

James Sunderland MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

June 2020

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about racism in the US, UK and beyond. This is a very serious issue.

To be clear, I was appalled by the treatment of George Floyd in police custody and his death remains a disgrace. The pictures beamed around the world are abhorrent, the actions of the Minneapolis Police will rightly result in appropriate criminal charges and I understand the anger and grief that is felt not just in America, but here in the UK too. I also fully support the right to protest peacefully, lawfully and in accordance with the current rules on social distancing. Having tracked this key issue carefully all week, I will of course continue to take a close interest and raise the concerns that many constituents have shared with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and right across Parliament.

In line with what other MPs have stated, it is incumbent on us all to reflect upon this sad moment and consider with renewed vigour how black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people are treated here in the UK. Racism and religious intolerance have no place in our society and we all have a part to play in tackling it. Our country also has a wealth of diversity that is always to be celebrated and cherished.

I have therefore been heartened by the solidarity shown by so many people to bring all communities together, whether that be colleagues in Parliament, the projection of purple lighting on buildings or those from all walks of life 'taking a knee'. I have also been moved by the number of British people wanting to demonstrate their support for the Black Lives Matter campaign, which I fully endorse. But the strength of feeling in the wake of George Floyd's killing serves as a reminder that work remains to be done here in the UK and that staying silent is never going to be enough.

Several national and local initiatives are available to support these campaigns and I urge you to get involved. Well-established mechanisms are in place across Whitehall and within all UK police forces to address racially motivated discrimination, improve policing and stamp out racist bullying in schools. Some of these flow from a Hate Crime Action Plan, which you can read more about here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/hate-crime-action-plan-2016. With this in mind, I know that ministers are aware of the real strength of feeling here and will do everything in their gift to solve.

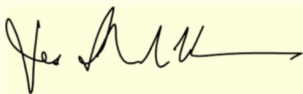
I also welcome the recent report from Public Health England (PHE) regarding the impact of Covid-19 on the BAME community. This confirms that people from BAME backgrounds are at greater risk of becoming seriously ill with Covid-19 and the figures are very worrying. This disproportionate impact has been recognised by my colleagues in Government, not least by the Prime Minister, and I look forward to the response from the Department for Health and Social Care on what can be done.

The tragic loss of Belly Mujinga has also provided further urgency for this report to be considered and then mitigated. My personal thoughts remain with her family and I am glad that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has today been asked to review the evidence in recognition of wider public concern. The British Transport Police (BTP) will continue to support her relatives with specialist officers as they come to terms with the loss of their much-loved mother and wife. And I agree that the circumstances of her infection were simply appalling. No-one should ever have to face that.

Finally, could I please assure you that the UK Government takes its export control responsibilities seriously and operates one of the most robust and transparent export control regimes in the world. Every export licence application is considered on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. This consolidated criteria provides a thorough risk assessment framework, requiring the Government to think carefully about the impact of providing equipment and its capabilities. My clear understanding is that the Government will not grant an export licence if it is deemed to be inconsistent with this criteria and the UK has one of the most ethical export regimes in the world. I have ensured that Ministers are aware of all points raised.

For the record, racial and religious intolerance has no place in our society. Having been a proud Diversity and Inclusion Champion in my previous employment, I am clear that I will also continue to support all efforts to end racism in all its vile forms as your MP. We must and will do better.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact me. The appalling circumstances affecting George Floyd, Belly Mujinga and so many others remain a stain on humanity and their tragic deaths must not be in vain. I hope that all of our communities will continue to come together to fight injustice.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Sunderland', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

James Sunderland MP
Member of Parliament for the Bracknell Constituency
Bracknell, Crowthorne, Finchampstead, Sandhurst and Wokingham Without