The Rt Hon. The Lord Naseby  
House of Lords  
London  
SW1A 0PW  

16th October 2017

Dear Michael

I promised to write to you to answer a number of questions you posed to me in the House of Lords on 10 October following my reply to your question about the United Kingdom’s response to Hurricane Irma as it impacted the Overseas Territories.

I can confirm that officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development started tracking the formation of Hurricane Irma on Thursday 31 August. This was done via the Overseas Territories Disaster Management Oversight Committee (DMOC) which convenes when a potential weather system threat to the Caribbean Overseas Territories is identified. DMOC subsequently convened on 1, 3, 4 and 5 September after which senior officials recommended that a formal crisis be declared and operations transferred to the FCO’s Crisis Centre. RFA Mounts Bay, which had been in the Caribbean since before the start of the hurricane season, carries personnel and equipment specifically to support humanitarian relief operations as quickly as possible. She arrived off Anguilla at the earliest safe moment following Hurricane Irma, which was within 24 hours of it passing the Island.

RAF Brize Norton was notified of the potential requirement to provide humanitarian relief flights on 6 September and on 7 September the station was tasked to prepare those flights. It was important to first identify and prioritise the relief stores required and establish which runways remained open following Hurricane Irma’s impact. Once that was done, the first aircraft were loaded and despatched from RAF Brize Norton on 8 September reaching the Caribbean that night.

HMS Ocean was conducting operations in the Mediterranean as hurricane Irma approached the Caribbean, but her deployment was confirmed as soon as there was clarity about the unprecedented humanitarian needs in the Caribbean region and that HMS Ocean was best placed to deliver materiel to meet those additional needs. At no point after being tasked to support the relief effort did HMS Ocean break down. This was clarified by the First Sea Lord in his open letter to the Telegraph.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Yrs Sfr

LORD AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON  
Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN  
Prime Minister’s Special Representative for Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict