



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

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Dear Plan International supporters,

Thank you for your recent correspondence about putting gender equality and women's and girls' rights at the heart of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). I am responding as the Minister responsible for gender equality.

The Prime Minister is clear that the creation of the FCDO will allow the UK to maximise our influence around the world and ensure we are in the best position to confront the challenges and make the most of opportunities that lie ahead. This decision comes ahead of a critical time for the UK: next year the UK will be President of the G7, host the crucial COP26 climate summit and the Secretary General's visit marking the UN's 75th anniversary, and the UK will also co-lead the new global Generation Equality Action Coalition on gender-based violence.

The merger will ensure our development and foreign policy are aligned and that decisions on development spending take into account a coherent and unified set of priorities for our international policy. Our commitment to spending 0.7 percent of our Gross National Income on aid is enshrined in law and we continue to be guided by our responsibilities under the International Development Act, including a commitment to poverty reduction. Advancing gender equality and women's and girls' rights are a core part of this mission, and vital to fulfilling every girl's right to 12 years of quality education. I can assure you that the Government remains steadfast in its commitment to this agenda.

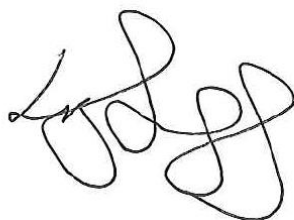
The UK has a proud track record on gender equality. We fought successfully for a dedicated gender equality goal in the Sustainable Development Goals, and targets on gender equality across the other goals. We are delivering results at scale. For example, between 2015 and 2020, we supported 8.1 million girls gain access to a decent education. The FCDO will continue to be a progressive force for women and girls, including our commitment to protecting their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and right to education. As Special Envoy for Girls' Education and as a SheDecides Champion, I am committed to highlighting the needs and rights of all women and girls.

COVID-19 has demonstrated just how important it is that our development and diplomatic efforts are brought together more closely. As you note in your letter, women and girls are amongst the hardest hit by the indirect impacts of the virus, including a shocking rise in violence against women and girls globally. DFID and the FCO have been working together to ensure the needs and priorities of women and girls are central to every aspect of our response, while supporting women's participation and leadership, including through women's rights organisations. For example, we provided £10m for the UNFPA's COVID-19 response, so they can continue to reach girls and women with vital gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health services.

As you have set out, the Strategic Vision for Gender Equality was DFID's guiding document on gender equality, but it also reflects and responds to the UK Government's ambitions on gender equality and works alongside our National Action Plan (NAP) on Women Peace and Security. As part of the merger discussions, we will refresh and build on existing strategies, as well as develop new approaches. We do not see the core ambitions of the Strategic Vision for Gender Equality changing. The challenges of advancing girls' education, SRHR, women's political empowerment, women's economic empowerment and ending violence against women and girls, are as acute now, if not more so, as when we published the strategy in 2018.

The UK's reputation as a world leader on development issues comes from three things: our thought leadership; the scale and quality of UK development programmes; and the excellence of our analysis, long-term perspective and staff. The UK's global leadership on gender equality and advancing women's rights in development is an excellent example of these elements coming together. None of these will change. Our development work will be better aligned with foreign policy and the broad UK national interest. The establishment of the new Department should make our development work even more effective.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sugg', with a stylized, cursive flourish.

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