



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



**Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon
Minister of State (Middle East,
North Africa, South Asia and The
UN)**

**Prime Minister's Special
Representative on Preventing
Sexual Violence in Conflict**

King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

Tel: 0207 008 5000

**Email:
fcdo.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk**

www.gov.uk/fcdo

Baroness Hooper
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

18 December 2023

Dear Baroness Hooper,

Thank you for calling the debate on 'the United Kingdom's relationship with the countries of Latin America, and the political trends and economic developments in those countries' on 7th December. I promised to follow up on several points in writing.

Baroness Coussins asked me to comment on the UK-Colombia bilateral investment treaty. I also committed to respond to interventions made by Lord Griffiths and Lord Collins on Haiti, as well as the point made by you on UK Visas.

1. UK-Colombia Bilateral Investment Treaty

The UK-Colombia Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) plays an important role in supporting the investment relationship between the UK and Colombia by protecting investors from arbitrary, discriminatory, and unfair treatment, as well as expropriation without adequate compensation.

These provisions are backed by an Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism which provides investors with an independent form of legal recourse should they be subject to such treatment. ISDS is an effective means of resolving investment disputes and the UK has investment agreements containing ISDS provisions with over 90 trading partners. We are content with the standard of protection that the UK-Colombia BIT provides to investors, as well as both States' ability to regulate for the environment.

The UK is clear that more trade should not come at the expense of human rights or the environment. The UK will continue to show global leadership in encouraging all states to uphold international environment and human rights obligations and to hold to account those who violate these rights.

As set out in the FCDO's Annual Human Rights Report, the UK expects British businesses to respect local and international law wherever they operate, and looks to extractive companies to comply with the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights.

The UK is committed to working with the international community to make trade more sustainable now and for the future, adopting a coordinated approach across our bilateral agreements, multilateral trade policy, diplomatic efforts and trade promotion activity, to ensure they work in support of our green objectives.

2. Haiti: 'Innovative Solutions'

I note that my noble friends Lord Griffiths and Lord Collins are both concerned by the difficult circumstances faced by the Haitian people. I quite agree that the deteriorating political and security situation and its severe impact on the Haitian population is alarming.

The Government has used its position in the UN Security Council to support the authorisation of the deployment – planned for early 2024 – of a Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission led by Kenya to help Haitian forces combat armed criminality and restore security. The mission's aim is to create a secure enabling environment to promote the rebuilding of Haitian institutions in support of a democratic political process, reestablishment of the rule of law and renewed stability in Haiti. We will also continue to work with the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) as they support a peaceful, democratic solution for the Haitian people.

The UK has supported and implemented UN sanctions targeting those carrying out or aiding armed criminal violence in Haiti. On 8th December the UK co-sponsored sanctions against four gang leaders. We have also, as part of our global human rights announcement for the 75th anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, sanctioned two further individuals, under our Global Human Rights Sanctions Regulations 2020, for their involvement in the commission of serious human rights violations in Haiti.

The UK plays a leadership role in international discussions on developing country debt. Where a country requests debt relief, the UK works with its international

partners, the G20 and Paris Club to negotiate a treatment that returns a country to debt sustainability as swiftly as possible.

The Government has set out clear priorities in the White Paper to strengthen the international debt architecture. These include pushing for the G20 Common Framework for debt restructuring, which Haiti is eligible to access, to be improved and expanded. For example, developing a user manual to clarify timelines for debtor countries.

The Government is also leading on market-based (contractual) innovations - such as Climate Resilient Debt Clauses that pause repayments when a crisis occurs – as well as working with debtor countries to champion their voice and meet their capacity needs.

3. UK Visas

You also raised Visas Policy, particularly as it relates to students. Following the end of free movement in 2020, the Government implemented a points-based immigration system. This system allows the UK to exercise control over who comes here based on the skills they have to offer. Through our points-based immigration system, we have established a range of work and study routes, including those targeted at the top end of the labour market and, more generally, skilled migrants who can support the growth of our economy.

However, as you are aware, the Government is committed to lowering overall net migration. Earlier this year, the Government announced a package of measures to cut net migration. This included removing the right for international students to bring dependents unless they are on postgraduate research courses. This will come into force for courses starting in January 2024. The Government has re-affirmed its commitment to the International Education Strategy and our offer to international students remains extremely competitive.

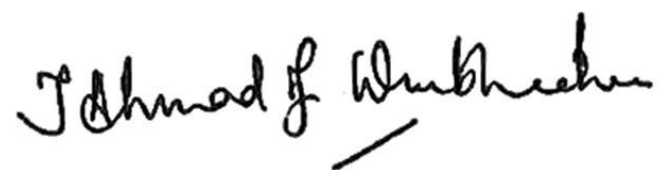
We keep all of our immigration policies under constant review to ensure they best serve the UK and reflect the public's priorities, including filling skills gaps and growing the economy.

I am grateful to you for tabling this important issue for debate and I thank you for your ongoing work to promote stronger links between the UK and Latin America. It was regrettable that due to the pressures of time you were unable to make closing remarks at the end of the debate.

Finally, I must update some figures I mentioned during the debate. The value of £40 billion in imports and exports last year refers to both Latin America and the Caribbean, not just Latin America, an increase of 51.5% from the previous year. Latin America and the Caribbean represented 2.3% of total UK imports, and 2.8% of total UK exports in 2022.

A copy of this letter has been placed in the Lord's library.

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 underneath the name.

LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON

Minister of State

Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict