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Sarah Champion MP  
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By email at: [indcom@parliament.uk](mailto:indcom@parliament.uk)

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Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your letter of 30 March on the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

You have clearly set out the current challenges in Yemen, including the grave humanitarian crisis. The UK remains deeply concerned by the situation in the country. The UK's response is driven by the National Security Council (NSC) on Yemen, which aims to work towards a sustainable political settlement, reduce humanitarian suffering, and enhance security and stability. All government departments are closely aligned in working towards these objectives.

In your letter you set out ten important questions, I will address each of these issues here in turn.

1. What is the UK doing to support the continued provision of humanitarian assistance and to try to improve the access of humanitarian organisations, and the aid they provide, throughout the country based on need? What is the UK's position on US threats to suspend aid provision in Yemen due to access restrictions?

As you may already know, the UK committed to providing £200 million in aid to Yemen in the financial year 2019/20. However, as additional urgent needs emerged in late 2019, we increased our support by providing an extra £40 million for lifesaving humanitarian aid. Among other things, this £240 million of support helped to provide 1.9 million people with cash and vouchers to help buy food and household essentials, provided over 400,000 children and pregnant and lactating women with nutrition interventions and supplied over 1 million people with improved water supply and basic sanitation.

Responding to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen remains a top priority for the UK and we will shortly confirm our aid contribution for this financial year (2020/21). I look forward to sharing more details on this with you in due course. However, humanitarian aid is only one part of the answer.

I am extremely concerned by continued Houthi restrictions to humanitarian delivery. These restrictions are unacceptable and put vulnerable Yemeni lives at severe risk. Houthi interference is at its worst level since the war began with access constraints affecting nearly 7 million people according to the United Nations (UN).



These actions have forced donors and UN agencies to assess how we can adjust the way we all give aid, to ensure it gets to those most in need. Given the constraint imposed by the Houthis, the World Food Programme and the US have already been forced to reduce their levels of aid. We sympathise with this position: aid must be able to reach those it is intended for. As such, we continue to call on the Houthis to comply with the UK-drafted United Nations Security Council Resolution 2451, which calls on all parties to facilitate unhindered access for humanitarian actors. Improved humanitarian access in Houthi-held areas is now more important than ever, given the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. In particular, what steps is the UK taking to support sustainable food procurement, and reconstruct food production infrastructure, in Yemen?

In 2019/20 DFID's support to the World Food Programme helped provide over 3 million cash transfers and vouchers to vulnerable Yemenis, empowering them to make choices on how best to meet their basic needs. Compared to providing food, cash programming is more cost-efficient and sustainable, as well as more effective at alleviating poverty and stimulating growth (as local markets can keep functioning).

We also provided £21 million in 2019/20 to the Social Fund for Development (SFD), a national Yemeni quasi-state institution. Our assistance helped support cash for work and cash for nutrition programmes, enabling 290,000 of the poorest households across Yemen to buy food from local markets and support their basic needs. SFD also provided agricultural and infrastructure work geared towards protecting soil and water through farming, as well as providing vulnerable small holder-farmers with knowledge and technology to help increase their productivity.

However, 90 per cent of Yemen's food is still imported, so the UK continues to do all it can to encourage the smooth flow of imports. We do this by funding the UN's Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM), which facilitates imports into Hodeidah and Saleef ports by giving the Saudi-led Coalition confidence that weapons are not coming in on commercial ships. We also continue to urge all parties to protect civilian infrastructure – such as ports, roads and food warehouses - so that food infrastructure and supply chains can be maintained.

3. What steps is the UK taking to improve economic resilience, and particularly to empower women and girls in this regard? Will the UK seek to involve civil society organisations – including those led by women – in the future peace negotiations?

The stability of the economy is critical to Yemen's food security, alongside an effective humanitarian response. The UK continues to use its diplomatic channels to urge the Government of Yemen to pay public salaries across the country as well as to encourage a further injection of hard currency to the Central Bank to facilitate food and fuel imports into the country. UK-funded technical assistance to the Central Bank of Yemen, designed to establish greater public financial transparency and the rebuilding of financial institutions, is also supporting our diplomatic efforts. In 2019/20 DFID also supported SFD to issue over 2,500 loans, of which 36 per cent were used to support small women-owned businesses, central to women's economic empowerment.

