

Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

1 February 2016

Our reference: MIN/92105/2016

The Rt Hon Fiona Mactaggart MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Fiona

Thank you for your email of 08 January to the Foreign Secretary on behalf of your constituent about the UK's Death Penalty Strategy. I am replying as Minister responsible for human rights policy.

Let me start by reassuring you that recent media stories suggesting that the Government has abandoned or de-prioritised its pursuit of the global abolition of the death penalty are incorrect. The Government's opposition to the death penalty is clear. As the Prime Minister recently said: "We condemn and do not support the death penalty in any circumstances and that includes Saudi Arabia. We always make representations on the death penalty." This is part of the day-to-day work of diplomatic missions to all countries who retain the death penalty. Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Ministers take all appropriate opportunities to urge penal reform and the abolition of the death penalty with our counterparts overseas.

Through our human rights programme funding we work with civil society to promote abolition. Since the election the UK has spent £600,000 on such projects. From 2016, the FCO is doubling its spending on human rights programme work to £10.6 million - its highest ever level - through the new Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy. This will allow us to grant funding to a greater number of projects and I welcome bids in support of abolition.

Our bilateral work with individual countries is underpinned by broader support for the rules based international order and multilateral efforts towards abolition, including the UN's calls for moratoria. The UK's pledges for re-election to the UN Human Rights Council reflect this enduring commitment to promoting universal human rights.

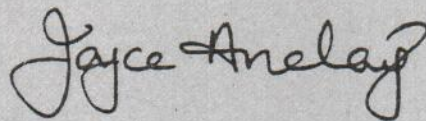
In response to the four questions which the Reprieve campaign poses:

1. Opposing the death penalty in all circumstances is already a firm, formal and explicit objective of UK foreign policy. We regularly make diplomatic representations in relation to death sentences which violate particular principles of international law.

2. We do not tolerate the illegal detention, torture or execution of British citizens anywhere. We take any such cases extremely seriously and use all means at our disposal to secure fair and human-rights compliant treatment for British citizens.
3. The Government's 'Guidance on Overseas Security and Justice Assistance' sets out a robust and sophisticated scrutiny process which ensures that UK security or justice assistance is only given once the risks of violations and abuses have been identified and dealt with.
4. There is no need to reinstate the country of concern status from previous versions of the Annual Human Rights Report as we have not abandoned that approach. Countries with serious human rights issues will be listed as 'Human Rights Priority Countries' in this year's report.

I urge you to support our efforts to uphold universal rights, informed by the evidence of our position and actions as outlined above.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jayce Anelay". The signature is written in dark ink and is centered on the page.

**RT HON BARONESS ANELAY OF ST JOHNS DBE
MINISTER OF STATE**