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Arms Exports to Saudi Arabia

Thank you for contacting me about the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia.

I am reassured that the Government takes seriously its legal obligations as regards the licensing of arms for export to Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. The UK has one of the most rigorous licensing regimes in the world.

Each application is considered on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria, taking into account the precise nature of the equipment and the identity and track record of the recipient. The Government has consistently said it does not, and will not, issue licences where it judges that the proposed export would provoke or prolong internal conflicts, or where there is a clear risk it might be used to facilitate internal repression or be used aggressively against another country. I have always fully supported this stance.

Saudi Arabia has publicly stated that it is investigating reports of alleged violations of international humanitarian law. This is an important process and the UK fully supports thorough investigations into all allegations of violations of International Law. Finding a political solution to the conflict in Yemen is the best way to bring long-term stability and so helping and encouraging peace talks is a top priority.

The Government is aware of legal opinion having been provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) regarding Saudi Arabia. Allegations made by NGOs are investigated by the Coalition's Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT). The outcomes of this investigation will be taken into account when assessing the Government's position. This, in turn, informs the risk assessment made during licensing judgements.

The Saudi-led coalition confirmed in December that a limited number of BL755 cluster munitions that were exported from the UK in the 1980s were used in Yemen, including by a coalition aircraft not far from the Saudi border. The coalition, whose members are not parties to the convention on cluster munitions, has said that they were used against a legitimate military target and did not therefore contravene international humanitarian law. Nonetheless, I am glad to note that Saudi Arabia has confirmed that it will not use BL755 cluster munitions in future.

The Government continues to monitor the situation closely, using cross-Departmental resources to seek further information. Additionally, the Government continues to welcome any further information NGOs can provide.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP