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Baroness Anelay of St Johns
Chair, International Relations and
Defence Committee
House of Lords
London
SW1A OPW

5 November 2020

Dear Baroness Anelay,

Thank you for your letter of 13 October on behalf of the International Relations and Defence Committee of the House of Lords. I was sorry to read that the Committee was disappointed by the Government's response to their report: The UK and Sub-Saharan Africa: prosperity, peace and development co-operation. Please be assured that the Government fully recognises the importance of Select Committee scrutiny, and that our response sought to provide you with a clear understanding of our approach to Africa.

Your letter asks for further information, and detail, on a number of issues. I am sure you will understand that our ability to do so is somewhat constrained by other pressures and processes: the ongoing Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, the Spending Review, ODA reprioritisation exercise and the evolving impact of COVID-19.

The upcoming debate on the Report in the House of Lords will, of course, offer an opportunity to discuss many of the issues further and provide any updates. Ahead of that discussion, I am able to provide further information on the four key issues highlighted in your letter:

1. Visas. I regularly raise Africa visa matters with my Home Office colleagues. I met Chris Philp, Home Office Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts, and Kevin Foster, Home Office Minister for Future Borders and Immigration on 12 October. We discussed a range of immigration and visa issues, including many of those raised in the Committee's Report.

These meetings have helped to make sure that the Home Office is fully aware of the impact our visa policy has on our African partners. They are committed to making the process of applying for a visa as simple and straightforward as possible. I am pleased that UKVI have recently announced a 50% reduction in fees that overseas customers will pay when contacting them for queries about visa and immigration applications and technical queries. This is a step towards making our immigration system more accessible for African visitors. UKVI are also working with commercial partners to expand the number of locations at which services are available in Africa and are also exploring options on printing visa vignettes and scanning documents in secure locations closer to the point of application to help speed up processes.

Looking forward, the UK's Future Borders and Immigration System will introduce a streamlined application process for those visiting, or coming to work or study, that makes greater use of the latest digital technology. Further meetings are planned at both ministerial and official level and we will continue to work closely with Home Office on the implementation of these measures, working to make sure that they are designed and implemented in a way that will be transparent and fair to African partners.

2. Trade after Brexit. The Department for International Trade has already made arrangements to provide continuity of duty-free quota-free access on 'Everything But Arms' for 39 sub-Saharan countries and to provide tariff reductions to a further five countries. This includes the transition of the UK-Southern Africa Customs Union and Mozambique (SACU+M) and UK-Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) Economic Partnership Agreements. As demonstrated by the signing of the Economic Partnership Agreement between the UK and the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire on 15 October 2020, the UK remains committed to transitioning continuity agreements with our African partners. We are continuing to engage with them, with the objective of concluding these before the 1st January 2021. In the future, the UK aims to deepen these agreements to make them even better for business, and ensuring that they reflect the ambitions of African partners to increase their trade with the UK. The UK also looks forward to working with our African partners to make our future UK Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) scheme even more generous and easier to access.

UK Export Finance (UKEF), the government's export credit agency, is helping to drive UK content into overseas renewables projects across the globe and has been proactively developing the breadth of its support for renewables. In his Spring 2020 Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer allocated an additional £2 billion to UKEF's direct lending facility to support clean growth and renewable energy projects. UKEF continues to develop and build its clean growth offer. UKEF has provided £392m in support for UK exports to renewable energy projects. This includes supporting UK exports to a solar powered water purification project providing safe water to 225,000 people across Ghana.

Our current Aid for Trade (AFT) portfolio covers much of sub-Saharan Africa and we will continue to support these countries after Brexit. In addition to country-led programmes, each of our centrally managed AFT programmes contributes in some way to supporting trade in sub-Saharan African countries, and we intend for many of these to continue after our exit from the European Union. For example, the Trade and Investment Advocacy Fund provides demand-led technical assistance, capacity building and logistical support to developing countries, including in sub-Saharan Africa, to participate in and benefit from trade and investment negotiations.

The UK's commitment to AFT in sub-Saharan Africa was underlined at the UK-Africa Investment Summit in January 2020, where the UK Government announced not only extensions to current important AFT programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, such as SheTrades Commonwealth, but also announced several new programmes and investments that will benefit sub-Saharan African countries. For example, the Trade Connect programme will provide £20 million over 5 years to increase trade between developing countries and international businesses, including the UK.

AFT remains of importance given the current economic crisis facing developing countries due to COVID 19. The Government and TradeMark East Africa (TMEA) have agreed a plan to allow TMEA to continue its good work this financial year. Future spending commitments are subject to the Government's Spending Review, which is currently underway.

3. The impact on sub-Saharan Africa of the reduction in ODA. We are committed to ensuring that any re-prioritisation of ODA minimises any adverse effect on Africa countries. The Foreign Secretary recently chaired a review process looking at all of the strands of the UK ODA budget, evaluating the impacts of spending and assessing operational capacity. This review safeguarded support for five ODA priorities; the very poorest (poverty reduction for the bottom billion) climate change, girls' education, Covid-19 and Britain as a force for good. All of these areas have significant relevance for UK ODA spending in Africa. ODA allocations for 2020/21 will be published by HM Treasury at the Autumn Budget, and the Statistics for International Development published in 2021 will provide a full breakdown of the UK's ODA spend for 2020. We, of course, also stay in close touch with partner governments on the continent, civil society representatives as well as beneficiaries and other donors in order to fully understand the impact of any policy changes.

4. Mentoring and accompanying troops. The UK Government fully recognises the potential value of accompanying troops from the Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) that the UK has delivered Pre-Deployment Training to on deployments. While the UK already demonstrates leadership in peace support operations through its deployment of experienced Military Staff Officers to UN and AU missions where they have an opportunity to observe performance in-mission, we agree with the Committee that accompanying UK-trained African troops would add further value. It would demonstrate commitment to core bilateral and multilateral partners and could offer new opportunities to monitor and improve mission performance and efficiency.

The challenges of implementing these partnerships in practice are, however, substantial. Ensuring that the operating procedures of the UK and African TCCs are sufficiently aligned so that we can operate effectively and safely alongside one another is one such challenge. As is aligning our deployment timelines and requirements around force protection with those of our African TCC partners, over which we have limited control. We remain committed to this approach and are exploring options for implementing it. Outside of UN Peacekeeping, the UK provides Pre-Deployment Training to TCCs that deploy to AU Missions such as AMISOM. In FY19/20 HMG provided Pre-Deployment Training to 6,765 troops deploying to this mission.

I hope these answers provide the Committee with some further clarification. I am also grateful to you for highlighting other areas that the Government should expect further questions on during the House of Lords debate. I am happy to meet you in person at the House of Lords or in the FCDO before the debate to discuss these issues further.

James Duddridge MP
Minister for Africa