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20 MAY 2015

*Dear Caroline,*

Thank you for your emails of 20 and 27 April regarding the EU's response to events in the Mediterranean.

The situation in the Mediterranean is a tragic reminder of the huge risks migrants take when they attempt the perilous journey to reach Europe. On 23 April, the European Council agreed a clear set of actions to prevent further loss of life at sea and to tackle the root causes of the increasing flow of irregular migrants, in cooperation with the countries of origin and transit.

The UK supports the current search and rescue efforts in the Mediterranean, and is playing a full part by contributing to joint efforts to prevent further loss of life at sea. The Prime Minister offered UK operational assets to support efforts coordinated by Italy and Frontex's Operation Triton. This includes a commitment to support Frontex's Mediterranean operations by providing two Border Force cutters and making a number of specialist debriefers available to Frontex. This is in addition to the UK's contribution of HMS Bulwark – the Royal Navy's flagship – and three search and rescue Merlin helicopters to support broader efforts in the Mediterranean. Because the UK is not a member of Frontex, we have no formal role in deciding the geographical scope of Operation Triton.



However, as you rightly note, it is essential to address the factors underlying this tragic situation. What is needed is a comprehensive strategy to prevent people embarking on the perilous journey across the Mediterranean. That strategy must also involve action against the people smugglers and traffickers and efforts to stabilise the countries from which the migrants are coming. Only by doing that can we offer a long term solution to the problem.

The UK is already taking forward action against the criminal gangs who exploit migrants, including joint efforts with European partners. For instance, the UK is a leading member of the 'core group' of EU Member States and African partners developing the EU's 'Khartoum Process', focused on concrete actions to combat people smuggling and human trafficking in the Horn of Africa. But we think more can be done to break the business model of the traffickers. We will continue to work with our European and African partners to achieve this, and to bring the ruthless criminals responsible for so many deaths to justice.

It is clear that we need to enhance efforts to help stabilise the countries from which migrants are travelling. This includes stepping up efforts to address conflict and instability as key drivers of migration, including in Syria. The UK is at the forefront of the international response to the crisis in Syria, providing £800 million in humanitarian assistance. Our support has reached hundreds of thousands of people across Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.

We also support the EU's proposals for sustainable protection in North and East Africa under EU Regional Development and Protection Programmes (RDPPs). RDPPs aim to improve the conditions for refugees seeking protection in their region of origin until they are able to return to their homes, and to help support their host communities. We are already participating in the Middle East RDPP, which is supporting a sustainable approach to protection for those who have fled to neighbouring countries to escape the Syrian crisis, and we have pledged €500,000 to that Programme. We support the proposals for new RDPPs in North Africa and the Horn of Africa. Enhanced, safer and more sustainable regional protection is key to protecting those in genuine need of refuge, and preventing further dangerous journeys to Europe.

We will continue to work with our EU, Mediterranean and African partners more broadly to develop and implement actions in the region in order to reduce the number of those placing their lives in the hands of criminal facilitators and the resulting loss of life.

In your email of 27 April, you raise your concerns about the number of migrants who may be returned to their country of origin and note that resettlement should not be a predetermined matter. The UK has a proud history of offering refuge to those in need and considers each claim for asylum on its individual merits. However, we need to distinguish between those genuinely fleeing persecution and those attempting the Mediterranean crossing for economic reasons.

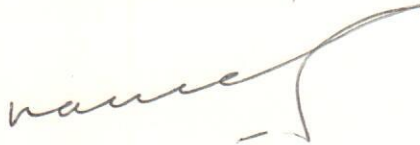
The UK does not refoule those with a genuine need for protection. However, we strongly believe that those without such a need, and who have no legal right to remain in the EU, should return home. Where they do not do so voluntarily, we should enforce their removal. To fail to do this would undermine our immigration system and encourage other irregular migrants to risk the illegal and dangerous crossing to the EU.

With millions of people in need around the world, resettlement to the EU cannot provide a realistic or sustainable solution for the majority. That is why we do not believe that a mandatory system of resettlement, as currently proposed by the European Commission, is the answer to the problems in the Mediterranean. Instead, support for the large numbers of displaced people is best provided in the region they come from.

There are no easy answers to the difficult and tragic situation in the Mediterranean. We remain firm in our belief that the only sustainable response to the scale of the situation is to tackle the root causes of these dangerous journeys and the organised criminal gangs behind them.

I hope that you find this information reassuring.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Brokenshire', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**James Brokenshire**