

8 January 2019

Tom Tugendhat MP
Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
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Foreign &
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Secretary of State

Der Tom,

Thank you for your letter of 2 January on the Government's work to rescue victims of forced marriage. I will respond in due course to your detailed questions, but I wanted to notify you of an immediate policy change.

After careful consideration, I have decided that victims of forced marriage who are helped to return to the UK by the Forced Marriage Unit will no longer be asked to take out a loan for their repatriation costs.

This joint unit was established in 2005 because the Government of the day recognised that British citizens who are forced into marriage constituted a category of exceptionally vulnerable people in need of specific help. I have decided to apply this principle to the treatment of repatriation costs.

Whereas the Foreign Office rightly expects that adult Britons who receive consular assistance will, in general, pay for their own travel home, victims of forced marriage may have endured particular suffering. They will often have travelled abroad against their wishes, or under false pretences.

From now on, none of those who are assisted by the Forced Marriage Unit - and would previously have been offered a loan - will have to cover the costs of their repatriation. Where possible, the Government will continue to seek to ensure the costs fall on the perpetrators by means of Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPOs).

In 2016-17, the Forced Marriage Unit helped 82 individuals to return to this country, often after rescuing them from deplorable conditions. The vast majority had their repatriation costs met by others; only a small minority made use of Foreign Office loans.

The Government has agreed to ensure that those victims who have outstanding loans will have no further cost fall to them. Their passports will also be unblocked.

Successive Governments of all parties have sought to do the right thing and help victims of forced marriage. I pay tribute to the dedicated staff of the Forced Marriage Unit - the first of its kind in the world - who carry out profoundly necessary work.

Our treatment of vulnerable Britons abroad should always be guided by compassion. So I am glad to make this policy change.

A central pillar of our foreign policy is to protect British nationals overseas, particularly those who have suffered. I hope you will agree that we have taken a step in the right direction today.

Yours ever

Jeremy

THE RT HON JEREMY HUNT MP