



UK Mission
Geneva

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From the Permanent Representative
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Ms Maria Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona
Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

Mr Olivier De Schutter
Special Rapporteur on the right to food

Ms Raquel Rolnik
Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to
an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context

OHCHR
Palais Wilson
8-14 Avenue de la Paix
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Dear Special Rapporteurs,

Thank you for your letter of 20 May 2014.

The British Government has a long standing commitment to supporting human rights, and we play a lead role internationally, including at the UN.


I would like to reiterate our strong support for the work of the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Treaty Bodies and the Special Rapporteur mandate holders.

In your letter, you suggest that the British Government's fiscal austerity programme undermines the human rights of British citizens. The UK does not agree with your assertion that we are in breach of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, or that cuts to public spending amount to "retrogressive measures". Fiscal austerity is not in itself a breach of fundamental human rights. On the contrary, by returning the economy to a sounder footing, the UK is seeking to improve the lives of all its citizens. The British Government is committed to ensure that resources are targeted towards those in greatest need. The UK's Equality Act requires that the impact of policies on protected groups is thoroughly considered by Government as part of the decision making process.

You imply in your letter and annex that Government economic policy has disproportionately affected the poorest in society and advantaged wealthier families. In fact, the richest households continue to make the greatest contribution towards reducing the deficit. The latest OECD figures show that the UK's social expenditure is higher than the OECD average, per head and on a percentage of GDP. For example, the UK spent 2.4% of its GDP on disabled people's benefits, in the top 3 of OECD figures.

We were disappointed that your letter cites generalised rather than specific allegations with few sources cited. It is therefore difficult for us to respond in detail. I hope however that the information above sets out the UK's position. Detail on specific Government policies as well as on proposals still under public consultation can be found at www.gov.uk. Parliamentary reports e.g. from Select Committees and records of debate can be found at www.parliament.uk.

In addition, I and my colleagues in the UK Mission would be happy to meet you, collectively or individually, to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely,


Karen Pierce CMG
Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN and Other International Organisations, Geneva