

7 December 2010

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Lord Jones of Cheltenham  
House of Lords  
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Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
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*Dear Dicky*

~~Thank you for your letter of 17 November about Craig Murray, the former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan.~~

We share your concerns with the overall level of respect for human rights in Uzbekistan. The situation in Uzbekistan is outlined in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office's Annual Report on Human Rights 2009, published in March this year. While there have been some positive steps, such as the abolition of the death penalty and the introduction of habeas corpus, it is clear that much more progress is needed. The EU Council Conclusions on Uzbekistan, published after the Foreign Affairs Council on 25 October, make clear the serious concerns that remain across a range of areas, including relating to political prisoners, the operation of non-governmental organisations, freedom of speech and child labour. The Conclusions also reiterate the EU's readiness to assist Uzbekistan with taking forward reforms. We also stand ready to assist Uzbekistan bilaterally.

We do not shy away from raising our concerns with the Uzbek Government, which we do through a critical but constructive dialogue with the Uzbek authorities in Tashkent and in discussions with the Uzbek Embassy in London. In doing so, we strongly encourage Uzbekistan to act in accordance with its international obligations. The FCO's Permanent Under-Secretary raised human rights issues several times during a visit to Tashkent in November, including with Foreign Minister Norov. Our Embassy also funds projects which support good governance, human rights and the development of civil society, such as on police reform, sharing UK best practice on implementation of habeas corpus legislation and inviting Uzbek deputies to observe the UK General Election. Human rights are, and will continue to be, at the heart of what we do in Uzbekistan

I recognise your concern that British Diplomats should be able to report freely on events in countries to which they are accredited. With this in mind, it is worth noting that the disciplinary actions taken by the FCO in Craig Murray's case related first to complaints made formally about him by members of his staff, and, second, to an allegation that he had contravened Diplomatic Service Regulations in his dealings with the media. These actions would have been taken in the case of any member of the Diplomatic Service who faced similar allegations. I should stress, too, that Mr Murray was not dismissed from the Diplomatic Service, but rather applied for, and was granted, early severance terms.