

29 June 2016

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The Rt Hon George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

King Charles Street
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Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 8 June to the Foreign Secretary on behalf of your constituents' about the conflict in Yemen. I am replying as Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East.

I share your constituents' concerns about the crisis in Yemen and the impact it has had on civilians, particularly children. The situation in Yemen remains of deep concern. We all agree on the need for urgent action to prevent a further deterioration and to provide life-saving assistance to the Yemeni population. The UK Government will continue to work hard to improve the humanitarian situation and support peace and stability in Yemen.

The UK supports the Saudi Arabian-led Coalition military intervention, which came at the request of President Hadi, the head of the legitimate Government of Yemen, to deter aggression by the Houthis and forces loyal to the former president Saleh, and allow for the return of the Yemeni Government. The Houthis have consistently failed to adhere to UN Security Council Resolutions and continue to use force to achieve their aims, including attacks across the Saudi Arabian border. Saudi Arabia and the Coalition have played a crucial role in reversing the military advance of the Houthis and forces loyal to former president Saleh. The UK is not a member of the Saudi-led Coalition and British military personnel are not directly involved in the Saudi led Coalition's operations.

We are aware of the UN Secretary General's annual report on Children in Armed Conflict which was published on 2 June, which includes a section outlining the impact of the conflict in Yemen on children. The conflict in Yemen has had a significant impact on children, in terms of the numbers of child casualties, the recruitment of children as soldiers, and attacks on hospitals and schools. We consider all these reports very carefully. We note the announcement by the UN Secretary General on 6 June that removed the listing of the Saudi Arabian-led Coalition from the report's annex, pending the conclusion of a joint review by the UN and Saudi Arabia on the cases and numbers cited in the text. We welcome co-operation between the UN and Saudi Arabia to look in to this matter. We support the UN Secretary General's call on all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

We regularly raise the importance of compliance with IHL with the Government of Saudi Arabia and other members of the military coalition; we will continue to engage

with them on this. We have also provided guidance and advice to help the Government of Saudi Arabia to ensure continued compliance with IHL. In addition, we have raised our concerns with the Houthis on the importance of compliance with IHL. It is important that all sides to the conflict conduct investigations into incidents where it is alleged that International Humanitarian Law has been breached.

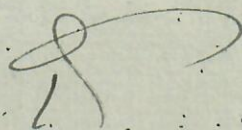
Saudi Arabia has publically stated that it is investigating reports of alleged violations of IHL, and that lessons will be acted upon. On 6 June, Brigadier Assiri, the Saudi Arabia military spokesperson, set out their response to the allegations highlighted in the UN report. Saudi Arabia has the best insight into their own military procedures and will be able to conduct the most thorough and conclusive investigations. It will also allow the country to really understand what went wrong and apply the lessons learnt in the best possible way. This is the standard we set ourselves and our allies. We encourage them to continue and complete this process in good time.

Your constituents' call for an embargo of UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia. I would like to re-iterate that the Government can and does respond to changing circumstances and is able to review licences, suspend or revoke them when required. On the basis of the information currently available, we are satisfied that all extant UK licences for the export of arms to Saudi Arabia are compliant with the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. All available relevant information, including reports from Non-Governmental Organisations, our overseas network and the media is taken into account as part of the assessment and this is kept under regular review. I can assure you that the conflict in Yemen is being monitored closely. The issue was also recently debated in Parliament on 8 June and for ease of reference you can read the transcript at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-06-08/debates/16060823000001/HumanRightsAndArmsSalesToSaudiArabia>

The best way to prevent more civilian casualties is to bring the conflict to an end. We fully and actively support the UN's efforts to bring about a political solution. The Foreign Secretary has publically welcomed the cessation of hostilities that began on 10 April. We are strongly encouraging all parties to respect it. UN-led peace talks between the Yemeni parties began in Kuwait on 21 April. The Foreign Secretary said on their commencement "I urge all those around the table to come together to find a way to end the conflict, address the humanitarian situation, and allow the return of Yemen's legitimate government". The Foreign Secretary visited the Gulf region 29 May – 1 June and made clear that there can be no military alternative to a peace process.

We share your constituents' desire to bring this conflict and dire humanitarian crisis to an end; Yemen will remain a priority for the UK Government.

Yours sincerely,



TOBIAS ELLWOOD MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State