

Rt Hon. Rishi Sunak MP
Prime Minister's Office
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

cc: The Rt Hon. James Cleverly, Secretary of State for
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs
The Rt Hon. Stuart Andrew, Parliamentary Under Secretary
of State, DCMS

2 October 2023

Dear Prime Minister,

As Chair of Social Enterprise UK, I am writing on behalf of social enterprises in the UK. As a citizen of the Commonwealth, I am writing on behalf of Professor Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Laureate and founder of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh.

In 1976, Prof Yunus pioneered the provision of collateral free loans to the poor, mostly women, in rural Bangladesh. For creating a new model of microfinance, taken up around the world, Yunus was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize – making him one of only a handful of people to have received the Nobel Prize, the United States Presidential Medal of Freedom and the United States Congressional Gold Medal. Yunus' work has inspired millions, showing how enterprise can fight poverty, how business can be a force for good, and how finance can serve society. He has subsequently set up businesses fighting poverty, creating jobs, delivering healthcare and nutrition, advancing agriculture, education, energy and more – pioneering new models of social business through which profits are directed to people and planet. Yunus is the father of microcredit and social business, and a true global hero.

Yet Prof Yunus also has a close relationship with this country. He has worked with Social Enterprise UK, shared platforms with our leaders, founded the Yunus Centre in Glasgow, inspired our own social entrepreneurs (such as Fair Finance in East London), and strengthened the bonds between the people of the UK and Bangladesh. Encouraged by Yunus' leadership, the UK and Bangladesh have led the way in social enterprise - often together - and enhanced the reputation of both our countries around the world.

Yet in August this year, 188 global leaders - including over 100 Nobel laureates, Barack Obama, former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon - signed an urgent letter calling on the government of Bangladesh under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to stop the "continuous judicial harassment" of Yunus and end his persecution. The letter asked Hasina to

immediately suspend judicial proceedings against Prof Yunus. Meanwhile, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern for the “continued intimidation and harassment of human rights advocates and civil society leaders through legal proceedings in Bangladesh, including Nobel laureate Mohammad Yunus” and the UN has said they are “concerned that smear campaigns against him, often emanating from the highest levels of government, risk undermining his right to a fair trial and due process in line with international standards.”

In response, the Prime Minister Hasina has said that she would welcome international experts and lawyers in Bangladesh to assess the legal proceedings and examine the charges against Yunus. I believe this is where you can play a pivotal role – offering to co-ordinate and provide international expertise to support impartial local experts and ensure the just resolution of the situation. We call on you to help take a few small steps to help bring justice to bear.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Victor Adebawale', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Lord Victor Adebawale CBE
Chair, Social Enterprise UK