

STOP FUELING THE YEMEN CONFLICT

End all UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia

It is now over a year since the recent outbreak of armed conflict in Yemen began, forcing 2.4 million people to flee their homes, and leaving over 22 million people in need of humanitarian support. The conflict has killed over six thousand people, and left the health care system on its knees.

Humanitarian agencies are struggling to respond and the country stands on the brink of famine. A senior representative of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has described the current level of humanitarian assistance in Yemen as a “drop in the ocean.”

The underlying cause of the conflict between the Huthis and the current regime in power is complex, with the latter being supported by a coalition of other states led by Saudi Arabia and supported by the United States. Both sides in this conflict stand accused of serious violations of international law, including war crimes, with particular condemnation of the aerial bombing campaign that is targeted at Huthi-controlled areas.

Accusations of war crimes levelled at the Saudi led coalition in particular have included attacks on three Médecins Sans Frontières facilities which resulted in the death of both patients and healthcare workers.

As health professionals, we have a duty to speak out against all causes of ill health in Yemen. This must include the sale and export of UK weaponry that is fuelling the conflict.

Between April and September 2015, the UK approved sales of around £2.8 billion worth of combat aircraft and bombs to the Royal Saudi Air Force. A recent legal opinion by Matrix Chambers concluded that the UK Government is in breach of its obligations arising under the Consolidated Criteria on Arms Exports, the EU Common Position on Arms Exports and the Arms Trade Treaty by authorizing transfers of weapons to Saudi Arabia that could be used in Yemen.

We therefore join human rights organisations, the European Parliament, the Dutch parliament, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International in calling for an immediate end to UK arms transfers to all sides in this conflict. We also echo the advice of the Chair of the International development committee, Stephen Twigg MP, that the UK Government should retract its opposition to calls for an independent international inquiry into the alleged abuses of international humanitarian law during the conflict.

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