



Home Affairs Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Tel +44 (0)20 7219 3440 Email homeaffcom@parliament.uk

Website www.parliament.uk/homeaffairscom

From the Committee Chair

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Home Secretary
Via email

27 March 2024

Dear James

I am writing to ask for clarification about the Home Office's use of citizenship deprivation in the context of British nationals who are detained in North East Syria, including a number of likely trafficking victims. A number of concerns have been raised with me by a coalition of different organisations. These concerns include:

- A handful of British families being detained in what have been described as appalling conditions in detention camps and prisons in North East Syria. I understand that most of the British detainees are children, and British courts and UN experts have found the conditions in which they are detained to amount to inhuman and degrading treatment. I am told that conditions for children have been found to be "life-threatening" and that investigations by the NGO Reprieve have found that the majority of the adult British women detained in North East Syria are likely victims of human trafficking. I understand that almost half of these British women were children when they travelled to Syria, and at least 44% were coerced by a male partner or relative.
- UK authorities systematically failing to prevent the trafficking of vulnerable women and girls by ISIS and public authorities failing to identify at-risk individuals, including known victims of domestic violence, and failing to intervene in time to prevent them being trafficked. I have been told that police and local authorities have repeatedly failed to notify the parents and guardians of at-risk girls who were being groomed, missing opportunities to intervene, and that despite evidence of trafficking by ISIS, and UK failures to prevent it, the UK Government has made no attempt to identify, assist, and protect British victims of trafficking in North East Syria.
- The idea that the Home Office has adopted an apparently blanket policy of citizenship deprivation using the powers available in the British Nationality Act. I understand that public reporting indicates that at least 217 people have been deprived of their citizenship since 2010 – a 4,000 per cent increase in the use of these powers compared with the previous three decades. In 2019, the then Home Secretary Rt Hon Sir Sajid Javid MP told Parliament that more than a hundred people had been deprived of their British citizenship after travelling to Iraq and Syria. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Trafficked Britons in Syria expressed concern at evidence that at least 19 British adults detained in North East Syria have been deprived of their citizenship. I'm told that, while some of our European allies have removed citizenship from a small number of their nationals, none have used citizenship deprivations on

the same scale as the UK, and that the UK Government has deprived more people of citizenship since 2010 than any nation except Nicaragua and Bahrain.

In the light of these concerns, I would be grateful if you could provide the following information:

1. How many British nationals are currently detained in North East Syria, and of these how many have been deprived of their British citizenship?
2. Will the Home Office publish a comprehensive breakdown of citizenship deprivation, including by age, gender, ethnicity, and religious affiliation?
3. What assessment has the Home Office made to determine whether British nationals detained in North East Syria are victims of trafficking?
4. What assessment has the Home Office made of the best interests of the British children who remain in detention in North East Syria?
5. What steps have been taken to investigate possible failures by UK public authorities to prevent the trafficking of vulnerable women and girls by ISIS?
6. What role does the Home Office play in decision-making concerning repatriations of British families from North East Syria?

It would be helpful if we could receive a response by 17 April.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Diana Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Diana" and the last name "Johnson" clearly distinguishable.

Dame Diana Johnson MP
Chair of the Home Affairs Committee

