



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

The Rt Hon. David Lammy MP
Secretary of State for Foreign,
Commonwealth and Development
Affairs

King Charles Street
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Sarah Champion MP
Chair of the International Development Committee
House of Commons
London
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10 July 2025

Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your letter of 23 June on behalf of the International Development Committee about the situation in Tunisia.

You set out concerns regarding the deteriorating political and human rights situation and ask four questions, principally about UK policy and wider approach. I will take each of your questions in turn.

1. What assessment has the FCDO made of the political motivations behind recent arrests of Tunisian parliamentarians and opposition figures?

As noted by the UK's Human Rights Ambassador last October, the space for political participation in Tunisia has shrunk considerably and the way legitimate political actors have been arrested has raised questions about the independence of the judiciary. The British Embassy in Tunisia closely monitors changes to the situation, including through regular engagement with civil society, media monitoring and trial observation. In both public and private, we encourage respect for civil, political, social and economic rights and the rule of law in Tunisia.

2. How is the UK ensuring that its funding for migration-related programmes in Tunisia is not inadvertently supporting or legitimising repression of civil society actors?

During my visit to Tunisia in January, I announced a new package of up to £5 million to boost UK-funded programmes in the region to upskill migrants in-country, making it less likely that they will make dangerous small boats journeys to Europe, including to the UK, and undermine the country's border security. By improving people's living standards in their home country, they are less likely to make a perilous journey to the UK, enrich criminal gangs and exploit our immigration system.

UK migration programming in Tunisia aims to both increase the 'saving lives at sea' capability of Tunisian security forces and prevent migrants from crossing the border illegally. The UK is working with Tunisia to provide support to the most vulnerable migrants, working in partnership with international partners and institutions, and continues to emphasise the importance of civil society organisations to deliver on the ground support, not just on migration but across all our programming in Tunisia.

But our decision and action to tackle the root causes of migration will never come at the expense of civil society. The UK puts open societies and the protection of human rights around the world at the heart of what we do. I stressed the importance of political participation and human rights during my visit.

To mitigate against harm to civil society actors, the UK and Tunisia signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2016 on security cooperation, renewed in 2021, that committed Tunisia to comply with stipulated human-rights obligations. In addition, all programmes are subject to a rigorous review of their compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law in our Overseas Security and Justice Assessments.

3. Will the Government consider making the UK-Tunisia Association Agreement conditional on demonstrable improvements in human rights and political freedoms in the country?

The provisions of the EU-Tunisia Association Agreement concerning human rights are incorporated into the UK-Tunisia Association Agreement, *mutatis mutandis*. Accordingly, the UK-Tunisia Association Agreement provides that respect for human rights and democratic principles constitute an essential element of the agreement. In the case of a material breach of the Agreement by one of the Parties appropriate measures may be taken in accordance with international law, including the suspension of the agreement.

Ministerial meetings of the UK-Tunisia Association Council provide a forum for robust and frank exchange on the full range of bilateral issues, including human rights. At the most recent meeting in London in October 2023, the UK and Tunisia stressed the importance of political participation, democratic freedoms and human rights. We will continue to make clear the importance of continued public commitment to and respect for all Tunisians' civil, political, social, and economic rights, and the rule of law. To that end, we are working constructively with Tunisia for a partnership based on shared values, foremost being the protection of human rights. We will continue to urge the Tunisian Government to respect the principles and values of an open and democratic society.

4. Would you be willing to facilitate a meeting between Members of the Committee and the relevant FCDO officials overseeing UK programming in Tunisia, to better understand the current approach and challenges?

The Tunisia Integrated Security Fund Programme remains the main tool for delivering our work in Tunisia. The programme directly tackles the drivers of instability, and aims to support inclusive economic reforms, a more open and inclusive society, and improved

security. My officials would be happy to meet Members of the Committee to discuss our Tunisia programming and wider approach.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DL', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

THE RT HON. DAVID LAMMY MP
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs