



## Foreign Affairs Committee

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From the Chair

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon  
Minister of State for the Overseas Territories  
Foreign & Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH

5 March 2019

*Dear Lord Ahmad,*

During the course of our Overseas Territories inquiry, we received evidence to suggest authorities in the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) are struggling to cope with the number of illegal migrants trying to reach the territory from Haiti. Indeed we understand that a Haitian sloop that landed on Salt Cay in January, carrying 213 people. The Committee were concerned by these reports. While we understand that border management and immigration are a devolved matter in TCI, there are clear national security implications if the TCI authorities do not have sufficient resources to police the border.

The Committee would be grateful if you could provide us with information about the scale of the problem, what the FCO is doing to support the TCI government's management of the issue, and what you are doing through the FCO network to facilitate cooperation and dialogue between the relevant authorities in TCI and Haiti. We would be grateful if you could provide this information by Friday 22 March.

I will be placing this letter and your response in the public domain.

**Tom Tugendhat MP**  
Chair



Foreign &  
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King Charles Street  
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Minister of State

Tom Tugendhat, MP  
Foreign Affairs Committee  
House of Commons,  
London,  
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20 March 2019

Dew Jon

Thank you for your letter of 5 March asking about the scale of the problem of illegal migration of Haitians to the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) and what the FCO is doing to support the Turks and Caicos Islands Government (TCIG).

This is a long-standing problem the roots of which can be found in the continuing challenges faced by Haiti; but TCIG's ability to respond to illegal arrivals by sea was exacerbated by the hurricanes in 2017 when the radar which plays a key role in the detection of sloops was damaged. In 2017, TCIG repatriated 1335 illegal Haitian migrants. Between January and March 2018, there were ten landings; each sloop can carry up to 100 passengers. Since the beginning of this year, there have been around ten sloop landings, the latest on 5 March. The landings are usually on Providenciales, but as you mention there was a landing on Salt Cay. TCI authorities have captured and repatriated around 664 Haitians so far this year.

In March 2018 the number of sloop incursions spiked sharply with more in prospect (information suggested perhaps as many as eighteen would be leaving from Haiti). The TCI Deputy Governor alerted FCO officials, who immediately responded. The Royal Fleet Auxiliary Mounts Bay, which patrols the Caribbean all year round and is funded by the MOD, changed course to head to TCI waters and patrolled there for three days, to successfully act as a deterrent. The FCO also liaised with the Cayman Premier, who kindly agreed that the Royal Cayman Islands Police Force helicopter and pilots would deploy to TCI for five days to assist operations. This was funded from the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). The TCI radar repairs and upgrade were completed shortly after the crisis in April 2018 and upgraded at a cost of £379,998



from the CSSF. This included training for the staff on how to make the most of the new equipment.

As follow-up to the crisis, the FCO offered, and TCIG accepted, a visit from UK Border Force (BF) and Immigration Enforcement (IE) officials. The officials spent ten days in TCI in May 2018 in order to carry out a scoping review, to assess the illegal migration issues within the islands, both with respect to the in-country immigration enforcement element and the operating model and capability at the TCI Border, including a review of processes and systems to see where efficiencies and improvements could be made. The visit was also funded from the CSSF. After meeting with all stakeholders and reviewing facilities the team produced a report with sixty- four recommendations, covering elements such as staffing, equipment, and training. Along with the report the officials also offered a CSSF funded follow-up visit of three months to carry out training for TCI Border Control and Immigration Officers and to help implement the report recommendations. Although this offer was not taken up, TCIG has been working on implementing the report recommendations. The Premier responded on 25 October to my earlier letter and offer and provided me with an update on progress made against the recommendations. I was pleased to hear that all the recommendations were accepted and action had been taken on the most urgent ones. IE officials amended their offer, based on a request from the Premier.

The UK IE officials will revisit TCI at the end of March to assess progress and help produce a job description for a change manager, who will be responsible for producing strategies and the implementation of the remainder of the recommendations. Then in April, two TCI Border Control senior officials will visit the UK for training in leadership awareness and mentoring. To complement this work, another CSSF funded project led by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and BF will visit TCI at the end of March to carry out an Operational Needs Assessment of maritime security and the border integrity capabilities, with the aim of identifying areas for potential projects for future bids to the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund.

In July 2018 I issued a Letter of Entrustment to the Governor (and by extension to TCIG) to allow talks with the Bahamian Government on potential cooperation on illegal migration. I understand a Bahamian delegation, led by the Bahamian Foreign Secretary, visited TCI on 26 January. I understand that TCIG will be following up on the dialogue with the Bahamians. I have not engaged directly with Haitian authorities, given their ongoing challenges. However, most recently I wrote to the Deputy Premier suggesting TCI may wish to work with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The IOM is very active in Haiti, working throughout the country, particularly with vulnerable groups. They have recently appointed two high profile, Haitian, IOM goodwill ambassadors who will visit Haiti soon to support IOM's activities and promote safe migration, the fight against trafficking and smuggling, awareness campaigns with local communities, and the engagement of Haiti's diaspora. I offered to facilitate an introduction.

In December 2018, I signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Cayman Premier to jointly fund a second- longer range- helicopter, which will be capable of extended deployments to support neighbouring territories, including TCI, in times of need. This is due to arrive with the Cayman Islands at the end of March.



I remain supportive of TCIG and its efforts to combat illegal migration and will continue to explore ways in which UKG can continue to assist.

Yours truly  
Tariq

**LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON**

Minister of State for the Overseas Territories

Prime Minister's Special Representative for Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict

Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief