



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH

**Minister of State for  
Europe and the Americas**

24 December 2018

Tom Tugendhat MP  
Chair, Foreign Affairs Select Committee  
House of Commons  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Tom,

Thank you for your letter of 18 December about Bangladesh. I am replying on behalf of the Foreign Secretary and as FCO duty Minister.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been consistent and clear that we want to see a free, fair and inclusive election in Bangladesh without violence. The Foreign Secretary met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during the UN General Assembly in New York in September, and expressed his concerns regarding the conduct of the election and on freedom of expression more broadly in Bangladesh.

Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific, The Rt Hon Mark Field MP, has repeatedly engaged the Government of Bangladesh to urge a free and fair election, and did the same with opposition leaders during his visit in July. Minister Field met Bangladeshi Minister for Information, Tarana Halim, on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> December to discuss the election. He expressed UK concerns regarding recent political violence in Bangladesh, pressure on freedom of expression and the importance of proper election observation.

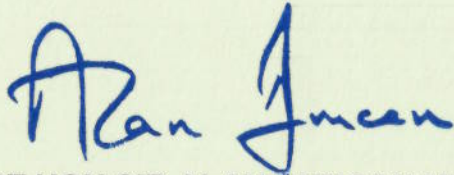
Our concerns regarding democratic freedoms in Bangladesh, including freedom of expression, are long-standing. Bangladesh remains a Human Rights Priority Country for the FCO. We have consistently raised our concerns with the Government of Bangladesh, particularly on extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, and freedom of expression, including at the UN Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights on Bangladesh in May.

The UK is supporting local observation of the election through DFID funding, and we also supported the EU's Election Expert Mission. We have encouraged international observation from other international partners, including the US. The Bangladesh Election Commission has a critical role to play and it must be allowed to carry out its work free from political influence.

In Parliament on Thursday 20 December, Minister Field condemned the political violence that has taken place across Bangladesh in the run-up to the election and expressed concern that some NGOs have not yet received permission to observe the elections. He was clear that election observers must be allowed to carry out their critical work.

Our officials at the British High Commission in Dhaka and in London will continue to monitor the situation in Bangladesh closely.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Alan Duncan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Alan" and the last name "Duncan" clearly distinguishable.

**RT HON SIR ALAN DUNCAN MP**