to produce a national action plan to implement the *United Nations' Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*. It is based on their three pillars: the state duty to protect human rights; the corporate responsibility to protect human rights; and access to remedies. Actions since its introduction include introducing the *Modern Slavery Act* and implementing the *OECD 2012 Common Approaches*.

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