Rt. Hon. Dominic Raab

Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

29th January 2021

Dear Dominic Raab,

**Intervention required with deteriorating human rights situation with respect to farmers peacefully protesting in India**

We are deeply concerned with the deteriorating human rights situation with respect to farmers peacefully protesting in India against the enactment of three new controversial farming laws and appeal to you to carry out an urgent assessment and intervene on our behalf.

Two months earlier farmers from across India, especially Punjab were initially prevented from peacefully taking their protest to Delhi with roads being dug up and barriers installed, use of tear gas and water cannon and police using batons to beat farmers indiscriminately.

Farmers have been camped outside Delhi for over two months in very difficult circumstances and around 150 have died. The situation has significantly deteriorated following the protests in Delhi on the 26th January 2021.

We are concerned with the gross violation of human rights, harassment of the elderly, women and children and denial of freedom of expression and protest. The right to protest peacefully is an internationally enshrined fundamental human right. We urge you to take immediate action in expressing our collective concerns on behalf of British citizens to the Government of India and to raise the matter at the United Nations.

Despite the Supreme Court of India observing that the farmers have a fundamental right to protest the police and paramilitary forces are now indiscriminately detaining people, slapping charges of terrorism, sedition and anti-national conduct on hundreds of people associated with the farmers protest.

Protesting, raising religious flags (that were also present at the official Republic Day Parade), responding to police vandalising tractors and vehicles, putting up barricades, using tear gas, beating protesters with batons and using live ammunition against unarmed protesters does not constitute terrorism or sedition on the part of protesters. The protesters simply want the three farms laws repealed. Also, the protesters who broke away from the main protest, were carrying the Indian National Flag.

There are credible reports that some detained people have been tortured. Families are being ‘lathi charged’. The Government is now exercising extraordinary powers to disperse farmers protest and deny them the rights to freely protest, which is of considerable concern as the protesters are camped at various protest sites on Delhi’s borders. The police and paramilitary forces are encouraging and watching as BJP mobs attack peaceful protesters camped on the outskirts of Delhi.

The internet has been suspended at certain sites and electricity and water supplies cut off to protesters that include many elderly and vulnerable.

The UK Government has rightly and repeatedly raised concerns around the right to peacefully protest with regard to the Chinese Government’s crackdowns on peaceful protesters in Hong Kong. You have noted that the police in Hong Kong often provoke young people to react emotionally and that should not take away from the vast majority who have been protesting peacefully in Hong Kong.

Similarly, in India, most farmers and their supporters have been peacefully protesting for over two months and this was also the case on 26th January 2021 despite police provocation.

There is evidence of the Indian authorities possibly relaxing security in some places and police provoking young people. It should not therefore be a surprise that some protesters responded to the police provocation. This should not be used as an excuse to crack down on peaceful protesters.

We are aware that you are fully conversant with the issue that has led to the farmers dispute. In summary, the Indian government has decided to introduce controversial legislation without proper consultation to change the way farming is done in India. While any law is ultimately an internal matter of India you must support the right to peacefully protest.

The farmers are demanding for the law to be repealed and start consultations to enact policies beneficial to all sectors in the farming industry. The Supreme Court of India has also imposed an interim stay on the new laws, but they are not yet repealed.

At this stage, our greatest concern is for the safety of families, elderly, women, young people and the farmers who have been leading the protests.

The Indian authorities should have made appropriate security arrangements for the protest on 26th January and worked with the farmer leaders to ensure the protests took place peacefully. We believe the Indian Government and its security services have been negligent. We are now very concerned that the Indian Government is using the events of 26th January to violate human rights.

We urge you to raise these matters urgently with the Indian Government and your counterpart. The Indian authorities must act with restraint and resume peaceful dialogue with the farmers. We also ask you to pursue this matter with appropriate authorities and forums at the United Nations.

This letter is being copied to local MPs.

Yours sincerely,