



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office



Department
for International
Development

6 April 2020

Derek Thomas
Member of Executive Council
The Castle
Jamestown
St Helena Island
STHL 1ZZ
By email to: connie.johnson@sainthelena.gov.sh

Dear Derek

Thank you for your letter of 31 March raising concerns about testing capability in St Helena and the susceptibility of the island if COVID-19 does arrive.

I understand your concern and I can assure you that we are doing all we can to ensure the Overseas Territories (OTs) have the resources they need at this difficult time. The UK is resolute in its commitment to support the people of St Helena despite the difficult situation we are facing in the UK, where we have almost 40,000 confirmed cases. I am very pleased to hear there are no confirmed cases in St Helena at this time.

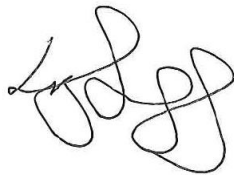
My officials are working with Public Health England (PHE) and Crown Agents (CA) to source and supply Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), testing equipment, test kits, medical equipment and medical staff for the OTs. There have been a number of challenges, including the global shortages of PPE and test kits and the closure of many of the usual access routes, but we have made good progress sourcing these supplies. A consignment of PPE for St Helena has already been despatched to Ascension Island for onward transmission to St Helena on the 'MV Helena' next week.

The UK Government has also chartered a flight in mid-April to deliver further essential medical supplies to the island. These include 960 test kits and a compatible Polymerase Chain Reaction machine to analyse the test results locally. The type of Cepheid COVID-19 test-cartridges which would be compatible with the equipment available in the St Helena hospital laboratory are simply not yet available. Procurement of additional laboratory equipment was therefore the quickest way to secure the means for St Helena to test and get results locally. We hope that this flight will also be used to transport additional medical staff recruited to bolster St Helena's capacity.

I can assure you that other OTs are not being given preferential treatment. There are 3 OTs currently already performing COVID-19 testing. They have been able to do this because they already had the required laboratory equipment prior to the emergence of COVID-19. PHE and CA have been working with these OTs to help them obtain the supporting consumable supplies and test kits needed to commence COVID-19 testing on island. This has not, however, been at the expense of sourcing equipment and test kits for all the OTs, including St Helena. The UK Government has done its utmost in a challenging commercial market to ensure that St Helena can start testing locally as soon as possible.

I have already asked my officials to consider urgently with your Financial Secretary whether there is a need to increase DFID's agreed contribution to St Helena's budget to relieve pressure on your public services and allow you to respond to key short term impacts of the crisis.

I hope that you find this reply helpful and that it demonstrates the UK Government's commitment to provide the maximum support possible to St Helena and the other OTs. I have organised a joint teleconference on 7 April with St Helena, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha and Pitcairn and this will be an opportunity to discuss these issues further and any other concerns you may have.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sugg', written in a cursive style.

BARONESS SUGG
Minister for Sustainable Development and the Overseas Territories