I recognise the important role women must play in ending the conflict and contributing to peacebuilding at all levels, which is why we continue to support the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security through UN Women. The Pact, which includes 60 women with links to over 500 individuals and organisations across 13 governorates, has grown to become the primary channel for women to feed into the UN-led Track I process with



members forming part of the UN Special Envoy's Office's Technical Advisory Group. The UK also champions the inclusion agenda by funding the new UN Gender Adviser for Yemen. This role will focus on ensuring the voices and interests of women and girls are not systematically or accidentally excluded from future peace processes.

4. What steps is the Government taking to promote a political solution to the crisis in Yemen bilaterally and within the United Nations Security Council? Did the Foreign Secretary's recent trip to the region result in any new initiatives in this regard? Is the UK pressing for a new UNSC Resolution on Yemen?

Ultimately, only a political settlement will address the worsening humanitarian and economic crisis, as well as the potentially catastrophic consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak. The Foreign Secretary and I recently underlined this message in [our joint statement<sup>\[1\]</sup>](#) of 26 March, reinforcing the need for all parties to de-escalate and engage constructively with the peace process led by the UN Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths. As you may have seen, the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, also recently issued [a statement<sup>\[2\]</sup>](#) condemning the provocative Houthi attack on Riyadh and Jazan, which threatened to derail the peace process.

The Foreign Secretary's visit to Saudi Arabia and Oman at the beginning of February resulted in constructive conversations on de-escalation and peace-building in Yemen with key partners, including HM King Salman of Saudi Arabia, President Hadi of Yemen, and the Sultan of Oman. Our diplomats across the region continue to use their relationships to support his efforts politically and, as penholder in the UN Security Council, the UK has drafted and secured Security Council resolutions and statements in the last year to bolster his efforts.

5. What support is the UK providing to UN Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths?

The UK will continue to do all it can to support Martin Griffiths to achieve a political solution to the conflict in Yemen. In addition to our political support, the UK has provided the UN Special Envoy's Office with £342,000 over 2019/20 in direct support to the peace process, including the secondment of a political advisor. The UK has also made a £1.6 million contribution to the UN-run Peace Support Facility that works with the Special Envoy and the parties on peace initiatives supported by both sides.

We also recognise the need for an inclusive peace process and consideration for marginalised groups, particularly in the south, to avoid future fragmentation. Besides the Gender Adviser position, the UK also funds a Senior Inclusion Adviser in the UN Special Envoy's Office, whose focus is to help the UN to engage with a wide range of groups in Yemen.

Complementing the UN's efforts to deliver a durable and sustainable peace deal, the UK's Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) supports a range of Track II (Influential Figures) and Track III (Civil Society and Local Groups) initiatives that promote a more inclusive political dialogue. For example, a CSSF-funded programme with the Oxford Research Group has been able to build consensus on key issues amongst local actors across the political, religious, tribal and social spectra in Marib and Hadhramaut.

6. What plans do you, and/or the Foreign Secretary have to visit Yemen (once current restrictions are lifted)?

Given the security situation in Yemen and the constraints imposed by COVID-19, we will keep the situation under review and explore a Ministerial visit to Yemen when the security

situation permits. In the meantime, we will continue to coordinate the international response to the Yemen crisis and provide full support to the UN Special Envoy in reaching a political settlement.

7. What is the UK Government's position on pressing for the publication of JIAT reports in full? Minister Murrison referred to recent improvements in the JIAT process and of room for more; what further progress would the UK Government wish to see and what steps has it taken to encourage Saudi Arabia in that direction?

We support the role of the Joint Incidents and Assessment Team (JIAT) in investigating alleged violations of international humanitarian law (IHL). We also welcome improvements in the quantity and quality of the JIAT's reports, while recognising there remains room for further improvement. We encourage the JIAT to ensure findings from its investigations are published clearly and its recommendations, including payment of compensation and changes to procedures, are properly implemented.

