

24 October 2016

Your reference: ML.N0044.ID.26.6.16  
Our reference: MIN/101808/2016

Caroline Lucas MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH

*Dear Caroline,*

Thank you for your e-mail of 26 September about the UK's arms exports to Saudi Arabia and the conflict in Yemen.

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 (the "Consolidated Criteria"), taking account of all relevant factors at the time of the application. A licence will not be issued, for any country, including Saudi Arabia, if to do so would be inconsistent with any provision of the mandatory Criteria, including where we assess there is a clear risk that the items might be used in the commission of a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

I share your constituent's concerns about the crisis in Yemen and the impact it has on civilians, particularly children. The UK Government will continue to work hard to improve the humanitarian situation and support peace and stability in Yemen. The UK is the fourth largest donor in response to this crisis and on 21 September we provided an additional £37 million of support to Yemen, which will bring the UK's total humanitarian funding in response to the crisis to £100 million this year.

The UK supports the Saudi Arabian-led Coalition military intervention, which came at the request of legitimate President Hadi, to deter aggression by the Houthis and forces loyal to the former president Saleh, and allow for the return of the legitimate Yemeni Government. 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. Coalition and Government of Yemen military gains must now be used to drive forward the political process.

Your constituent raises concerns about UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia. The UK has supplied munitions to assist the Saudi Air Force under existing arrangements. The Government of Saudi Arabia faces a number of security challenges, with concerns arising from the fractious regional situation and external sources, and so has a legitimate requirement for equipment in the performance of its sovereign defensive responsibilities.

All available relevant information, including reports from Non-Governmental Organisations, our overseas network and the media are 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.

We are aware of reports of alleged violations of IHL by actors in the conflict and take these very seriously. It is important that all sides conduct thorough and conclusive investigations into all incidents where it is alleged that IHL has been breached.

We regularly raise the importance of compliance with IHL with the Saudi Arabian Government and other members of the military Coalition; I visited Saudi Arabia on 13 October to make this point to the Saudi Arabian Government. Saudi Arabia has publicly stated that it is investigating reports of alleged violations of IHL, and that lessons will be acted upon.

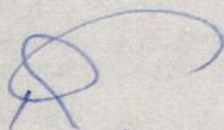
The Saudi Arabian-led Coalition Joint Investigations Assessment Team publically announced the outcome of eight investigations on 4 August. Saudi Arabia has the best insight into their own military procedures and will be able to conduct the most thorough and conclusive investigations. It will also allow 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.

The key test for our continued arms exports to Saudi Arabia in relation to IHL is whether there is a clear risk that those weapons might be used in a serious violation of IHL. As the Foreign Secretary made clear in his Written Statement to the House on 5 September, having regard to all the information available to us, we assess that this test has not been met. The situation is kept under close and careful review.

The UK welcomes the release by the Coalition's Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) of the outcome of an initial investigation into reports of an airstrike hitting a funeral hall in the Yemeni capital Sana'a on 8 October. Our consideration of the reports will be used to contribute to our overall view on the approach and attitude of Saudi Arabia to IHL, as part of all the information available to us. This, in turn, informs the risk assessment made against the Consolidated Criteria. We welcome the commitments to take action against those responsible and to review rules of engagement and compliance. There can be no military solution to this conflict and we urge all sides to implement a Cessation of Hostilities and recommit to political talks.

A political solution is the best way to bring long-term stability to Yemen and end the conflict. The UK continues to support strongly the work of UN Special Envoy, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, and his tireless efforts in working with all parties to bring about peace in Yemen. We deeply regret the failure of the parties to reach an agreement in Kuwait and we urge them to find the compromises that will end the current conflict. Both sides will need to engage constructively and in good faith to overcome obstacles and find a political solution to end the conflict.

Yours sincerely,



**TOBIAS ELLWOOD MP**  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State