



Foreign Affairs Committee

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Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Foreign
and Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London
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29 January 2019

Dear Foreign Secretary,

I am writing regarding the continued suspension of UK direct flights to and from Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt. As you know, the Government took this measure in November 2015, following the bombing of a Russian passenger plane that had departed from Sharm El Sheikh's airport. I understand that since then the UK has worked with the Egyptian authorities to improve security systems at the airport. Many other European countries have now resumed direct flights.

The suspension has damaged Egypt's tourism industry, and there are also ramifications for the UK's relationship with the country, which is a vitally important strategic partner in the region. I would appreciate your assurance that it is the Government's view that, once it is safe to do so, flights should resume without delay.

Further, I would be grateful if you could answer the following questions:

- How frequently does the FCO review its advice regarding air travel to Sharm El Sheikh?
- What is the FCO's assessment of the measure's impact on UK-Egyptian relations?
- Has the Government set out to the Egyptian authorities the additional steps that are needed before flights can resume?

The Committee generally publishes its correspondence with ministers. However, given the security implications of this issue, I would of course be happy to discuss how this correspondence should be treated. I would be very grateful if you could respond by 15 February.

Tom Tugendhat MP
Chair

14 February 2019

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

Dear Tom,

Thank you for letter of 29 January, regarding the suspension of UK direct flights to and from Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt.

Our advice regarding air travel to Sharm el-Sheikh is kept under constant review. Our security experts take account of many factors in providing advice on whether it is safe to fly to certain destinations and the Government has not yet concluded that it is right to lift the restrictions on direct UK flights to and from Sharm el-Sheikh.

We appreciate the impact of the decision taken to suspend flights to and from Sharm el-Sheikh. Despite this, our bilateral relations continue to develop, with the UK and Egypt cooperating closely on security, commerce and education. We are encouraged to see an increase in UK tourist numbers to Egypt. An estimated 415,000 UK tourists visited Egypt in 2018: an increase of a third from 2017 (319,000). There are 61 direct flights between the UK and Egypt per week.

Officials in London and Cairo continue regular discussions on the restrictions with the Egyptian authorities. We do this in a spirit of cooperation. Experts from the UK's Department for Transport work closely with the Egyptian authorities to achieve high levels of security at airports. Foreign Office Ministers have underlined the UK's commitment to work with the Egyptian Government in reaching a position that allows for full resumption of direct flights. We look forward to achieving this as soon as the situation allows.

THE RT HON JEREMY HUNT MP