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The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
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10 July 2019

Dear Secretary of State,

As the Yemen conflict enters its fifth year, I am writing to you in my role as Chair of the United Nations Association – UK (UNA-UK) to express our organisation's concern about ongoing UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UK's wider role in the Yemen conflict.

Yemeni civilians still bear the brunt of the rapidly deteriorating conflict, dubbed by the UN as the "world's worst humanitarian crisis," with OCHA documenting a staggering 24.1 million Yemenis in need of humanitarian assistance, 1.9 million more than last year. The subsequent economic collapse has placed enormous pressure on basic services and the humanitarian response, with 10 million Yemenis on the brink of famine and 17.8 million lacking adequate access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene.

UN reports show that the majority of civilian casualties sustained directly from the conflict are due to airstrikes being carried out by the Saudi-led coalition. Since the conflict began, the UK has licensed over £4.6 billion worth of arms to Saudi Arabia despite any common sense reading of the situation showing there is a clear risk that these will be used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law.

Along with our 20,000-strong supporter-base, UNA-UK is extremely concerned about the UK's complicity with respect to this conflict. We welcome the UK Court of Appeal's landmark ruling on 20 June which found that the UK failed to adequately assess whether UK exports might be used to breach international humanitarian law in Yemen and therefore found the decision to authorise them to be unlawful.

Yet the UK Government's response to the decision so far has been inadequate – deciding to suspend only the granting of new licences to members of the Saudi-led coalition, while allowing existing licences to stand. This means that lethal weaponry continues to leave our country for use in Yemen, despite such exports having been authorised via a process which is unlawful.

It has been apparent for many years that exports for use by Saudi Arabia are immoral. We now know they are also illegal. We urge you to immediately recommend to your counterpart in the Department for International Trade the cancellation of all export licenses and transfers of weapons which might be used in Yemen and establish a thorough independent inquiry into

how the UK's arms export control processes have enabled illegal activity which has potentially lethal ramifications for innocent people in Yemen to take place.

The ruling deals a major blow to the UK's professed role as a champion of the rules-based international order and in particular, of the Arms Trade Treaty. A fundamental rethink of the UK's role with respect to the war on Yemen is clearly necessary to help restore belief that the UK is capable of acting in the interests of international peace and security, as it is entrusted to do through its privileged position on the Security Council. In the meantime, we strongly believe the UK should immediately hand over its "penholder" responsibilities for drafting Security Council resolutions on Yemen to a member state with more credibility on this issue.

Looking ahead with respect to the Yemen conflict, UN-brokered efforts for a ceasefire focussing on the port city of Hodeidah have been partially successful. Yet, fighting and airstrikes continue elsewhere. A full ceasefire without preconditions is required and all parties to the conflict must cooperate fully with the humanitarian relief efforts that the UN is attempting to coordinate.

The UK accepts that there is no military solution to the conflict. It should therefore desist from undermining peace efforts through continued military support to parties involved in the conflict. Instead we believe that the UK should press all parties to implement a nation-wide ceasefire and commit fully to inclusive peace talks with the participation of Yemeni women, youth and civil society.

The impact of over four years of conflict in Yemen is eye-watering. The UK has an opportunity to change course and put human rights and the suffering of those in Yemen at the centre of its efforts with respect to the conflict. We sincerely hope it will.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Wood of Anfield
Chairman
United Nations Association - UK