Dear Secretary of State,

Many congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of State.

We are writing to you as parliamentarians of the APPG for Africa that have a specific interest in mental health provision, innovation and investment in Africa.

In the past decade, the United Kingdom has seen a revolution in the recognition of mental health as an important issue in our national life. It is now common to hear public figures in sport, media, entertainment and politics speaking about their own experiences, and public discussions of mental health and wellbeing now take place regularly, including in Parliament. This is very much welcomed, and has helped reduce stigma and lessen the unnecessary additional burden that people with mental health problems suffer. Besides the leadership of Princes William and Harry, the Government-funded anti-stigma programmes Time To Change in England and See Me in Scotland have played an important role in this.

We need to support the same kind of shift in Africa.

Last November the Royal African Society together with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine co-hosted a major international conference on Mental Health in Africa at the Wellcome Trust in London, drawing on an earlier meeting on this issue in Burkina Faso. Their aim was to highlight this neglected issue, highlight some of the innovative steps African countries are taking to address it, and look at how their efforts could be supported by British research and international donors. Last week the APPG for Africa hosted a concluding parliamentary event to share the findings of these landmark events with policy makers and parliamentarians. We are pleased to enclose here a copy of the briefing paper, which includes recommendations of relevance to DFID and the UK Government.

We would welcome the opportunity to host a meeting with you and those that played a key role in the Parliamentary meeting and are involved in DFID’s future work in this area.
DFID has played a crucial role in the last 5 years in raising the profile on mental health in the UK’s engagement in global health and development work, incorporating it into the UK’s international humanitarian response, and its work on violence against women and girls, and HIV/Aids. DFID has also commissioned a scoping report, and is delivering a learning journey on mental health for the benefit of staff across the Department. We are delighted that as a product of this work, a Topic Guide on Mental Health for Sustainable Development has been published, with a launch scheduled for early April.

Important work has also been done, with others concerned, in preparing a Theory of Change and Position Paper to guide DFID’s future work on mental health. We look forward to these being signed off swiftly as they contain important policy statements that will improve the ability to better integrate, evaluate and scale-up the UK government’s contribution to mental health and well-being in some of the most vulnerable communities in the world, including in Africa.

We applaud the commitment made by DFID and FCO in this area of work, and look forward to hearing back from your office on your availability for a meeting to discuss DFID’s work in this area and the findings of this landmark consultation. We would be grateful if your office could liaise directly with the secretariat for the APPG Africa to arrange this (Henrietta Bailey on baileyh@parliament.uk).

Yours sincerely,

Chi Onwurah MP
Theo Clarke MP
Baroness Barker

cc. James Duddridge MP, Minister for Africa, DFID and FCO

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