



**Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office**

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Sarah Champion MP,
Chair
International Development Committee
House of Commons
London
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27 July 2021

Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your letter of 7 July concerning the FCDO's actions to protect and promote the rights of LGBT+ people globally through UK aid programmes.

Aid programmes

The impact of the global pandemic on the UK economy has forced us to take the tough decision to temporarily reduce how much we spend on Official Development Assistance. This is a temporary measure and we will return to 0.7% when the fiscal situation allows. The UK remains a world-leader in international development. We will continue to ensure that Official Development Assistance is allocated to those who are most vulnerable and most in need of this assistance.

In the financial year 2020/2021, the FCDO spent more than £5.47 million on protecting and promoting the rights of LGBT+ people including support for the work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy on greater representation of LGBT+ people in democratic processes in 18 Commonwealth countries; the work of the Human Dignity Trust's on the removal of laws targeting LGBT+ people and a meeting of multi-faith religious leaders to discuss the impact of religion on global discrimination towards LGBT+ people, which produced a declaration calling for an end to violence and discrimination, to the criminalisation of same-sex conduct and to the practice of conversion therapy. Full budgets per country and a final audited spend for 2021/22 will be published in due course, including in our regular Statistics on International Development website and in the FCDO Annual Report and Accounts.

It is clear that the realisation of human rights underpins sustainable development. Despite the funding restrictions this year, we shall continue to build a solid evidence base to underpin our work to advance LGBT+ equality. Across our work we will seek to protect the human rights of LGBT+ people, and to ensure that all groups are able to share in the benefits of development, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. We will prioritise resources over the next five years to ensure that we continue to advance LGBT+ equality through our overseas missions and programme funding.

COVID-19

You raised your concern that COVID-19 has disproportionately affected LGBT+ people in

social, economic, political, legal and health terms. The UK government has been clear that states must not use COVID-19 as an excuse for repressive, discriminatory action against LGBT+ people.

The UK Government works to ensure that all aid reaches the most vulnerable including LGBT+ people. Vulnerable populations will experience COVID-19 outbreaks differently. COVID-19 is reinforcing their marginalised position in society, their experience of discrimination, violence and stigma, and further limiting their access to essential support and services. For this reason, in 2020, guidance was circulated across the FCDO highlighting that inclusion must be central to our response to COVID-19 and the specific contexts and needs of LGBT+ people should be taken into account when developing practical programmes to tackle COVID-19.

Conversion therapy

You raised the allegations of MSI-Reproductive Choices having funded conversion therapy. We conduct rigorous assessments before supporting any organisations to ensure they meet high standards and deliver funded work appropriately. The UK Government strongly opposes the abhorrent practice of conversion therapy and is committed to introducing a UK ban.

The FCDO has not funded the programme referenced in OpenDemocracy's reporting. Marie Stopes International are conducting a full investigation into these allegations and we await its outcome.

Before providing funding, the FCDO undertakes rigorous due diligence assessment of organisations supported. These assessments cover the governance and institutional structure and policies and procedures needed to deliver the work funded effectively and appropriately. The FCDO is working to improve standards across the aid sector to ensure all those engaged in poverty reduction and delivering FCDO-funded programmes take all reasonable steps to prevent harm and abuse.

The FCDO's Supply Partner Code of Conduct has been embedded in our contract Terms and Conditions from 1 September 2017. In addition to value for money, it covers ethical behaviour, respect for human rights and corporate social responsibility. The Code requires organisations to train their staff regularly in ethical behaviours and for a workforce whistleblowing hotline to be provided and publicised throughout the organisation. Formal agreements finalise the programme monitoring framework which includes monitoring safeguarding risks. Delivery plans are used to monitor programme activities and risks. Organisations report regularly on the progress of their work. All reports of inappropriate activities are investigated.

We hosted the Equal Rights Coalition Conference on the 6 and 7 July which adopted a new five-year strategic plan aimed at defending the rights of LGBT+ people around the world and we are committed to increasing cooperation ahead of the Global LGBT+ Conference in 2022.

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