Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your letter of 10 November on the Government’s role in the global HIV and Tuberculosis (TB) response.

Securing a more effective and ambitious global response to killer diseases, particularly HIV and TB is a high personal priority for me. I really welcomed your ideas about what more the UK could do to demonstrate greater international leadership and plan to give these serious considerations. I have also discussed with Nick Herbert, and invited him to suggest areas where the UK should be more active and ambitious.

I believe that we can and should provide more vocal leadership in the global fight against TB, and will personally take every opportunity to do so.

Incredible progress has been made in the fight against HIV and TB, and as a result, millions of lives have been saved. TB treatment averted 49 million deaths between 2000 and 2015 and over 17 million people are now receiving treatment for HIV. However, I agree that the job is not yet done. In 2015 alone, AIDS killed over 1.1 million people and TB killed 1.4 million. Many of these deaths could have been prevented. Too many people are still being infected, too many people are unable to access the treatment they need, and it is the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people who are at greatest risk.

The two diseases together are, of course, an even more deadly combination – people who are HIV positive are up to 30 times more likely to develop active TB than those who are not, and about one in four deaths among people with HIV are due to TB.

The UK is making a substantive contribution. Our pledge of a £1.1 billion investment to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria makes us the
second largest donor during the fifth replenishment period. This support will help provide treatment to 800,000 people with TB and enough lifesaving anti-retroviral therapy for 1.3 million people living with HIV.

Our investments in research and support to UNITAID will ensure we improve access to medicines, diagnostics and prevention for those affected by HIV and TB in low-income countries. They will bring promising new health technologies to scale faster and cheaper, helping us move towards the ambitions set out in the Global Goals.

We are supporting a number of product development partnerships, such as the Global Alliance for TB Drug Development and Aeras, to develop new drugs and vaccines for TB. We also support the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative for vaccines for HIV, and the International Partnership for Microbicides developing HIV prevention products for use by women.

The portfolio includes new products suitable for people who suffer with combined TB and HIV infections. In addition, DFID also supports the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics, a partnership that has developed 5 new TB tests, all of which are approved by the WHO and have been scaled up in over 27 countries as part of the Expand TB Programme.

The governments of the countries in which we work are essential partners, as are civil society organisations active in the fight against TB and HIV. The UK is a founding supporter of the Robert Carr Civil Society Networks Fund, and has pledged up to £9 million until 31 March 2018 to support the grassroots response for inadequately served groups affected by HIV.

Through our multilateral and bilateral investments, we will continue to concentrate on areas that are most under-resourced, with a particular focus on key populations – adolescents, girls and women, men who have sex with men, sex workers, injecting drug users, transgender groups and prisoners. Our investments include strengthening health systems to improve access to quality healthcare, and tackling the broader drivers of the epidemics, such as stigma, discrimination and gender inequality, which influence behaviour and limit people’s ability to make healthy choices.

It is important that we match our substantial financial and research investments with an equally powerful voice on the international stage. We need to secure a global consensus on how to implement our commitment to end these epidemics.
The international community needs in particular to further step up efforts to tackle TB. I have made it a high priority for DFID to help make this happen – especially in the run-up to World TB Day on 24 March.

I was also encouraged to hear Dr Motsoaledi’s call for the first ever UN High Level Meeting on TB. The UK supports this call and will use our influence globally to secure agreement to this meeting, and then use all our levers and work hard to make it a success.

I also agree that the UK must be present and vocal at major international HIV events and I have asked officials to keep me updated on plans for 2017 and beyond. I am delighted that Lord Bates gave the keynote address at the STOPAIDS World AIDS Day conference at the Impact Hub Westminster on 30 November 2016. I hope this will be seen as a strong signal that the UK Government will not be silent when a loud voice is needed, particularly around addressing stigma and protecting the rights of HIV key populations.

Thank you again for sharing your ideas and for pushing for a stronger, more ambitious UK role in the global HIV and TB response.

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Secretary of State