



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon
Minister of State for South Asia and
the Commonwealth
Prime Minister's Special
Representative on Preventing Sexual
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Rt Hon. Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
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Our ref: MC2021/03749

22 March 2021

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 11 February to the Foreign Secretary on behalf of your constituent, [REDACTED] about HMG's support for Human Rights Defenders around the world and a proposal that this Government should adopt a human rights strategy for Human Rights Defenders. I am replying as the Minister of State responsible for human rights.

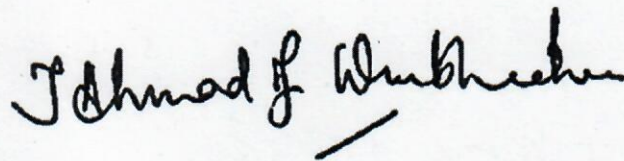
Human Rights Defenders play an essential role in promoting and protecting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. They also make a huge contribution to the development of their societies. In my speech at the launch of Amnesty International's report on 10 February, I thanked Amnesty and other attendees for sharing their report. As the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office takes shape, we are considering a range of options for how we should use the enhanced opportunities which the new Department offers to advance the Government's human rights agenda, including our support for Human Rights Defenders. There is, however, much in Amnesty's report for us to consider, both on what we do well and what we could do differently.

We will continue to support Human Rights Defenders and listen to what they have to say. In 2019, we launched the document 'UK support for Human Rights Defenders', drawn up with significant and important input from relevant stakeholders, including Amnesty International. It set out in detail how we would work and engage with Human Rights Defenders to promote and protect human rights throughout the world. Just over a year ago, I issued a statement at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, voicing concern about the harassment and all too often imprisonment of Human Rights Defenders. On International Human Rights Defenders Day on 9 December 2020, I issued a message to all Human Rights Defenders thanking them for their courageous work and their unwavering determination in fighting for human rights. When I visit countries in my capacity as Minister for Human Rights, I make a point of talking directly to Human Rights Defenders. Listening to them helps inform the decisions we make and inspires us to do more.

The UK also supports Human Rights Defenders through bilateral engagement via our global network of Embassies and High Commissions and, importantly, through multilateral organisations. Colleagues in our diplomatic network monitor cases, observe trials, and raise issues with host governments relating to Human Rights Defenders.

As noted above, we will consider Amnesty's report carefully and draw lessons from it. I speak regularly with Amnesty International's Director, Kate Allen, and look forward to continuing our dialogue on this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name "Ahmad".

LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON
Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth
Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict