



Department for
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Dear Harriet,

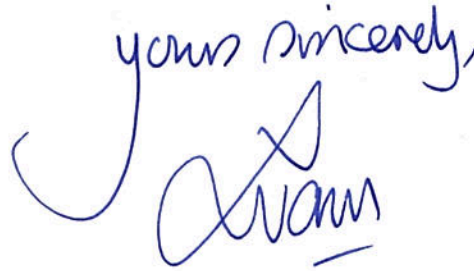
Thank you for your letter of 13 September. I am happy to provide an initial response to the questions made by the Committee ahead of the launch of the enquiry. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to you.

While the UK is still a member of the EU, all rights and obligations will apply. We will continue to support a trade liberalising agenda and the UK will participate constructively in EU decision making on trade issues. This includes any human rights requirements in the trade deals to which the UK is currently party as a Member State of the EU.

The UK has a strong history in protecting human rights, and was the first country to produce a national action plan for the implementation of the UN guiding principles on business and human rights; we are now also the first to both review and publish an update, which was completed in May 2016. This update Action Plan includes support for the EU commitment to consider the possible human rights impacts of free trade agreements (FTAs) and incorporate human rights clauses as appropriate. Alongside this, the Transparency in Supply Chains provision in the Modern Slavery Act ensures that major businesses who operate in the UK must publish annual statements on the action they are taking against modern slavery in their global supply chain.

The UK has long supported the promotion of our values globally, including via our trade policy initiatives. Britain's exit from the EU provides us with an opportunity to explore how we can best use FTAs to uphold these values whilst recognising the need for a balanced and proportionate approach. My Department is currently developing proposals on how to best approach this and other important issues in UK FTAs, and will engage fully with a broad range of stakeholders. The Government is looking at a range of options to allow UK business and international partners to continue to benefit from existing trade preferences via interim adoption of EU deals which are in force. How we deal with human rights within these arrangements will be a key issue.

I look forward to further discussion with you on these issues as our policy in this area develops.

yours sincerely,


THE RT HON LIAM FOX MP
Secretary of State, Department for International Trade
& President of the Board of Trade