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Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

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The Rt Hon George Howarth MP
House of Commons
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King Charles Street
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Thank you for your email of 23 March to the Foreign Secretary relaying on behalf of your constituents about the humanitarian situation 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 on civilians, particularly children. The UK's priorities are to support improved humanitarian access across Yemen and to build consensus towards an end to the conflict and a return to a UN-led political process to agree Yemen's future. The Department for International Development (DFID) has so far announced £85 million of humanitarian assistance to Yemen to support those affected by the crisis, including those forced to flee their homes. This is delivered through UN agencies and non-governmental organisations and provides emergency shelter, healthcare, water and food assistance, as well as supporting UN work to co-ordinate the humanitarian response.

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 reports of alleged violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) by actors in the conflict and take these very seriously. We support the UN Secretary General's call on all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under 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 and continue to engage with them on this. Further we have also provided guidance and advice to help the Government of Saudi Arabia ensure continued compliance with IHL. We also raise this issue of IHL with the Houthis.

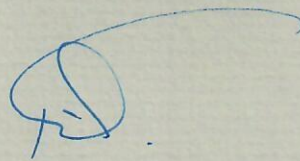
The UK Government takes its arms export responsibilities very seriously and operates one of the most robust arms export control regimes in the world. All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria, taking account of all relevant factors at the time of the application. A licence will not be issued, for any country, if to do so would be inconsistent with any provision of the mandatory Criteria, including where we assess there is a clear risk that it might be used in the commission of a serious violation of IHL.

The UK has a large defence industry that exports weapons, under strict conditions, to our partners. We know that some UK supplied weapons are being used in Yemen. It is important that they are used legally and we monitor this very carefully. The Government is satisfied that extant licences for Saudi Arabia are compliant with the UK's export licences criteria. We continue to urge all sides to the conflict to conduct thorough and conclusive investigations into all incidents where it is alleged that IHL has been breached.

The most effective way to achieve a lasting solution to the crisis in Yemen is through political negotiation. The UK welcomes the UN announcement of a ceasefire from 10 April, followed by peace talks. The UK fully and actively supports the UN's efforts to bring about a political solution to the conflict which remains the best way to bring long-term stability to Yemen and avoid a humanitarian catastrophe.

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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'T. Ellwood', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

TOBIAS ELLWOOD MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State