

UK response to arrests of human rights workers in Egypt

Government response

The UK is deeply concerned about the arrest of 3 staff members from the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR).



An FCDO spokesperson said:

The UK is deeply concerned about the arrest of 3 staff members from the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR): Executive Director Gasser Abdel Razek, and employees Mohammed Basheer and Karim Ennarah.

We have been in regular contact with the Egyptian authorities since the arrests took place, and the Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has raised the issue directly with his Egyptian counterpart. We are working closely with partners in the international community who share our concerns.

All human rights defenders should be able to work without fear of arrest or reprisals.

Published 22 November 2020

UK Government-supported mass Covid-19

testing begins in Merthyr

News story

UK Military provides logistical support for county-wide programme of testing.



Wales's first mass testing programme is being rolled out in Merthyr Tydfil Borough.

Merthyr is the first county in Wales to take part in the UK's mass testing scheme following the recent pilot in Liverpool.

The UK Government-supported mass testing programme will see the use of Lateral Flow Devices which can provide results within around 20-30 minutes. If an individual tests positive via an LFD test, they will then have a swab test and will be asked to return home so they can self-isolate immediately.

The roll-out of mass testing in Merthyr is being carried out with the help of more than 160 UK Military personnel who are supporting local officials set up the mass testing programme rapidly.

All residents will be offered repeat C-19 testing, even if asymptomatic, to help find more positive cases and break the chains of transmission. The first testing site opened at Merthyr Tydfil leisure centre on 21 November with further sites due to open later this month.

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart said:

Mass testing is hugely important in our continued fight against the virus and the UK Government has been working night and day to deliver capacity right across the UK.

At the same time, the UK Armed Forces has provided crucial support and additional expertise to our NHS and ambulance service in Wales throughout the pandemic.

Working alongside the local council, Welsh Government and the NHS, the significant support the UK Government is now giving to roll out

Wales' first mass-testing programme in Merthyr shows, once again, that we are better tackling the coronavirus united across the four nations of the UK and making the best use of our shared resources.

The programme is being delivered through a partnership between the UK Government, Welsh Government, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board.

Residents and workers in Merthyr can find out how to access tests by visiting www.merthyr.gov.uk/covidtesting

Published 21 November 2020

[UK secures vital rollover trade deal with Canada and agrees to start negotiating more advanced deal next year](#)

- The agreement paves the way for negotiations to begin in 2021 on a new tailor-made UK-Canada trade deal, with the potential to go further in areas like digital trade, the environment and women's economic empowerment
- Today's agreement also locks in certainty for UK businesses trading goods and services with Canada worth £20 billion

The UK and Canada have locked in their existing trading relationship, worth £20 billion, and agreed to begin negotiating a new more ambitious trade deal as early as next year.

On a video call today (21st November), Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, joined by International Trade Secretary Liz Truss and her Canadian counterpart, Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade Mary Ng agreed an 'agreement in principle' to roll over current EU-Canada trading arrangements and begin negotiations on a new, bespoke UK-Canada trade deal in 2021.

Today's agreement to rollover provisions of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) gives certainty for UK businesses exporting goods and services to Canada worth £11.4 billion. It will support the British automotive manufacturing and food and drink industries which between them provide jobs for more than half a million people across the UK.

Overall, an estimated £42 million tariff burden on UK exports has been saved.

The benefits locked in under the agreement reached today include:

- Future zero tariffs on UK car exports to Canada, which were worth £757 million last year, supporting factories and jobs in our communities. Without this agreement, Canada's standard tariffs on cars of 6.1% would apply.
- Tariff-free trade on 98% of goods that can be exported to Canada including beef, fish and seafood and soft drinks.
- UK producers will continue to benefit from zero tariffs on many agricultural and seafood exports including chocolate, confectionary, fruit and vegetables, bread, pastries and fish. Last year the UK exported £344m worth of agri-food goods to Canada.
- Without the continuity agreement, Canadian food products such as maple syrup, biscuits and salmon could have been more expensive for British consumers as they would face taxes of up to 8% when entering the UK under the UK Global Tariff.

The deal secured today provides the foundation for both countries to negotiate a new trade deal, that will improve on the existing EU-Canada agreement. It will be tailored for the British economy with the potential to go further in new areas like digital trade, women's economic empowerment and the environment.

Today's announcement means that in under two years, the UK government has agreed trade deals with 53 countries accounting for £164bn of UK bilateral trade. It also takes us one step closer to accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), of which Canada is a member. CPTPP is a key part of our trade negotiations programme, helping businesses secure more opportunities in 11 key Pacific markets.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

This is a fantastic agreement for Britain which secures transatlantic trade with one of our closest allies. British businesses export everything from electric cars to sparkling wine to Canada, and today's deal will ensure that trade goes from strength to strength.

