



Ministry
of Defence

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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THE RT HON THE EARL HOWE PC
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS AND
MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE

MSU/4/2/6/12/ap

7th January 2019

Dear Bishop Christopher.

During the Archbishop of Canterbury's debate on 'The role of reconciliation in the UK's foreign, defence and international development policy' on 14 December 2018 you asked about the UK's relations with Yemen and Saudi Arabia. I wanted to return to this as I felt there was not enough time to discuss this in detail.

As you mentioned in the debate, the UK announced on 3 April £170 million in response to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen for the financial year 2018-19 making us the fifth largest donor to Yemen in the world this year. This will feed the equivalent of 4 million people for a month and brings the total UK bilateral support to Yemen to over £570 million since 2015. The UK is also leading efforts in the UN to address the worsening humanitarian situation through proposing UN Security Council Resolution, underpinning the recent Stockholm Peace Talks. The Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2451 on 21 December 2018.

Peace talks are the top priority – there can be no military solution to the conflict. A political settlement is the only way to bring long-term stability to Yemen and to address the worsening humanitarian crisis. The Yemeni parties must engage constructively and in good faith to overcome obstacles and find a political solution to end the conflict.

We welcome the outcome of talks in Stockholm hosted by the UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and the good faith with which all parties progressed towards finding a political solution to end the conflict. The UK has played a leading role in diplomatic efforts, including bringing together key international actors to try to find a peaceful solution. On 13 December, the Foreign Secretary attended peace talks in Sweden to lend his support to the efforts of UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and press for progress on an inclusive political settlement and an end to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. He met the Special Envoy and had constructive discussions with the heads of the Government of Yemen and Houthi delegations.

The Rt Rev the Lord Bishop of Coventry
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The UK continues to support the work of the UN. It is vital that we work towards a rebooting of a UN peace process as a matter of urgency. By the end of the financial year 2017-18 we had provided £1.68 million to the UN Special Envoy's office to bolster the UN's capacity to facilitate the peace process. Additionally, the UK is supporting the stabilisation and recovery of Yemen through £7 million of funding from the Conflict, Stability, and Security Fund this year. This funding supports many different programmes, including bolstering the UN's capacity to facilitate the peace process, and establishing long-lasting conflict resolution mechanisms in Yemeni communities.

The UK and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have a long history of defence cooperation. The UK's arms exports to Saudi Arabia are made under pre-existing and long-standing government to government arrangements. Export licensing requires us to consider how the equipment will be used by the end-user. This is done by reference to all currently available and relevant information at the time of application. A licence will not be issued, for any country, if to do so would be inconsistent with any provision of the mandatory Consolidated Criteria, including where we assess there is a clear risk that it might be used in the commission of a serious violation of IHL. Our export licensing system allows us to respond quickly to changed circumstances, with options to suspend or revoke licences if necessary. We have suspended or revoked licences when the level of risk changes and we constantly review local situations. In the last few years we have suspended or revoked licences for Russia, Ukraine, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. This shows how seriously we take the guiding principle of responsible export controls.

We are aware of reports of alleged violations of IHL by actors in the Yemen conflict and take these very seriously. Saudi Arabia has publicly stated that it investigates reports of alleged violations of IHL, through the Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) and has stated that it acts on lessons learned. We regularly raise the importance of compliance with IHL with the Saudi Arabian Government and other members of the Coalition. We continue to monitor the situation closely, seeking further information where appropriate. We welcome any further information NGOs can provide.

A copy of this letter will be placed in the House of Lords' Library.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Howarth

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