

Tireless work by the Embassy in Chile during coronavirus times

Since the middle of March, when the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic was declared by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the British Embassy Santiago has been almost entirely focused on managing the health crisis.

Our main work at the start of the pandemic was helping British nationals in Chile, both on cruise ships and on land, who had emergency needs arising from the crisis. Before international flights were completely cancelled in mid-April, we worked with the Chilean authorities to ensure that British nationals could leave the country without difficulties and to help people in remote areas to get to Santiago for their flights.

We believe that nearly all of the 3,000 or so British visitors who were in Chile in mid March are now safely back in the UK. However, we will continue to work tirelessly to help those who are still in Chile.

Another part of our work has been to support British nationals who were visiting Chile and contracted COVID-19. We have had five cases – four of which were people on cruise ships – including 3 who were hospitalised. Throughout their weeks in Chile we remained in close contact with them, their respective hospitals, insurers, and families back in the UK. All have now returned to the UK.

The UK and Chile working together

In the rush of handling the immediate health crisis, it can be hard to make time to take a longer term view. However, Chile and the UK, like all other countries in the world, are going to suffer serious economic damage as a result of the virus. Therefore, a powerful and co-ordinated economic response is vital to reduce the negative economic impact of the pandemic.

Chile is one of the UK's key trade and investment partners in Latin America, a country which shares the UK's belief in the importance of free trade and a fellow member of the OECD. We will be working closely together in the coming months over our responses to the economic consequences of the pandemic.

We will also be seeking not only to restore trade to its pre-COVID-19 levels, but to increase it. In this way we can help restore the economies of both the UK and Chile. Also, both countries are committed to global responses to the current health crisis, including the scope for collaboration on the area of vaccines.

The UK's international response

As in other British embassies overseas, the UK has been combining our support for British citizens with a three-pronged approach to respond to COVID-19:

- firstly, supporting the global health response and in particular the most vulnerable countries. The UK has pledged £744 million through aid funding including support for the WHO (£65 million), Red Cross (£50 million) and UNICEF (£25 million). This includes sending experts and sharing medical supplies to prevent the spread of the disease and support hospitals and medical workers stretched to their limit around the world
- secondly, the UK is leading on international efforts to find a vaccine. We have contributed £250 million to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), the largest national contributor to this global initiative to develop new vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics. The UK will also host the Global Vaccine Summit in June 2020. In addition to tackling COVID-19, it remains vital that programmes against other diseases such as AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria continue
- the final strand is to protect the international economy – as it would be a high cost to pay if we beat the virus but were to lose yet more lives to increased poverty and the loss of global supply chains for essential goods like food and medicines

Further information

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