Our negotiators have been working flat out to secure trade deals for the UK, and from as early next year we have agreed to start work on a new, bespoke trade deal with Canada that will go even further in meeting the needs of our economy.

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said:

Today's agreement underpins £20 billion worth of trade and locks in certainty for the thousands of jobs. We look forward to striking a new more ambitious deal next year with the aim of creating more opportunities for businesses and improving the lives of people across the country.

The UK is bonded by history, culture and transatlantic trade with our friends and allies in Canada, and we want to continue to build partnerships around the world that support our shared values of freedom and democracy, and today marks another step towards membership of a group of like-minded nations- the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Today's agreement also guarantees tariff-free access to the Canadian market for British wine and spirits and ensures that the UK and Canada can continue to work towards recognising each other's qualifications in areas including accountancy, architecture and law.

All nations and regions will benefit from preferential access to Canadian markets. For example, together the West Midlands and North West regions exported over £1.2 billion worth of goods to Canada last year, while Scotland and Northern Ireland collectively exported £1 billion.

Josh Hardie, acting Director-General of the CBI said:

Agreeing a deal with Canada that secures continuity of trade is great news for businesses on both sides of the Atlantic.

Whether it's manufacturers still sending their products between the two countries tariff-free, or UK firms being able to sell their services into the Canadian market, this is a real milestone.

The signing of this deal can now lay the foundations for an even deeper trade agreement, tailored to both economies. Business stands ready to work with government to achieve that goal and to promote opportunities with Canada. Miles Beale, Chief Executive of the Wine and Spirit Trade Association, said:

This is a good result for the UK wine and spirit industry. Canada is an important market that is growing for UK exporters, particularly our small and medium sized gin and English wine exporters.

This agreement doesn't just confirm the continued removal of tariffs, but gives us some extra footing and mechanisms to engage with the Canadians on their complex alcohol market, which is controlled at a provincial level. It should allow UK businesses to be more competitive in the Canadian Liquor Board system and that's a positive step in helping us to grow in the market.

British supercar maker McLaren Automotive, the largest part of luxury automotive, motorsport and technology company McLaren Group, sold its first car in Canada in 2012.

Now with retailers in major Canadian cities such as Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver the brand, represented by Pfaff Automotive, has seen a four-fold growth in sales over the past eight years.

Combining leading-edge technology that enhances owner experience and hand-built personalised luxury, McLaren is poised to sell its 1,000th supercar in Canada before the end of the year.

Tony Joseph, Regional Director for The Americas, McLaren Automotive said:

As an innovative British-based bespoke manufacturing business exporting to meet a growing demand for McLaren's supercars among Canadian buyers, today's news that the UK and Canada have secured a continuity trade agreement is welcomed. It provides added certainty and continuity both for us and our Canadian retail partners, customers and employees as we continue to build our presence in this key global market.

FSB National Chairman Mike Cherry said:

There was always a danger that the end of the transition period would mean losing wider international market access that we enjoyed as part of EU membership. So it's really encouraging to see new trade deals secured with trading partners like Canada, long since seen as a crucial market by small firms. The fact that this new agreement upholds the small business chapter that was previously in place is very welcome. We look forward to such chapters being at the centre of all future UK trade deals.

The UK-Canada Trade Continuity Agreement will be subject to final legal checks before it is formally signed.

Notes to Editors:

- The agreement will be formally signed once it has been subject to formal checks.
 - Total trade between the UK and Canada was worth £19.9 billion in the four quarters to end of Q1 2020
 - The UK will continue to be covered by the EU-Canada FTA during the transition period. This agreement will come into effect on 1 January 2021.
 - Source of statistics on trade with Canada: ONS UK Economic Accounts, Q2 2020 release.
 - Source of regional trade statistics: HMRC Regional Trade in Goods, Q2 2020 release.
-

Government steps in to help homeowners caught up in 'EWS1' process

- Agreement that buildings without cladding not subject to EWS1
- Nearly 450,000 homeowners set to benefit
- Government funding to train 2000 more building assessors to speed up valuations
- Government working with industry to ensure professional indemnity insurance is available for assessors

Owners of flats in buildings without cladding will no longer need an EWS1 form to sell or re-mortgage their property – thanks to an agreement reached today (21 November) between the Government and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), UK Finance and the Building Societies Association (BSA).

This is part of a wider government-led solution to support those homeowners who have unsafe cladding on their buildings and where there is still more to do.

Developed by industry to assess the potential financial impact of cladding on high-rise flats, an external wall fire review process – commonly referred to as 'EWS1' – is being applied to other buildings without cladding. This is stopping some people from selling or moving home and causing unnecessary anxiety for homeowners.

Mr Jenrick and RICS have agreed that buildings without cladding do not need an EWS1 form, clearing the way for up to nearly 450,000 flat owners to sell, move or remortgage their homes.

