

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Secretary of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
Sent by email only

21 December 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

Working visit to Ukraine 9th - 12th December 2022

I have recently returned from a working visit to Kyiv following an invitation to speak at the **Human Rights in Dark Hours** conference, organised by the President's Office. As UK National Ombudsman I was looked after extremely well by the Ukrainian security services and my personal bodyguard, Igor, showed me a picture of him with you in a similar situation a few weeks ago. He sent his regards.

The conference was held at Independence Square metro station, deep underground on 9th December. At this conference, I was introduced to President Zelenskyy, who was the key-note speaker, and I shared a platform with my Ukrainian counterpart, Parliamentary Human Rights Commissioner Lubinets.

With exemplary International Ombudsman Institute President Chris Field I also called upon Speaker Ruslan Stefanchuk, Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada, the Ukrainian Parliament. At this meeting, Speaker Stefanchuk expressed his sincere thanks for the strong support of Ukraine in the field of Human Rights:

“This [visit] is an example of professionalism and courage for the leaders of the worlds human rights institutions. You demonstrate your commitment to the ideals of human rights and freedom not in words, but in deeds.”

I was very impressed with the new Human Rights Commissioner who had called on our offices in Millbank a few weeks ago, and who facilitated the working programme including a day of discussions for me at his own office. Appointed by Speaker Stefanchuk, he is rebuilding the Ombudsman office to be a strong and resilient player in the situation Ukraine finds itself and I had constructive discussions with his staff and members of his Human Rights advisory council. The office is now closely aligned to but fully independent from the Ukrainian Parliament.



Everywhere I went I was thanked for coming and heard repeated appreciation for the early and strong support the United Kingdom is giving to Ukraine. Of course, the Ombudsman is separate and independent from the UK Government but you will want to know that we will be shortly signing an institutional partnership with Ombudsman Lubinets and offering capacity building, work placements in London and Manchester and online seminars to support this important institution. Dmytro Lubinets is grateful for this support. He is also looking for targeted financial support to replace second hand cars, bombed by the Russians in his regional offices. I hope that you will consider support to this valuable institution as part of the UK's international aid programme.

I hope this is helpful. I am happy to provide further briefing when required.

Yours sincerely,

Rob Behrens

Rob Behrens CBE
Ombudsman and Chair
Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

cc:

William Wragg, Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Chris Field, President of the International Ombudsman Institute
Sir Alex Allan, Senior Non-Executive Director, Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman
Sir Philip Barton, Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
Baroness Neville-Rolfe, Minister of State for the Cabinet Office



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