We regularly raise the importance of IHL compliance with Saudi Arabia, including at senior levels, and press for timely and comprehensive investigations into all allegations. In particular, we have supported the development of the JIAT's investigations into allegations and continue to urge Saudi Arabia to ensure recommendations from such investigations are acted upon fully. Although the UK is not a member of the JIAT and has not participated directly in the JIAT's investigations, we continue to provide advice and support to the JIAT on the process for investigations. Statements by the JIAT on their investigations can be found in English here: [www.spa.gov.sa/search.php?lang=en&search=JIAT](http://www.spa.gov.sa/search.php?lang=en&search=JIAT)

8. What recent steps has the UK taken towards the objective of ensuring that all those committing violations of International Humanitarian Law in Yemen on all sides – particularly the use of restricted munitions and infliction of civilian casualties – are held to account?

The UK takes all allegations of violations of IHL in Yemen extremely seriously. On receiving reports of alleged violations of IHL, we routinely seek information from all credible sources, including from NGOs and international organisations.

The UK also supports the mandate of Group of Eminent Experts (GEE) on Yemen to monitor the human rights situation. We recognise its importance and thus supported resolutions of the UN Human Rights Council to establish the GEE in 2017 and to renew its mandate in 2018 and 2019.

9. What discussions have been held with Saudi Arabia regarding the UK's arms sales and the necessary measures to guarantee such materiel is not used in Yemen in operations resulting in civilian casualties?

We regularly raise the importance of IHL compliance with Saudi Arabia, including at senior levels. The UK also provides training courses, advice and guidance to Saudi Arabia, all of which support the Saudi military's compliance with IHL. We share UK experience of best practice for conducting air operations in accordance with acceptable international norms. The British military has some of the highest standards in the world in how they conduct themselves in armed conflicts, including the avoidance of civilian casualties. We have drawn from our own experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere to learn lessons and further improve our processes. British personnel are involved in advising the Saudi-led Coalition on how to ensure targeting procedures are compliant with IHL.

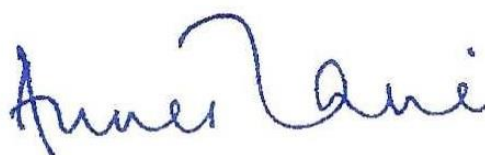
10. What immediate action is DFID taking to mitigate the impact of any potential coronavirus outbreak in Yemen, and what steps is the Department taking to ensure humanitarian partners have the support to cope with any further spike in cholera cases?

I am proud the UK has already announced up to £744 million of aid to support the global efforts to combat the outbreak of COVID-19. This includes up to £150 million to the International Monetary Fund to help developing countries focus their available resources to tackling the virus, £65 million investment into COVID-19 research, and £10 million to the World Health Organisation (WHO) to help prevent the spread of this outbreak by supporting developing countries to rapidly identify and care for patients with symptoms.

DFID is also currently assessing how best to respond through existing programmes in Yemen, with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) already providing vital equipment across the country. We will continue to monitor the situation closely, with the UK standing ready to provide further support if required.

It is vital that alongside efforts to prepare for and respond to a COVID-19 outbreak, critical humanitarian assistance continues as well. We are, once again, concerned about the threat of cholera in Yemen this year. DFID has a track record of helping to stem the number of cases and deaths of cholera in Yemen, and this year will be no exception. DFID is currently supporting UNICEF's Rapid Cholera Response Teams including Water, Sanitation and Hygiene programmes to continue to target high risk areas and communities and will contribute 25 per cent of the costs of this year's Oral Cholera Vaccination campaigns. In response to the cholera outbreak last year, we brought forward funding from our £96.5 million programme to UNICEF to help scale up the cholera response and deliver support to areas in Yemen predicted to be at greatest risk. Support included hygiene kits, chlorine to clean water and medical equipment for hospitals. The UK also contributed 25 per cent of the costs of Oral Cholera Vaccination campaigns in 2019, which have helped to vaccinate more than 2.5 million Yemenis since they began in 2018.

Thank you again for writing to me on such an important subject. I hope that you find this reply useful and I look forward to working with you in the future, including on progress towards a more peaceful and resilient Yemen.



**Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan**  
**Secretary of State**

<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fifth-anniversary-of-the-conflict-in-yemen-joint-statement>

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/minister-for-the-middle-east-condemns-attempted-missile-attacks-on-riyadh-and-jazan>