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Louise McLornan
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22nd October 2020

Dear Louise McLornan,

Thank you for your correspondence dated 2 October regarding the motion passed by Belfast City Council's Brexit Committee in September. I am responding on behalf of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

I would first like to address the Committee's comments on the UK Internal Market Bill. It is an established principle of international law that a state is obliged to discharge its treaty obligations in good faith. This is, and will always remain, the key principle in informing the UK's approach to international relations. However, in these exceptional circumstances the UK Government has taken limited and reasonable steps in order to deliver the wider objectives recognised in the Ireland and Northern Ireland Protocol itself, which is to protect the Belfast ("Good Friday") Agreement and to maintain and strengthen the UK internal market. Our actions to secure unfettered access for Northern Ireland businesses trading with the rest of the UK reflect precisely those objectives, protecting key markets and supply chains on which so many businesses in Northern Ireland rely.

The Government will continue to work with the EU in the Joint Committee to resolve the issues with the Protocol – that is our overriding priority. However, as a

responsible Government, we cannot allow the gains of the peace process or the smooth functioning of the UK's internal market to inadvertently be compromised by unintended consequences of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

With regards to free trade agreements, we are continuing to engage constructively with the EU and other countries, including the US, so that the UK can seize the opportunities of its new status. Indeed, the UK-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement was agreed in principle on 11 September, which will secure additional benefits beyond the EU-Japan trade deal and will give UK companies exporting to Japan a competitive advantage in a number of areas. It will help to create jobs and drive economic growth throughout the whole of the UK. Northern Ireland stands to benefit and build upon its strong agricultural exports to Japan, with Northern Ireland's agri-food sector benefiting from reduced tariffs on products such as beef. Last year, Northern Ireland meat and meat preparations exports to Japan were £3.6 million.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robin Walker', written in a cursive style.

ROBIN WALKER MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND