

Debate Pack

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Consular services for cases involving human rights

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Summary

A Westminster Hall debate on Consular services for cases involving human rights is scheduled for Tuesday 16 April 2023, from 2:30-4:00pm. The debate will be led by Christine Jardine MP.

The Consular Service

The Consular Service is the part of the UK Government to which British nationals turn when they encounter serious problems overseas: from lost passports to kidnapping, detention or death. The Consular Service also has a role in the event of a crisis abroad and may arrange evacuation “in extreme and rare circumstances” for British nationals.¹

The FCDO provides guidance on [support for British nationals abroad](#), outlining the type of help it can provide and offering general advice on staying safe overseas.² It also provides comprehensive [travel advice](#) and warnings.³ [The Consular Charter](#) (updated in 2022) explains what services are provided by the consular service, what people can expect from it and what it asks for in return.⁴

The 2022 [FCDO Consular and Crisis Strategy](#) sets out the number of people supported by the consular services:

In any given year, we support around 20,000 to 25,000 British nationals and their families, including approximately:

- 6,800 detained or arrested abroad
- 4,500 who die abroad
- 4,000 who are hospitalised
- 1,600 who are victims of crime
- 5,000 who need welfare support⁵

The FCDO annual report 2022-2023 highlights that, in the last three months of the financial year, consular teams responded to:

- over 114,000 enquires;

¹ FCDO, Guidance: [If you're affected by a crisis abroad](#) [accessed 15 April 2024]

² FCDO, [Support for British nationals abroad](#), 31 August 2022

³ FCDO, [Foreign travel advice](#), [accessed 11 April 2024]

⁴ FCDO, [Consular Charter, 2022](#)

⁵ FCDO, [Consular and Crisis Strategy 2022](#), August 2022

- 5,300 new assistance cases (an increase of 29% on the same period in 2021-22), over 1,700 of whom were considered vulnerable; and
- over 6,700 applications for emergency travel documents⁶

The Consular Service is funded by fees charged for notarial and assistance services and a consular premium of £15.50 included in the price of each standard British passport issued.⁷ A smaller percentage also goes towards the Emergency Disaster Relief Fund, which the FCDO is able to draw on to fund its response to major crises on a cost recovery basis.

Consular and Crisis Strategy 2022

The FCDO published its most recent [FCDO Consular and Crisis Strategy](#) in August 2022. In her introduction to the strategy, Jennifer Anderson, Director for Consular Services described the delivery of consular services as “a vital public service and one of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office’s top priorities.”

The strategy acknowledged there had been a recent period of “unprecedented change and challenge.” It notes that the Covid-19 pandemic affected “all areas of delivery” and highlights a series of major crisis operations. It said “this period of change, disruption and crisis has tested our provision of consular services, which we deliver 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.”

The strategy commits to:

1. A 24/7 service with a more resilient Consular Contact Centre;
2. Providing “tailored and empathetic assistance to British people abroad,” including through using an “integrated approach to complex casework” and expanding partnerships with other organisations;
3. Helping British people to stay safe abroad, through travel advice, communication campaigns and working with “local stakeholders to share expertise and build capacity to improve the experience British people have when they need help from another country’s authorities”; and
4. Maintaining a “world leading crisis response capability” through improving crisis communication, and an integrated humanitarian and crisis response.⁸

⁶ FCDO, [Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office annual report and accounts 2022 to 2023 July 2023](#)

⁷ FCDO, [Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office annual report and accounts 2022 to 2023 July 2023](#) p167

⁸ FCDO, [Consular and Crisis Strategy 2022](#), August 2022

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Consular cases involving human rights

The UK Government provides consular assistance in approximately 5,000 new cases of arrest or detention overseas each year ([PQ114271](#)).

Under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, states which detain British nationals should notify the British Embassy or consulate, and if requested, consular officers must be given access to those detainees “without delay”. However, the Government has highlighted that, while it is a party to the Vienna convention on consular relations (VCCR), its “ability to provide consular assistance remains at all times dependent on other states respecting the VCCR and must be done in accordance with the laws of that country”⁹. The FCO [states](#) that arrests and detention of British nationals overseas constitute the greatest number of consular cases each year, and take up a substantial amount of consular time.

The FCDO guidance, [Arrested or in prison abroad](#), sets out the assistance the consular services can provide British citizens imprisoned abroad. This includes where there the individual has been subject to torture/mistreatment:

The British embassy or consulate takes all complaints about torture and mistreatment seriously. They will put your best interests first and not do anything that might put you, or anyone else, at risk.

The British embassy or consulate will do its best to check you’re safe. This may include:

- visiting you more often to check on your welfare
- discussing your complaint
- explaining the local authorities’ complaints procedures and supporting you to make a complaint
- telling you about any organisations that can help you
- supporting your request for a transfer to another wing or facility
- helping you get access to medical treatment

The British embassy or consulate cannot investigate torture and mistreatment allegations, but with your consent it can raise the allegations with the local authorities and request an investigation. If you do not want to raise the allegations immediately, the British embassy or consulate can help you do this later if you wish – for example, after you have returned to the UK. The local

⁹ [Written Question 147011, February 2021 \[Diplomatic Service: British Nationals Abroad\]](#)

authorities may ask you to provide evidence, such as photos, medical reports or witness statements, to help them investigate a complaint.¹⁰

There have been recent concerns about the consular service's approach in cases where British citizens imprisoned abroad have been the victim of torture or other human rights abuses. A specific issue has been the FCDO's approach in cases where detained individuals are dual nationals, such as Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a British-Iranian dual national who was detained in Iran for nearly six years. More information about these cases is provided in a Library briefing, [Dual nationals imprisoned in Iran](#).

In August 2023, the Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman found that the FCDO had not acted on its own guidance in relation to the mistreatment of prisoners and did not act on warning signs that Matthew Hedges (a PhD student detained in the UAE on suspicion of being a British spy) was being mistreated. The Ombudsman said that Mr Hedges was "failed by the UK government and that it must not happen again."¹¹ The FCDO formally apologised to Matthew Hedges, committed to reviewing its internal guidance on cases where there are allegations of or concerns about torture and mistreatment, and providing training to all consular staff.¹²

In its April 2023 report, [Stolen years: combatting state hostage diplomacy](#), the Foreign Affairs Committee described an increase in the arbitrary imprisonment of British citizens where there is a risk that they may be used for political leverage. The report called for a "zero tolerance" approach and said the Government's approach to state-level hostage taking was "failing British citizens". It describes poor communication between consular staff and detainees and their families and calls for the creation of a new high-level role "Director for Arbitrary and Complex Detentions (DACD)" to lead on these cases.¹³ In its response to the Committee's report, the Government rejected the proposal for a new role, stating that the current approach reflected "the Foreign Secretary's primacy within Cabinet as the Secretary of State responsible for foreign affairs, including consular affairs, with direct access to the Prime Minister."

A February Parliamentary question response from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the FCDO, David Rutley, sets out the Government approach to supporting people detained abroad:

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) consular staff are available to offer appropriate and tailored support to British nationals and their families, 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year. Consular staff work tirelessly to give support to the c.4000 British nationals

¹⁰ FCDO, Guidance: Arrested or in prison abroad, [accessed 15 April 2024]

¹¹ PHSO, [Foreign Office missed signs of potential torture of British academic, August 2023](#)

¹² The Guardian, [Foreign Office apologises over handling of Matthew Hedges torture case | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#), September 2023

¹³ Foreign Affairs Select Committee, [Abductor states are weaponising citizenship of British nationals for geopolitical ends, 4 April 2023](#).

who are arrested or detained each year. We tailor the consular assistance we provide to British nationals who have been arrested or detained abroad depending on their specific circumstances. This includes raising individual cases with the relevant overseas authorities, including at Ministerial level, where appropriate. The FCDO seek continuously to improve our processes and services by acting on feedback and reviewing what we do.¹⁴

Proposals for a legal right to consular assistance

There is no current legal right to consular assistance but there is increasing support for enshrining this right in law for individuals whose human rights are at risk. This is a change that has been campaigned for by charities and NGOs, such as Redress.

In a 2022 conference speech, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, said he would introduce a legal right to consular assistance under a Labour government.¹⁵ He criticised the Government approach in dual national cases such as those of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, Morad Tahbaz and Jagtar Singh Johal and said Labour would legislate for a new legal right to consular assistance.

In October 2023, he also announced that a new Special Envoy for Arbitrary Detention would also be introduced if Labour won the General election. In comments to the Evening Standard, Mr Lammy said that a British hostage special envoy would offer a “centre of expertise in a very challenging environment” and highlighted the success of the US Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs.¹⁶

In December 2023, Liberal Democrat MP, Christine Jardine introduced a Private Members Bill, the [Consular Assistance Bill](#), which would establish the legal right to consular assistance for those who have been victims of human rights abuses and false detention. In [comments in the Sunday Post](#), Christine Jardine highlighted the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and said “we assume that if something happens, someone will speak to the Foreign Office and you’re guaranteed assistance – but you’re not.” She said that there was cross party support for the Bill, but that it was likely to run out of time in the parliamentary session before the election. Richard Ratcliffe, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe’s husband has expressed support for the Bill:

“The system, as it is now, is just unfair. If you make noise, you get attention, you can get protected from torture and other abuses. But if you are unable to get Ministers’ attention, you can be left to a different fate.”

¹⁴ [Written Question 12162, 2 February 2024 \[British Nationals Abroad: Detainees\]](#)

¹⁵ The Guardian, [Labour vows to give UK citizens abroad legal right to Foreign Office help | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#), October 2022

¹⁶ Evening Standard, [Special envoy for hostages planned by Labour to free UK citizens seized abroad like Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#), October 2023

“Petitions and hunger strikes shouldn’t be necessary to beg a government to do the right thing and look after their nationals both at home and abroad. There should be a framework for all British citizens.”¹⁷

In January, Redress (an NGO which provides support for individuals who have been the victims of torture and human rights abuses) published a briefing setting out the case for introducing a legal right to consular support.¹⁸ It notes that, whilst the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations gives individuals the right to communicate with consular services, it does not explicitly require states to provide consular services to its nationals. It proposes a legal framework that it states would be a commitment to the human rights of British nationals, recognise the “crucial role of consular assistance in international law” and enable detainees and families to know the level of support they should expect. The principles are supported by British Rights Abroad Group, The Free Nazanin Campaign, Hostage International, and Prisoners Abroad.

¹⁷ Scottish Liberal Democrats, [Lib Dem members bill would guarantee support for Brits falsely imprisoned abroad](#), 1 March 2024

¹⁸ Redress, [REDRESS Sets out Principles for a Legal Right to Consular Assistance](#), January 2024

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Press and media articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

[Consular Assistance Bill: UK citizens detained overseas should have a right to government help if their human rights or lives are in danger – Christine Jardine](#)

The Scotsman (subscription required)
Christine Jardine
4 March 2024

[Race to introduce landmark legal rights for Brits abroad facing human rights abuses](#)

The Courier
Derek Healey
18 February 2024

[David Lammy: Our plan for special envoy to free UK citizens seized abroad](#)

The Standard
Nicholas Cecil
6 October 2023

[Britain Is Failing Citizens Who Are Arbitrarily Jailed Abroad](#)

Time Magazine
Yasmeen Serhan
26 September 2023

[Matthew Hedges: Foreign Office apology to UAE torture academic](#)

BBC News
4 September 2023

[Foreign Office complacent over Britons held overseas, says Richard Ratcliffe](#)

The Guardian
Patrick Wintour
6 July 2023

[In trouble abroad? What the Foreign Office will, and won't, do for you](#)

The Independent
Simon Calder
30 December 2020

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Press releases

[Lib Dem members bill would guarantee support for Brits falsely imprisoned abroad](#)

Scottish Liberal Democrats

1 March 2024

[Prisoners Abroad's comment supporting legal right to consular assistance](#)

Prisoners Abroad

24 January 2024

[REDRESS Welcomes Labour's Commitment to Change Current Approach to Consular Assistance and Hostage-Taking](#)

Redress

6 October 2023

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Parliamentary questions

Manuel Guerrero

21 Mar 2024 | 18099

Asked by: Caroline Lucas

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had discussions with his Qatari counterpart on the case of Manuel Guerrero; and what steps he is taking to ensure Mr Guerrero has access to medical treatment.

Answering member: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Supporting the welfare of British nationals detained overseas is a priority for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and where there are concerns that an individual's needs are not being met, with their consent, we will raise this with the relevant authorities. Without consent, we are unable to provide comment on consular cases in line with relevant UK data protection legislation, which can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-development-office/about/personal-information-charter>

Business of the House

21 Mar 2024 | 747 c1066

Asked by: Nickie Aiken

My constituent Nadeem Anjarwalla, a UK citizen, has been detained in Nigeria since 26 February, with no charges formally brought. His health is suffering, and obstacles have prevented his lawyers and his family from ensuring that he receives proper care. He has also just missed his son's first birthday. As the safety and security of British nationals is a top priority for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, will my right hon. Friend please allow a debate in Government time on how we can further enhance FCDO's support for our citizens abroad?

Answered by: Penny Mordaunt | Leader of the House

I know my hon. Friend is working hard for this gentleman, and she is in close contact with the FCDO. As she knows, officials are in contact with his family and legal representatives, and the UK's high commissioner to Nigeria has raised the case with Nigerian authorities. We had a Westminster Hall debate on 5 September last year about British nationals who are detained overseas, and it was well attended. My hon. Friend knows how to apply for a debate, and if she did, I think it would be similarly well attended. As the next questions to the Foreign Office are not until 20 April, I shall ensure that the Foreign Secretary has heard what she has said.

[Jimmy Lai](#)

20 Mar 2024 | 18164

Asked by: Jim Shannon

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he is taking steps to ensure that Jimmy Lai receives regular consular access.

Answering member: Anne-Marie Trevelyan | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Ministers and officials continue to raise Mr Jimmy Lai's case at the highest levels with the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities and have consistently requested consular access which has been denied by the Hong Kong prison authorities. The Foreign Secretary reiterated his call for Mr Lai's release during his meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Munich Security Conference on the 16 February.

[British Nationals Abroad: Detainees](#)

02 Feb 2024 | 12162

Asked by: Fleur Anderson

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has taken recent steps to improve the Government's effectiveness in achieving the release of British nationals overseas.

Answering member: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) consular staff are available to offer appropriate and tailored support to British nationals and their families, 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year. Consular staff work tirelessly to give support to the c.4000 British nationals who are arrested or detained each year. We tailor the consular assistance we provide to British nationals who have been arrested or detained abroad depending on their specific circumstances. This includes raising individual cases with the relevant overseas authorities, including at Ministerial level, where appropriate. The FCDO seek continuously to improve our processes and services by acting on feedback and reviewing what we do.

[Diplomatic Service: British Nationals Abroad](#)

05 Jan 2024 | HL1311

Asked by: Lord Wallace of Saltaire

To ask His Majesty's Government what consular support they offer to UK dual nationals resident in other states of which they also hold citizenship.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Where a dual British national is living or travelling in the country of their other nationality, we would not normally provide consular support or get involved in dealings between them and the authorities of that country. We may make an exception if we consider that the individual is vulnerable because of their specific circumstances, and there are special humanitarian or human rights reasons. The policy is set out here <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/who-the-fcdo-can-support-abroad%23dual-nationals>

British Nationals Abroad: Detainees

27 Dec 2023 | 7097

Asked by: Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had discussions with representatives of international human rights organisations on (a) the case of Jagtar Singh Johal and (b) similar situations involving British nationals detained overseas.

Answering member: Anne-Marie Trevelyan | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK Government has raised our concerns about Mr Johal's case consistently with the Government of India, including his allegations of torture and mistreatment, and his right to a fair trial. The UK Government regularly raises Mr Johal's case with Indian counterparts and will continue to do so. We remain committed to seeing Mr Johal's case resolved as soon as possible. Our approach in Mr Johal's case is informed by all available information, including information made available by international human rights organisations. We take all allegations of human rights violations relating to British nationals detained overseas very seriously and we raise concerns with local authorities where appropriate. Our response is tailored to the circumstances of each case, prioritising the best interests and wishes of the affected individual. With the consent of the person affected, the FCDO is willing to discuss cases with relevant third parties, including international human rights organisations.

