



St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
T: 0300 244 4000

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street,
SW1A 2AA

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In May last year the Scottish Government was re-elected on a clear promise to give the people of Scotland the choice of independence. The election also returned a Scottish Parliament with a decisive majority in favour of independence and with a mandate for an independence referendum.

In line with that mandate, we committed last year to work to ensure that a legitimate and constitutional referendum could be held, if the Covid crisis is over, within the first half of this term of the Scottish Parliament.

Your government has made abundantly clear your reluctance to respect that mandate or to respond positively to my previous request for constructive engagement to agree the terms of an Order in Council under Section 30 of the Scotland Act 1998 to put the legal basis of a referendum beyond any doubt.

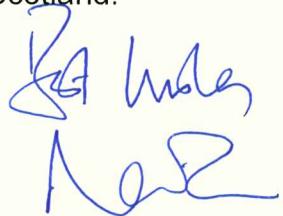
Against that background, the Lord Advocate has, following a request from me, decided to refer to the Supreme Court the question of whether Scottish Parliament legislation for such a referendum relates to reserved matters. The reference is being served on the Advocate General today.

It is a matter of deep regret to me that this action is necessary. In a voluntary union of nations where the people of one nation have voted in elections to give a mandate for a referendum, it is, in my view, unacceptable democratically that the route to a referendum has to be via the courts rather than by co-operation between the UK and Scottish Governments.

Indeed your actions to date call into question the whole idea of the UK as a voluntary partnership.

You and I will never agree on the merits of independence for Scotland. But I would expect any democrat to agree that it is unacceptable for the people of Scotland to be blocked from making that choice given the clear majority for a referendum in the Scottish Parliament.

Although the Court action is in progress, I continue to stand ready to negotiate the terms of a section 30 order with you, as we did with the UK Government in 2012, to respect the mandate given by the people of Scotland.



NICOLA STURGEON