

Lib Dem MP aims to secure for British citizens the legal right to consular assistance abroad with new legislation.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Most British citizens would expect to get help from the UK Government if they run into difficulties when abroad but that's not necessarily the case as, at present, the provision of consular support by the UK Government is decided on a case-by-case basis.

Take for example, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who was held in detention in Iran for almost six years on spying charges.

Her detention was kept high up in the news agenda thanks to the efforts of her husband, Richard Ratcliffe, to maintain pressure on the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office through media coverage. But many others do not have such a high profile.

"In an increasingly dangerous world, British citizens can run into serious difficulties and should have the automatic right to consular assistance, rather than this being left to the discretion of the Foreign Office," said Lib Dems Abroad Chair, George Cunningham.

On Friday (March 1st), a [Private Member's Bill](#), tabled by Liberal Democrat MP Christine Jardine, is set to have its second reading in Parliament. It aims to give British citizens the legal right to consular assistance when they are at risk of torture, death, or human rights abuses.

"I was shocked when I first heard that British citizens, who are locked up abroad on false charges, do not automatically receive support from our foreign consulates or the UK Government," Jardine said.

"It takes the brave and persistent work of people like Richard Ratcliffe and the family of imprisoned Scot Jagtar Singh Johal to get these cases on the government's agenda."

“A legal right to consular assistance would help British nationals who find themselves in dire circumstances while travelling abroad and provide a much clearer route to accountability when things do go wrong,” the Edinburgh West MP added.

Nazanin and her husband were interviewed by Jardine at a moving session at the Scottish Lib Dem Autumn Conference in Edinburgh in November.

“It’s something we’d been calling for, even before Nazanin got home. The system, as it is now, is just unfair. If you make enough noise, you get attention,” Richard Ratcliffe said in a recent newspaper interview.

The bill has already received cross-party support. However, it is now a race against time to bring in landmark protections before the next General Election.

“I am delighted by the amount of interest and support that MPs across parties have shown for this bill and I hope that we can swiftly move this important legislation forward,” Jardine said.

Lib Dems Abroad strongly support Jardine’s bill and are currently encouraging British citizens abroad to register to vote ahead of the UK election.

From mid-January, some 3.5 million British citizens living abroad became eligible to vote, a development which could have a major impact in key marginal seats.

Lib Dems Abroad local party chairs are available for interviews or quotes.

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Notes to editors

- The Liberal Democrats are a UK political party currently with 15 Members of Parliament in the House of Commons and 84 members in the House of Lords.
- Lib Dems Abroad, whose steering committee is chaired by George Cunningham, is made up of *Lib Dems in France*, *Lib Dems in Europe*, and *Lib Dems Overseas*.
- Lib Dems Abroad are already reaching out to British voters overseas to ensure they are fully informed of their voting rights, as requested of UK political parties by the Electoral Commission.

Interview availability

- Lib Dems in Europe Chair (David Sapiro), Lib Dems in France Chair (Jenny Shorten), Stephen Yolland (Australia and New Zealand) and Lib Dems Abroad Steering Committee Chair (George Cunningham, for the rest of the world and the UK) are available for interviews or quotes.

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