British Nationals Abroad: Detainees

20 Dec 2023 | House of Commons | 7096

Asked by: Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department takes to (a) monitor and (b) intervene on human rights concerns raised in relation to British citizens detained overseas.

Answering member: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Our consular staff endeavour to give appropriate and tailored support to British nationals overseas and their families in the UK, 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year. We help around 30,000 British nationals abroad every year.

Consular staff work tirelessly to give support to the c.4000 British nationals who are arrested or detained each year. Our support is tailored to the needs of the individual and their situation. This includes raising individual cases with the relevant overseas authorities, including at Ministerial level, where appropriate.

What we can and cannot do is set out in our public guidance on gov.uk. It includes further and updated information on what we can seek to do for victims of torture and mistreatment, and for those detained overseas. The level and type of assistance we offer is tailored to the individual circumstances of each case but we take all allegations of torture or mistreatment very seriously, treat those who have made allegations of torture and mistreatment as vulnerable cases and follow up with action appropriate to the circumstances of each case. The FCDO records all information about allegations of torture and mistreatment reported to us by British Nationals, and any actions taken in response to those allegations.

[Alaa Abd El-Fattah](#)

11 Dec 2023 | 5144

Asked by: Geraint Davies

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in Egypt on Alaa Abd El-Fattah; and whether he is taking steps to secure consular access to him.

Answering member: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Ministers and officials have raised Mr El-Fattah's case at the highest levels in the Egyptian government, and will continue to do so. This includes consistent calls for consular access. The Prime Minister has raised Mr El-Fattah's case with President Sisi on a number of occasions, most recently on 1 December. The former Foreign Secretary raised Mr El-Fattah's case on several occasions with Egyptian Foreign Minister Shoukry, including on 18 September. The Minister of State for Development and Africa Andrew Mitchell raised the case with the Egyptian authorities on 15 November during his visit to Cairo. The Minister of State for the Middle East, also responsible for Human Rights, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon has also raised the case several times, most recently with Foreign Minister Shoukry during his visit to Cairo on 4 April, and on a number of occasions with the Egyptian Ambassador to London.

British Nationals Abroad: Detainees

06 Dec 2023 | 4879

Asked by: Patrick Grady

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to help secure the release of UK nationals who are being arbitrary detained overseas.

Answering member: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The FCDO takes all allegations of human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, seriously. We tailor our support to British nationals depending on their specific circumstances, and what we consider to be in their best interests. Where appropriate, we raise allegations with the local authorities, often engaging at the highest levels. We expect all States to abide by their international human rights obligations.

Hamas: Hostage Taking

23 Nov 2023 | 1775

Asked by: Mr David Lammy

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what steps his Department is taking to provide consular support to the families of British nationals held hostage in Gaza.

Answering member: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The Government's thoughts are with those families who are facing unimaginable uncertainty and fear because of these despicable attacks and kidnappings. We are not commenting on specific numbers or individual cases. The safety of all British nationals continues to be our utmost priority and we continue to do everything we can to secure the release of all hostages, including working with Israeli counterparts and international partners at the highest levels.

Diplomatic Service: Prisoners

05 Dec 2022 | HL3474

Asked by: Lord Marlesford

To ask His Majesty's Government what consular access is granted to (1) citizens of the UK who are in prison in a foreign country, and (2) those who are also citizens of that country in which they are imprisoned.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Consular access to nationals detained in another State is generally governed by the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (VCCR). Where a British

national consents to the British Embassy or Consulate being informed about their detention, consular officers have the right to visit and communicate with them. The VCCR also states that these rights are to be exercised in conformity with the laws and regulations of the detaining State. The Government's ability to provide consular assistance remains at all times dependent on other states respecting the VCCR and must be done in accordance with the laws of that country. Providing assistance to dual nationals in their other country of nationality can be difficult and the help we can provide depends on what the host government will allow.

