

Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss  
Secretary of State for International Trade  
3 Whitehall Place, Westminster,  
London SW1A 2HP

10th September 2020

Dear Liz,

We are writing to you again concerning the export of arms to Saudi Arabia for use in Yemen, and the government's assessment of alleged violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in that conflict, on the basis of which you took the decision to resume the export of arms in July.

As you know, it was fundamental to your decision that, although the assessment had identified possible violations of IHL arising from Saudi air strikes on civilian targets, these constituted – in your view – ‘isolated incidents’, rather than a ‘pattern’ of activity that would lead you to question the intent or capacity of the Saudi-led coalition to comply with IHL.

In light of that, you will have seen the latest report, published yesterday, by the UN Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, which has investigated all alleged violations of IHL committed in Yemen since the start of the conflict in 2014, and reached the damning conclusion presented on the first page of their report, as follows:

*“The Group of Experts finds that the parties to the conflict continue to show no regard for international law or the lives, dignity, and rights of people in Yemen, while third states have helped to perpetuate the conflict by continuing to supply the parties with weapons.”*

While the entire report is essential reading, we wanted to bring your attention specifically to two extracts that directly contradict the conclusions of your own report:

- Paragraph 26: *“In its first two years, the Group of Experts analysed a number of coalition airstrikes given the apparently disproportionate impact of such airstrikes on civilians. It raised concerns with coalition processes for target selection and execution of airstrikes, and noted **a consistent pattern of harm to civilians.**”*
- Paragraph 102: *“The Group of Experts repeats its concern about third States transferring arms to parties to the conflict in Yemen in blatant disregard of the **documented patterns of serious violations of IHL and human rights law in the conflict to date.**”*

Given that you have so far made no oral statement to Parliament about your decision to resume arms exports to Saudi Arabia, we would respectfully ask you to do so in light of the UN Experts’

report, and explain how you concluded that there was no pattern of violations by the Saudi-led coalition, when the Experts examined the same evidence, and reached the opposite conclusion.

That would also provide an opportunity to discuss the other very serious violations of IHL reported by the UN Experts, committed by all parties in Yemen, and the strong recommendation made by the Experts that third States such as the United Kingdom should stop the continued supply of arms for use in the conflict.

Finally, we note with interest that the Group of Experts have published their 55-page report for other experts to analyse, and also intend to publish a longer and more detailed 'Conference Room Paper' when the report is discussed, setting out its investigations and findings in full.

By contrast, you have so far refused to publish even an intelligence-redacted version of your investigations and assessment, and moreover, rejected repeated requests to provide the most basic factual details about it, such as the number of incidents investigated, and the number that were deemed to constitute possible violations of IHL.

In a situation where the conclusions reached by your investigation appear diametrically opposed to the conclusions reached by the UN Experts, and we are left to consider which report is correct, it does your argument no service that the UN Experts are perfectly happy to put their analysis forward for public scrutiny, while you remain totally resistant to revealing yours.

As well as making an oral statement to Parliament on the UN Experts report at the earliest opportunity, we would therefore also urge you to reconsider your refusals to publish even a redacted version of your report, answer basic factual questions about its content, or make it available to MPs on a confidential basis.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

**Emily Thornberry MP, Shadow Secretary of State for International Trade**

**Stewart Hosie MP, Scottish National Party Spokesperson on International Trade**

**Christine Jardine MP, Liberal Democrat Party Spokesperson on International Trade**

**Hywel Williams MP, Plaid Cymru Spokesperson on International Trade**

**Caroline Lucas MP, Green Party Spokesperson on International Trade**