

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
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By email: caroline.nokes.mp@parliament.uk

1 December 2023

Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your Committee's interest in the negotiations on a UK-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) free trade agreement (FTA).

The GCC is one of our most important trading partners globally, with trade between us now worth more than £61 bn according to latest figures. A trade deal would be a substantial opportunity for both our economies and a significant moment in the UK-GCC relationship. A strong trading relationship with the GCC will allow the UK to play to our strengths as an innovative economy, a manufacturing powerhouse and an exporter of high-quality food and drink.

In response to your first question on timelines, negotiating a modern, comprehensive, and ambitious free trade agreement that delivers for the whole of the UK is more important than meeting any particular deadline. We are focussing on substance over speed.

On your second question, the UK is a leading advocate for human rights around the world and the government remains committed to the promotion of universal human rights. This is undertaken separately to negotiations on free trade agreements.

The Government is committed to advancing women's economic empowerment globally, and Free Trade Agreements can help to address barriers faced disproportionately by women in trade. In UK-GCC FTA negotiations we seek to: promote women's access to the FTA's full benefits and opportunities as workers, business owners, entrepreneurs and consumers; recognise the importance of advancing women's economic empowerment in trade; and uphold existing commitments relating to gender equality. Negotiations are ongoing and I have discussed these issues with my GCC counterparts, including during my visit to the GCC in May.

Regarding your final question, the government monitors human rights globally through the [FCDO's Annual Human Rights and Democracy Reports](#). This is undertaken separately from trade negotiations.

For further information, please see our approach to a UK-GCC FTA which was published on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) and presented to Parliament when negotiations launched last year. It outlines our:

1. Strategic case for a UK-GCC FTA
2. FTA negotiating objectives
3. Response to our consultation on the FTA
4. Scoping assessment of the FTA's economic and social impacts.

My Department and I are committed to keeping Parliament appropriately updated on our ambitious trade agenda.

Thank you once again for taking the time to write and I hope you find this response helpful.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Kemi Badenoch' in a cursive style.

THE RT HON KEMI BADENOCH MP

Secretary of State for Business & Trade and President of the Board of Trade and
Minister for Women & Equalities