Diplomatic Service: British Nationals Abroad

14 Nov 2022 | 82410

Asked by: Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department is taking steps to improve its (a) lists of lawyers and (b) prisoner packs for the use of UK nationals who require them overseas; and when those (i) lists and (ii) packs were last updated.

Answering member: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

FCDO posts overseas maintain lists of local English-speaking lawyers which are published on gov.uk. We have introduced a simpler system when looking for local service providers abroad, such as lawyers, on gov.uk. This allows the public to search for the type of lawyer they require by expertise and/or locality. Country-specific prisoner packs are also available on gov.uk and contain information about the local legal system, including whether legal aid is available, as well as practical information about detention conditions and what to expect in that country. Posts are asked to review lawyers lists and prisoner packs annually and update them whenever there is new information to include, or in response to feedback.

Diplomatic Service: British Nationals Abroad

30 May 2022 | 6687

Asked by: Mr David Lammy

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what her Department's policy is on the right to consular access for UK citizens imprisoned abroad; and if it will assert that right in the case of Alaa Abd El-Fattah.

Answering member: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The UK Government is in contact with the Egyptian authorities and urgently seeking consular access. We continue to support the family of Alaa Abdel Fattah. The UK Government regularly raises human rights concerns with the Egyptian authorities, including with regard to political prisoners in the

Egyptian system, both privately and in forums such as the UN Human Rights Council. This includes raising the implementation of the rights guaranteed by Egypt's constitution.

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Debates

British Nationals Detained Overseas

05 Sep 2023 | 737 cc108-124WH

Motion that this House has considered British nationals detained overseas.
Agreed to on question.

British Nationals Detained Overseas

20 Apr 2022 | 712 cc107-114WH

Motion that this House has considered British nationals detained overseas.
Agreed to on question.

Consular Support for British Citizens

09 Dec 2021 | 705 cc642-665

That this House regrets that the consular services provided by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to bereaved families of people who have been murdered, have died in suspicious circumstances, or have been imprisoned or tortured overseas have fallen short of the standard reasonably expected; notes that access to justice and basic standards of assistance are dependent upon a person's ability to pay; is concerned that there is no legal right to consular assistance and that support is provided on a discretionary basis, which can lead to unpredictable and inconsistent communications from the FCDO; further regrets that consular services in the UK are below the level of support UK citizens should expect; believes that the FCDO's focus is on what it cannot do to help, rather than what it can do, which adds to the trauma experienced by victims; calls on the Government to improve and standardise communication processes at the FCDO, to publish consular procedures and policies and to revisit the findings of the Fifth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Support for British nationals abroad: The Consular Service, Session 2014-15, HC 516; further calls on the Government to consult with the families affected and to raise the standard of how British citizens are treated by FCDO procedures; and urges the Government to set a world leading example of how a state treats its citizens in their darkest hour of need.

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Further reading

[Vienna Convention on Consular Relations](#), Done at Vienna on 24 April 1963. Entered into force on 19 March 1967. United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 596, p. 261

[Protecting British nationals abroad from human rights violations: Principles for a legal right to consular assistance](#), Redress, January 2024

[Arrested or in prison abroad](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

31 August 2022, updated 1 December 2023

How the British embassy or consulate can help, including contacting family, UK prison transfers, money transfers and complaining about mistreatment.

[Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office data](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Published 27 May 2013, last updated 6 March 2023

This series brings together all Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) consular data documents.

[Consular assistance: how the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office provides support](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

31 August 2022

Consular assistance describes the support and help the FCDO can provide to British nationals if they get into difficulty whilst living or travelling abroad.

[Consular support for British citizens](#), Commons Library Debate Pack, CDP-0210, 6 December 2021

[Support for British nationals abroad: The Consular Service](#), Fifth Report of Session 2014–15, Foreign Affairs Committee, HC 516, 23 November 2014

[All-Party Parliamentary Group on Deaths Abroad, Consular Services and Assistance](#) (membership information)

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