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## **INFLUENTIAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE URGES GOVERNMENT TO INVESTIGATE ALLEGATIONS THAT CONSULAR STAFF FAILED TO PROTECT BRITISH VICTIMS OF TORTURE ABROAD**

Foreign Affairs Committee releases report after year-long inquiry into consular services

**London, 24 November 2014** - REDRESS welcomes the findings of [a report released today by the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee](#), which calls on the Government to investigate allegations that consular staff failed to protect British nationals who may have been tortured or mistreated while in detention abroad.

Several British nationals and rights groups working with victims of torture, including REDRESS, made the grave allegations during a year-long inquiry by the Committee into consular services. [In its submissions to the Committee](#), REDRESS noted the sharp increase in reported allegations of ill-treatment of British nationals abroad in recent years, from an average of 50 reports a year in 2005-2010 to 142 reports in 2012. The reports were 95 in 2013, according to the Foreign Office (FCO).

In its report, *Support for British Nationals abroad: The Consular Service*, the Committee said that “any failure to support vulnerable nationals in such circumstances is deplorable” and urged the Government to interview the consular officials involved in the claims and to report back to the Committee with its findings.

**“The UK Government should be doing its utmost to prevent torture abroad, and a starting point is to do more to protect its own citizens from being tortured in foreign states. We hope this important report will result in greater and more transparent efforts being made to do so,”** said Carla Ferstman, REDRESS Director. **“British people in prison or detention abroad are in the most vulnerable position imaginable. They deserve the maximum possible support from consular officials, who are frequently their first and sometimes only contact with the outside world,”** Ferstman added.

REDRESS has raised in the past serious concerns about the level of consular assistance towards British nationals, including in cases outside detention. In December 2013, REDRESS contributed to the formulation of new guidelines for consular staff on how to handle torture and mistreatment cases. These guidelines were reviewed partly as a result of [a complaint against the FCO from a British aid worker](#) – a REDRESS client – who said she had not received adequate support by the UK Embassy in Cairo after being raped by a military official in Egypt. Her complaint was upheld by the Parliamentary Ombudsman in November 2013.

The Committee heard how the FCO was too concerned about limiting expectations and did not take the initiative to help or protect prisoners. Although it has not called on the Government to publish the new guidelines, the Committee has recommended that the FCO

produce a public document which sets out what consular assistance can and cannot be provided so victims and their families can understand better what they can expect. REDRESS has argued that the new guidelines need to be made public and must be properly and consistently implemented in practice.

**For further information please contact** Eva Sanchis, REDRESS Communications Officer, on [eva@redress.org](mailto:eva@redress.org) or +44 20 7793 1777.

**About REDRESS:** REDRESS is an award-winning human rights organisation based in London which works internationally to combat torture by seeking justice and reparation for torture survivors. Since 1992, it has consistently fought for the rights of torture survivors and their families in the UK and abroad and has intervened in a range of leading torture cases.