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Response to Protect Yemen's Kids – March 2017

Thank you for contacting me about the situation in Yemen.

I absolutely agree with you that there is a humanitarian crisis in Yemen, sadly exacerbated by conflict.

Yemen has historically been a fragile state, characterised by high population growth, food and water scarcity, female illiteracy and widespread poverty and economic stagnation. Clearly the conflict has contributed to further instability in Yemen, with extensive damage to infrastructure. According to the UN, 18.8 million Yemenis are now in need of humanitarian assistance.

Saudi Arabia entered the conflict in Yemen in support of the legitimate Government of President Hadi. The UK is not part of this Saudi-led coalition but we do support its aims, which I would like to emphasise are backed by a UN resolution and a legitimate request for help from the Government of Yemen.

I know arms exports are a concern. The first point to make is that Saudi Arabia has a right to defend itself and to answer the call of the legitimate Government of Yemen in coming to their aid. The second point is that we have a very tough arms export control regime. Each successive licence is weighed up against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. The key test is whether there is a clear risk that the items concerned might be used in the commission of a serious violation of international humanitarian law. The situation is kept under careful and continuous review, and I know that international humanitarian law is at the forefront of Ministers' minds when they weigh up each successive licence.

The UK Government continues to urge all parties to the conflict to take all reasonable steps to allow the delivery and distribution of aid, and to facilitate rapid and safe humanitarian access, as well as calling upon all sides to do everything possible to prevent civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure.

It remains the case, however, that a political solution is the best way to bring long-term stability. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office assure me that the UK is playing a leading role in diplomatic efforts, supporting the UN Special Envoy's tireless efforts to achieve this.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP