



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



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Sarah Champion MP, Chair
International Development Committee
House of Commons
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May 2023

My dear Sarah,

UK aid funding to anti-LGBT+ organisations

Thank you for your letter of 27 April and for raising your concerns. I deeply regret the decision taken by the Ugandan Parliament to pass the Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2023. If signed into law, this Bill will increase the persecution and discrimination of people across Uganda.

I am also mindful of the risks of anti LGBT+ legislation in other countries in Africa, where similar bills are either being considered or have already been introduced. This is part of a growing backlash against LGBT+ people globally. The UK is working with international partners and LGBT+ human rights defenders to do whatever we can to protect the rights of these vulnerable communities.

Uganda

The FCDO funded the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) from 2021-2023 through its open society programme in Uganda. The accountable grant clearly specified that activities cannot discriminate against any group on the basis of protected characteristics, including sexual orientation. The IRCU is a key civil society organisation representing the main religious bodies of Uganda which has helped contribute to freedom of religion and belief, an important pillar of an open society. However, given their support for the Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2023, the FCDO has stopped funding agreements with the IRCU. The FCDO does not plan any further disbursements to the IRCU.

The FCDO, including the British High Commission in Kampala, has regularly raised concerns on the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in the lead up to, and since the Bill passed, expressing our deep disappointment with the Government of Uganda and Ugandan politicians. I (Minister for Development) also discussed my concerns with the Ugandan Foreign Minister on 14 March 2023 and 4 May 2023, as did the Prime Minister on 5 May. Our High Commission in Kampala raised this with President Museveni on 31 March 2023. The Foreign Secretary has also raised the issue with the Ugandan High Commissioner.

MSI Reproductive Choices

You asked about the outcome of MSI's investigation into whether clinics it ran or funded were offering conversion therapy as alleged by Open Democracy. MSI's formal internal investigation included the use of mystery clients and interviews with the individual and team in question. The investigation was unable to corroborate Open Democracy's findings but despite this they have implemented a number of key initiatives to ensure all clients are treated equitably and with respect in a safe environment regardless of their sexual orientation. These included clarifying what services MSI does and does not offer, reinforcing MSI's equality and diversity policies and safeguarding procedures and supporting country programmes to forge stronger partnerships and connections with civil society organisations, including LGBT+ organisations.

Risk of FCDO funding of anti-LGBT+ policies and practices

You rightly raise the risk that the FCDO may inadvertently fund anti-LGBT+ policies and practices. The FCDO has an overall policy to do no harm. Our Programme Operating Framework (ProF) provides the framework for this, and teams are required to assess and manage the risks associated with their programmes and partners/suppliers.

There are several ProF rules that guard against the risk that FCDO funds anti-LGBT+ policies and practices. ProF Rule 1 sets out that portfolios should comply with all relevant UK law, including the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act, while Rule 10 sets out that all programmes must consider how interventions will impact on protected characteristics, including LGBT+ people.

Teams are expected to apply their judgement in implementing the rules, based on their detailed understanding of the context of delivery and the cultures of the countries, where there may be different values to our own. They take a risk-based approach. The ProF includes a focus on managing risks throughout the chain of delivery partners.

Rule 16 sets out the requirement to assess any partner who is to be a recipient of FCDO funding through a due diligence process. Teams should identify and assess the particular risks of working with a partner by conducting proportionate background checks. This process may identify particular beliefs, views or philosophies, which the organisation holds. ProOF Rule 24 requires the construction of delivery chain maps and teams are expected to use these as a basis for discussion with partners about risks in the delivery chain.

The FCDO uses its influence in this space when working with supply partners through the Supplier Partner Code of Conduct. They must ensure that robust procedures are adopted and maintained to eliminate the risk of poor human rights practices within complex delivery chain environments funded by the FCDO. These include sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment; all forms of child abuse and inequality or discrimination on the basis of race, gender, age, religion, sexuality, culture or disability.

In addition Sir Philip Barton the FCDO's Permanent Under-Secretary will shortly be writing to all directors on the organisation's requirements on equalities. He will use this opportunity to remind them of the risks of funding organisations who are prominently and actively working against the human rights of their populations and asking them to ensure this risk is assessed and managed appropriately.

Thank you for raising these important issues. The UK is absolutely committed to championing the rights of LGBT+ people internationally and defending violations of their civil, political and economic rights.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "With warm regards, John and Andrew". The signature is written in a cursive, informal style.

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