While building owners are already legally required to undertake fire risk assessments on all blocks of flats, following supplementary guidance published by the Government today, RICS will be working with lenders, valuers and fire safety bodies to develop new advice for surveyors. This will enable surveyors to take a more proportionate approach and reduce the number of buildings where an EWS1 assessment is needed.

Further, the Government has announced nearly £700,000 to train more assessors, speeding up the valuation process for homeowners in cases where an EWS1 form is required. This training will be delivered by RICS from January and will mean up to 200 additional assessors will be qualified to carry out the EWS1 assessment within a month, 900 within three months, and 2,000 within six months.

The Government is also exploring ways to address ongoing concerns around the availability of professional indemnity insurance and welcomes industry's progress on developing a portal where lenders, valuers and leaseholders will be able to find out if their building already has an existing EWS1, thereby reducing the demand for duplicate forms.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Through no fault of their own, some flat-owners have been unable to sell or re-mortgage their homes - and this cannot be allowed to continue.

That's why the Government has secured agreement that the EWS1 form will not be needed on buildings where there is no cladding; providing certainty for the almost 450,000 homeowners who may have felt stuck in limbo. However, this is only part of a wider solution and we continue to support those homeowners who do have cladding on their buildings and where there is still more to do.

I welcome the support we have received from RICS and industry to resolve this matter and will be working urgently with lenders to resolve these challenges, ensuring that EWS1 forms are requested only where absolutely necessary and that the number of surveyors able to complete them is increased urgently to meet demand.

RICS CEO Sean Tompkins said:

We are aware of the severe impact this has had on some homeowners and we agree that buildings without cladding should not be subject to the process. We will be taking forward work with industry on this.

Further, we recognise the acute market shortage of fire engineers to carry out EWS1 assessments and welcome the Government's support on working with us to upskill other regulated professions, such as Chartered Building Surveyors, to create additional capacity in the market.

Government steps in to help homeowners caught up in 'EWS1' process

- Agreement that buildings without cladding not subject to EWS1

- Nearly 450,000 homeowners set to benefit
- Government funding to train 2000 more building assessors to speed up valuations
- Government working with industry to ensure professional indemnity insurance is available for assessors

Owners of flats in buildings without cladding will no longer need an EWS1 form to sell or re-mortgage their property – thanks to an agreement reached today (21 November) between the Government and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), UK Finance and the Building Societies Association (BSA).

This is part of a wider government-led solution to support those homeowners who have unsafe cladding on their buildings and where there is still more to do.

Developed by industry to assess the potential financial impact of cladding on high-rise flats, an external wall fire review process – commonly referred to as ‘EWS1’ – is being applied to other buildings without cladding. This is stopping some people from selling or moving home and causing unnecessary anxiety for homeowners.

Mr Jenrick and RICS have agreed that buildings without cladding do not need an EWS1 form, clearing the way for up to nearly 450,000 flat owners to sell, move or remortgage their homes.

While building owners are already legally required to undertake fire risk assessments on all blocks of flats, following supplementary guidance published by the Government today, RICS will be working with lenders, valuers and fire safety bodies to develop new advice for surveyors. This will enable surveyors to take a more proportionate approach and reduce the number of buildings where an EWS1 assessment is needed.

Further, the Government has announced nearly £700,000 to train more assessors, speeding up the valuation process for homeowners in cases where an EWS1 form is required. This training will be delivered by RICS from January and will mean up to 200 additional assessors will be qualified to carry out the EWS1 assessment within a month, 900 within three months, and 2,000 within six months.

The Government is also exploring ways to address ongoing concerns around the availability of professional indemnity insurance and welcomes industry’s progress on developing a portal where lenders, valuers and leaseholders will be able to find out if their building already has an existing EWS1, thereby reducing the demand for duplicate forms.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Through no fault of their own, some flat-owners have been unable to sell or re-mortgage their homes - and this cannot be allowed to continue.

That's why the Government has secured agreement that the EWS1 form will not be needed on buildings where there is no cladding; providing certainty for the almost 450,000 homeowners who may have felt stuck in limbo. However, this is only part of a wider solution and we continue to support those homeowners who do have cladding on their buildings and where there is still more to do.

I welcome the support we have received from RICS and industry to resolve this matter and will be working urgently with lenders to resolve these challenges, ensuring that EWS1 forms are requested only where absolutely necessary and that the number of surveyors able to complete them is increased urgently to meet demand.

RICS CEO Sean Tompkins said:

We are aware of the severe impact this has had on some homeowners and we agree that buildings without cladding should not be subject to the process. We will be taking forward work with industry on this.

Further, we recognise the acute market shortage of fire engineers to carry out EWS1 assessments and welcome the Government's support on working with us to upskill other regulated professions, such as Chartered Building Surveyors, to create additional capacity in the market.