Dear Lesley-Ann Long,

Thank you for your email of 10 September to the Prime Minister regarding the Government’s approach to Official Development Assistance (ODA).

We are proud of UK aid and the help it has provided to transform the lives of hundreds of millions of people around the world. We completely understand the strength of your concerns about temporarily reducing the proportion of gross national income (GNI) that the UK spends on aid. The seismic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic sees the UK facing the worst economic contraction in three hundred years and a budget deficit of almost £400 billion – double that of the 2008 financial crisis - forcing us to take this tough but necessary decision. As we respond to the health and economic emergency caused by Covid-19, every penny of public spending has rightly come under intense scrutiny.

This is a temporary and proportionate reduction in scale, driven by prevailing fiscal circumstances. Despite this, the UK remains a global leader on international development, with an ODA budget on track to exceed £10 billion this year. Based on OECD data for 2020, the UK will be the third largest ODA donor in the G7 as a percentage of GNI in 2021. UK ODA continues to serve the primary aim of reducing poverty in developing countries and we remain committed to the ODA rules set by the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee.

The FCDO will prioritise investing in honest, reliable infrastructure in developing countries, providing life-saving humanitarian aid and supporting women and girls across the world. We are pursuing a positive, proactive foreign policy that delivers for people across our great country.

As you note, the Prime Minister highlighted at the UN General Assembly in September that “no one is safe until we are all safe”. We believe that the health of
every country depends on the whole world having access to safe and effective vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics. The UK is committed to rapid, equitable access to safe and effective vaccines through multilateral collaboration. We are combining our diplomatic influencing, development expertise, and money to tackle Covid-19 and secure or increase supply of affordable vaccines for low- and middle-income countries. We have committed up to £1.3 billion of UK aid to address the impacts of the pandemic, and to help end the pandemic as quickly as possible. The UK is committed to working with our G7 partners to vaccinate the world by the end of 2022 and is one of the largest donors to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC), which supports access to Covid-19 vaccines for up to 92 low and middle income countries. Our £548 million commitment will support the COVAX AMC to deliver up to 1.8 billion doses to these countries in early 2022.

The Government is committed to returning to spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA when the fiscal situation allows. That is: when we are no longer borrowing for day-to-day spending and underlying debt is falling. When these tests are met then the Government will increase ODA spending above 0.5% of GNI to 0.7% of GNI. Improving economic forecasts show that the Government may meet the fiscal tests to return to spending 0.7% of Gross National Income on aid for 2024/25.

The UK will continue to act as a global development actor focused on supporting the world’s poorest people. This is a key objective in the UK’s diplomatic and development work. We remain committed to protecting human rights and contributing to a fairer and more prosperous world.

Thank you for taking the time to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Development Policy Department
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office