



James Duddridge MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

13 October 2020

Dear Mr Duddridge,

Government response to ‘The UK and Sub-Saharan Africa: prosperity, peace and development co-operation’

The International Relations and Defence Committee has considered the Government’s response¹ to its report, *The UK and Sub-Saharan Africa: prosperity, peace and development co-operation*,² published on 10 July. We note that this response was provided by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), on behalf of the Government as a whole.

We are disappointed by the quality of the response. It fails to engage with many of the conclusions and recommendations made by the Committee.

We would like, in particular, to raise the following issues on which the response was inadequate.

1. **Visas.** The Committee raised serious issues regarding the issuing of UK visas for people from Africa (report paragraph 51). This issue also has an impact on how the UK is viewed in Africa and by the diaspora. The Government’s response refers to “perceived difficulties surrounding the visa regime in Africa” and fails adequately to engage with our points. We request a further response. In what ways has the FCDO fed back to the Home Office the concerns of partners in Africa about the way visas are issued and the reputational cost of this approach? Which of the problems raised by the Committee do you expect to be addressed by the ‘Future Borders and Immigration System 5-year transformation plan’?
2. **Trade after Brexit.** The Committee was disappointed that the response indicates that there has been little progress on granting better access to UK markets for Sub-Saharan African exporters after Brexit (report paragraph 415) or agricultural exports (report paragraph 417). The response does not engage with the recommendation that the Government should “offer better access to African exporters” than is available via the EU EPAs, and we therefore request more information on what the Government has done in this regard.

¹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2504/documents/24899/default/>

² House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee, *The UK and Sub-Saharan Africa: prosperity, peace and development co-operation* (1st report, Session 19-21, HL Paper 88)

On export credits for fossil fuels (report paragraph 432), the response states that the Government is “actively considering [its] international support to the energy/ fossil fuels sector, not least in the run up to COP26”, a response which is not sufficiently informative to allay our concerns about whether the provision of UK export credits in the region is consistent with the UK’s commitments to tackling climate change. We were also disappointed by the lack of information on Aid for Trade for Sub-Saharan Africa after Brexit (report paragraph 325). We request more detail on this, and in particular information on current and future funding for TradeMark East Africa, a very successful programme.

3. **The impact on sub-Saharan Africa of the reduction in ODA.** We were disappointed that the response does not provide detailed information on how the reduction in the UK’s ODA (resulting from the reduction in Gross National Income in the context of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic) will affect countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (report paragraphs 286 and 313). How will the review of “commitments of aid spending ... across all departments” affect funding to the region? What impact will the £2.9 billion cut to the aid budget have on UK development assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa in 2020-21, and which countries and programmes will be affected?
4. **Mentoring and accompanying troops.** We were disappointed that the response did not engage with the Committee’s recommendation (report paragraph 620) that “the Government should ... consider whether the British Army should accompany the militaries it is training on some missions.” It also did not comment on whether the UK provides pre-deployment training to the African militaries the UK supports outside the framework of UN Peacekeeping. We request a further response on these points.

We raise these four issues as of particular concern, and for further response. We also note that there were also many other areas where the response did not engage sufficiently with our conclusions and recommendations, including those below:


- The lack of clarity over what the ‘strategic approach’ to Africa is and how it is being measured, and when further information on it will be published;
- The longstanding issue of the rapid turnover of Minister for Africa;
- How the Government plans to improve engagement with the African diaspora;
- How the UK is supporting reforms to the rules-based international order to give African nations a greater voice;
- How the Government is measuring the planned increased in UK investment in Africa without a target, and what it is doing to address the flatlining of trade between the UK and the continent;
- How the UK-Africa Investment Summit is being followed up;
- Whether the UK is considering support to enable African countries to ramp up the substitution of renewables in place of oil and coal exports;
- Whether the UK will reconsider English language test requirements for visas for African students coming to study in the UK after the pandemic;
- Whether the UK’s soft power strategy has been developed and how it is being used in the region;
- The lack of senior political leadership on the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict initiative;

- The request for further information about the Government's objectives in the Sahel; and
- Whether the Government will review the application of the EU Payment Services Directive after the EU transition period ends in the context of its impact on remittance providers.

We expect to raise these issues during the debate on the report, when this is scheduled.

Scrutiny by select committees is an essential part of the UK parliamentary system. I hope that you will provide more detailed responses to the four principal issues raised in this letter, and give consideration to how to ensure that future responses to select committee reports are detailed and of high quality.

Yours, as ever

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jayce Anelay". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally below the text "Yours, as ever".

Baroness Anelay of St Johns
Chair, International Relations and Defence Committee