

The Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP  
Secretary of State for Foreign and  
Commonwealth Affairs  
Foreign & Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH



Sent via email

Unmesh Desai AM  
Assembly Member for City and  
East

27<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

I writing to ask you to outline the plans that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are putting in place to expedite the return of British nationals currently stranded abroad. It should be noted that these are fellow citizens who travelled in the absence of any clear Government advice to the contrary. Now, through no fault of their own, they have found themselves unable to return home as a result of flight cancellations and the closure of international borders.

My constituents and thousands of other British nationals desperately need you to act now to help them to get back to their families during these extraordinarily difficult times. Whilst the complexity of the situation should be acknowledged, alongside the Government's current efforts to mitigate the worst impacts of the pandemic, the need for a more robust repatriation strategy is clear. I would now appreciate your reassurances that this will be urgently forthcoming.

The reality is that most of those trapped abroad will not be able to follow the calls that you issued to them earlier this week to return to the UK immediately. Across the world, lockdowns are firmly in place, commercial flights are being cancelled or are now prohibitive in price.

Concerningly, a significant number of those stranded will be with children, will have medical conditions that require treatment and medication, or will be vulnerable in other ways. To add to this, media reports continue to emerge which highlight their lack of access to adequate healthcare, accommodation and reliable consular assistance.

- To this end, will you commit to prioritising the expansion of the FCO's emergency loan scheme to assist the increasing number of British nationals who have been left destitute?
- Will you consider consulting the German Government on their approach to repatriation, who seem to be leading the way on registering its citizens who require urgent assistance?

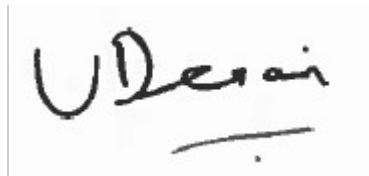
## LONDON ASSEMBLY

- In addition, it is vital that we work more closely in partnership with other countries to find and co-ordinate an international solution to this issue, can you provide an update on what progress your department is making on this?
- Another widely reported problem revolves around the fractured and sometimes unreliable communication from Embassies and Consulates, who are undoubtedly under huge pressures. Can you outline your department's plans to ensure that lines of communication are improved?
- I would also like to ask whether the Government would consider making use of our military capacity to bolster repatriation efforts in special circumstances?

Thank you for your continuing efforts, and for the work being undertaken all the FCO staff, in helping our fellow citizens return home. I hope you will fairly consider the points that I have made in this letter and immediately push forward with a renewed and robust repatriation strategy.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Unmesh Desai".

**Unmesh Desai AM**

London Assembly Member for Barking and Dagenham,  
City of London, Newham and Tower Hamlets