

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles St
London
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cc. Rt Hon Greg Clark MP
Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
1 Victoria St
London
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Thursday 17 November 2016

Dear Mr Johnson,

Re: Hosting the Sudanese state minister for investment on FCO website

In common with many in the UK's Sudanese diaspora and NGO communities, we note with alarm the British Ambassador to Sudan Michael Aron's blog on which the Sudanese state minister for investment, Osama Faisal, recently wrote a guest post titled 'Doing business in Sudan'. This detailed the results of his trip to the UK to attend a conference hosted by the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on 'Shaping Business Environments for Global Growth and Prosperity'.¹

While the UK is unlike the US in applying sanctions to the country, we wish to remind you of your department's previous commitments concerning trade with and to Sudan. I would like to bring to your attention an article in 2010² which highlighted the duplicity of the Conservative party in opposition calling Darfur "the world's worst humanitarian crisis" before going on to host a high-level trade delegation from Khartoum once in government. In 2012, this issue was raised again by establishing the government's hypocrisy of criticising the regime's role in ongoing violence in Darfur, and for indiscriminate and targeted bombing in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, while promoting trade via a brochure produced by what was then UK Trade and Investment.³ On both occasions, we were assured by your colleagues numerous times that the policy of the British government was not to pursue trade opportunities with Sudan but to only respond to requests for information.

There has been no change in the situation on the ground to warrant the current transformation in approach, which amounts to offering a Sudanese state actor a platform to lobby directly for UK investment at a UK government-hosted event, while obscuring the dreadful human rights situation in the country that acts as the most significant barrier to the success of its business environment. Allowing Mr Faisal to obscure this fact and to state that a lack of basic infrastructure like water is the primary challenge facing its trade community is disingenuous at best, and dangerous at worst. It also denigrates the suffering of the Sudanese people under this government and the wanton human rights abuses it has perpetrated.

We wish to remind you that the Sudanese state allocates at least three-quarters of its government spending to its bloated security sector, compared to the less than ten percent routinely offered to the agriculture, manufacturing, education, and health sectors combined.⁴ The country has recently been the site of protests against meteoric rises in

¹ <http://blogs.fco.gov.uk/michaelaron/2016/11/03/doing-business-in-sudan-thoughts-from-the-sudanese-state-minister-of-investment/>

² <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/wanted-by-the-hague-for-genocide-and-by-william-hague-as-a-trading-partner-2094575.html>

³ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/government-accused-of-double-standards-on-sudan-7922539.html>

⁴ http://www.enoughproject.org/files/report_KhartoumAchillesHeel_Suliman_August2016.pdf

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the price of consumer goods resulting from this financial mismanagement. Sudan is currently ranked by Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2015) as 165 out of 168.

We urge you to stand by your department's previous commitment to respond only to requests for information regarding trade with and to Sudan, and to cease offering a platform for its officials and hosting events encouraging investment there. If the UK is dedicated to creating fertile conditions for trade, we should first be focusing on establishing a meaningful cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access, and then demanding budgetary openness from the Sudanese government, as well as greater levels of state spending on basic and social infrastructure. Additionally, if HMG's previous commitment on trade no longer stands, can you confirm that this new approach be made public and transparent?

Like you, we sincerely hope for a time when all Sudanese are able to prosper from the country's enormous resources, both natural and human. We also would agree that there needs to be a plurality of voices in Sudan if it is to thrive in the global community, including figures like Mr Faisal. However, to present the country as open to British trade before there is lasting, inclusive and sustained peace is to put the cart before the horse, and to risk legitimising and emboldening a regime guilty of the gravest human rights abuses against its marginalised, peripheral populations.

Yours sincerely,



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