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25 January 2021

Dear Lewis Macdonald MSP,

I refer to your letter of 10 December 2020 regarding the UK Government's announcement, on 25 November 2020, that they propose to cut their commitment to Overseas Development Assistance from 0.7% to 0.5% of GNI.

The First Minister, and I, have made it clear that we find this decision deplorable and we have called upon the Prime Minister to reverse this decision immediately. The Scottish Government released a statement on 25 November making our views clear.

I have been keen to raise this, and a number of other issues of concern, with the UK Government. I had written to UK Minister for Africa James Duddridge on 30 September seeking a meeting to discuss both the Scottish Government review of International Development, and the UK Government's broader approach to international development including how the assessment of national interest will influence international development priorities. That meeting request was declined. I wrote again to James Duddridge on 14 December, asking him to reconsider his decision not to meet with me, and this further request has also now been refused.

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs has also recently written to the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, Dominic Raab, to express the Scottish Government's grave concern at the announcement of the reduction in the legal commitment to invest 0.7% of the UK GNI in Overseas Development Assistance to 0.5% this year. In that letter, Mr Russell also noted that this cut in ODA is, of course, on top of the £2.9 billion reduction in aid spend because of the fall in GNI. This therefore amounts to a cut of almost £5 billion of ODA spend this year and is a major blow to vulnerable people and communities around the world who would otherwise have benefited from UK aid. It also comes at a time when there is evidently no urgent need to cut aid spend, given that an additional £16.5bn has been found for increased spending on defence. Mr Russell has also raised that the refusal of my request for a meeting, to discuss amongst other things the UK Government's proposed cut in ODA spending, be reconsidered.

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Whilst we are all aware of the current COVID-19 pressures and EU exit negotiations which are no doubt occupying UK Government, I will continue to push for a meeting at the earliest opportunity, so I can raise these concerns.

Yours sincerely



JENNY GILRUTH

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