



Department
for International
Development



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Minister of State

James Firebrace
Yemen's Safe Passage Group

Our ref: 203538

By email to: james@yemensafepassage.org

16 June 2020

Dear James,

Thank you for your letter of 1 June to the Prime Minister, regarding UK support to help get COVID-19 related aid into Yemen. I am responding as the Minister responsible for the Middle East and North Africa at the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The UK government shares your concern about the impact of COVID-19 in Yemen. It is clear the virus is now spreading unchecked across the country, with UK-funded modelling estimating that there are already over 150,000 cases in Yemen. Yemen is particularly vulnerable due to the country's existing health vulnerabilities following years of conflict and humanitarian crisis, as well as the country's depleted healthcare system, which is beginning to collapse under the strain of COVID-19.

I welcome the recent progress made in importing COVID-19 supplies into Yemen, with air bridges from Dubai, Salalah and Muscat now operating into Sana'a and Aden. DFID has been working closely with the World Food Programme (WFP), who have confirmed that these cargo flights are operating effectively. WFP are drawing up plans to run additional flights from Nairobi and Djibouti to Sana'a later this month. I can assure you that the UK will continue to monitor this situation closely and engage with the Yemeni authorities to preserve these air bridges, to ensure vital COVID-19 supplies continue entering Yemen.

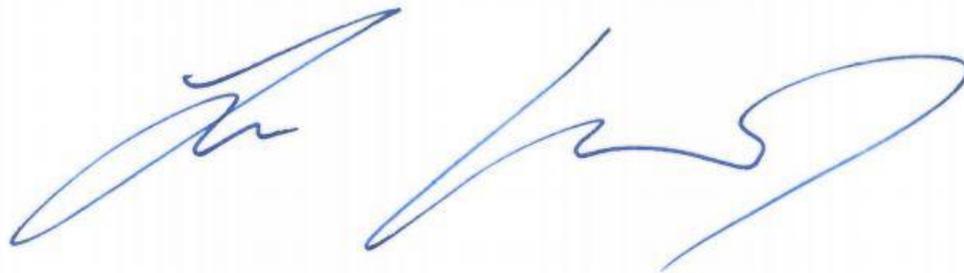
With the majority of Yemen's imports arriving by sea, the quarantine measures enacted by the Houthis/Yemeni authorities during the COVID-19 outbreak have made bringing assistance in through Yemen's seaports more difficult. In response, we are pressing the Houthi authorities to grant WFP's Merchant Vessel Elena an exemption to the quarantine restrictions, so it can more quickly transport essential COVID-19 supplies from Saudi Arabia to Yemen through Hodeidah port.

Whilst challenges remain in getting supplies and personnel into Yemen, internal access remains the biggest barrier to being able to reach those most in need. Access restrictions and interference with aid supplies, particularly in Houthi held areas, are impacting the delivery of assistance to millions of Yemenis in need. The UK is engaging closely with the UN and donor communities to ensure a coordinated international approach to the current excessive restrictions on humanitarian access. We welcome recent steps taken by the Houthis to improve humanitarian access but are clear that more progress is needed, or humanitarian organisations will be unable to continue delivering vital COVID-19 and humanitarian assistance.

The lack of funding for the humanitarian response is another major constraint limiting the UN's ability to get COVID-19 resources into Yemen. On 2 June, at the UN's 2020 Yemen Pledging Conference, I announced the UK's £160 million pledge in response to Yemen's humanitarian crisis for this financial year (2020/21). This funding will help humanitarian agencies to tackle COVID-19 in Yemen, and we expect to provide over 700,000 medical consultations, train 12,000 healthcare workers to work safely in a COVID-19 environment, and provide a much-needed boost to nearly 4,000 health centres.

The UK is also helping bring businesses and the UN together to tackle the crisis by supporting the Yemeni Private Sector Cluster, which in April sourced a vital shipment of COVID-19 related medical supplies and equipment. We will continue to lobby other donors, in the region and beyond, to provide much needed funding to the UN's humanitarian response plan.

I hope this reassures you that the UK is doing all we can to secure access into and across Yemen to facilitate an effective response to COVID-19. Many thanks again for your joint letter.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several fluid, connected strokes. The signature is positioned centrally below the text of the letter.

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Minister for the Middle East and North Africa

