Dear Cordine,

Thank you for contributing to the recent debate on Human Rights: Future Trade on Thursday 3 October, in which you asked about UK engagement with Sudan, including the approach last year in dealing with the then regime of President Omar al-Bashir.

Regarding Sudan, the UK policy of ‘phased engagement’ was consistent with our overall position towards Sudan and the regime of Omar al-Bashir. This approach was one of clear and public condemnation of human rights abuses. It also involved a limited process of engagement to explain to the Sudanese Government what needed to change and how to improve Sudan’s international relations. This approach enabled us to have frank and constructive exchanges on pressing issues such as increasing protections for human rights and macroeconomic reform; the resolution of conflict and matters related to UN peacekeeping; and to address shared threats including terrorism, modern slavery and illegal migration. As part of this, we had limited discussions on trade opportunities to open up closed off political and economic systems, but these discussions were firmly grounded in the wider dialogue on issues such as human rights improvements. The last such dialogue took place in November 2018.

I am proud of the UK’s role in supporting the Sudanese people’s calls for change, particularly during the period of protests beginning in late 2018. Our approach has been described by many in the protest movement, and those now in government, as well judged and critical. I also recognise that Sudan faces many challenges and that accountability for past abuses must be delivered. The UK welcomes the appointment of a civilian led government and Prime Minister Hamdok’s agenda of freedom, peace and justice for all in Sudan. We are engaging with him and the newly formed government on how best we can practically support these ambitions towards Sudan’s democratic transition. As the new government in Khartoum begins the process of reform and change, trade will be part of how they unpick decades of economic mismanagement.

I can confirm that our position about Omar al-Bashir remains unchanged. He gained no legitimacy from our past engagement with Sudan, which excluded all but essential contact with him, and we continue to support the mission of the International Criminal Court.

In addition, you enquired about UK engagement with Nigeria. I understand that you are meeting with the Nigeria team at the FCO on Wednesday 16 October, to discuss this issue in greater depth.
I hope you find this letter and your meeting helpful. I have copied this letter to all Noble Lords who spoke during the debate and I will also place a copy in the House library.

Baroness Cox
House of Lords