

The Right Honourable Keith Vaz MP,
Chairman, All Party Parliamentary Group for Yemen,
House of Commons,
LONDON,
SW1A 0AA

11 April 2016

Dear Mr Vaz,

The Yemen Safe Passage Group continues to monitor the ground situation in Yemen, as well as the current political moves to create a meaningful end to the conflict. The Group is very aware that since the APPG meetings last year, and the resultant report and letters sent by your office to various Ministers in October, that the UK Government has been under increased pressure to cease its arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Yemen Safe Passage fears that this understandable focus on outlawing arms sales has diverted attention away from the immediate core issues of humanitarian aid delivery, and the vital need for a Saudi Coalition policy change to stop the targeting of Yemeni civilians as a means of waging war contrary to International Humanitarian Law.

Whilst we see some improvement in the flow of aid and commercial imports, as well as the long-delayed commencement of the UNVIM mission to 'regulate' shipping movements through Yemen's ports, we remain concerned that little else has changed, and that the Coalition (along with the Houthis) continue to act with a dangerous disregard for the plight of the Yemeni people. You will recall that we had initially given the benefit of the doubt that the Saudi-led attacks on civilians were more a result of misguided and inefficient operational ability than wilful use of the population as a means of war.

However, the continuing state of affairs would suggest that our hopes were wrong, civilian targeting is intentional and, despite the APPG's advice to the Government, the UK has been unable or unwilling to prevent this, thus leaving itself open to accusations of complicity both through arms sales and through failing to effectively regulate the illegal use of those arms when being in a position to do so with British military advisers working closely with the Coalition.

Could you please let us know how the Foreign Secretary and the other Ministers to whom APPG Yemen addressed letters in October 2015 have responded. It is looking increasingly the case that if the current ceasefire fails to hold and if talks towards a negotiated settlement break down, there will need to be further pressure to keep the extreme plight of the Yemeni people foremost in the Government's eye in all future dealings with the Coalition.

The reports we hear of DFID's leading role in support of planning for post-conflict economic reconstruction, in conjunction with the GCC, are more encouraging. But all the various strands of British policy now need to act in concert to ensure a sturdy denunciation of internationally unacceptable behaviour, and most importantly a peaceful resolution to the war, allowing the millions of displaced to return to their homes and Yemen's shattered economy to be rebuilt.

Yours sincerely,

James Firebrace, Frances Guy, Philip Holihead on behalf of the Yemen Safe Passage Group (jf@firebrace.com)

cc

Sir Alan Duncan, UK Special Envoy

Hon Edmund Fitton-Brown, British Ambassador

Rt Hon Desmond Swayne, Minister of State for International Development