

14 December 2016



I'm writing this open letter to provide an update to all those who have contacted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in recent months concerning the case of British national, Andargachew Tsege, currently detained in Ethiopia.

Consular assistance is at the heart of what the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does. The volume and complexity of cases is staggering, but we try to ensure we manage each and every case with professionalism, empathy and care.

The British Government continues to take Mr Tsege's case extremely seriously. I personally raised Mr Tsege's case on numerous occasions with my former Ethiopian counterpart, and recently followed this up in my first call with the new Foreign Minister, Dr Workneh. In addition, Baroness Anelay raised Mr Tsege's case with the Ethiopian Communications Minister in September. Our Ambassador is also heavily engaged, taking every opportunity to raise Mr Tsege's case at the highest levels with the Ethiopian Government. The Ethiopian Government are in no doubt over our concern for Mr Tsege and the priority we place upon his wellbeing.

I am aware of the suggestion that the UK Government should directly call for Mr Tsege's release. As my predecessor has previously stated, Britain does not interfere in the legal systems of other countries by challenging convictions, any more than we would accept interference in our judicial system. We do, however, lobby strongly and consistently against the application of the death penalty, and against the carrying out of such sentences when they are imposed. Our consular priority at this time is to ensure Mr Tsege's wellbeing and access to legal advice, and to ensure that the death sentence is not carried out.

Our Ambassador conducted a consular visit on 11 November 2016. During her one hour meeting with Mr Tsege she was reassured of his wellbeing, despite recent concerns raised. At the same time the Ambassador was able to hand a list of local lawyers to Mr Tsege. We consider this an important step toward ensuring he has access to legal advice to discuss his options under Ethiopian law. Prime Minister Hailemariam committed to this step in June when he met with my predecessor as Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond. This step was only achieved through sustained high level engagement, and we will continue to press the Ethiopians to abide by their commitment to allow Mr Tsege access to legal advice.

We are in close contact with Mr Tsege's family. His case remains a high priority and we continue to keep our approach to this case under review.

**THE RT HON BORIS JOHNSON MP**