



Mr. Edouard Philippe
Prime Ministre
Hôtel de Matignon
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Copy to: Mrs Florence Parly, Minister of the Armed Forces
Mr Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs
Mr Bruno Lemaire, Minister for the Economy and Finance

Paris, Wednesday, February 5, 2020

Mr. Prime Minister,

The Saudi cargo ship Bahri Yanbu is due to arrive in Cherbourg on Thursday 6 February, as part of a European tour that will see it calling at Sheerness (UK) and Genoa (Italy) before leaving for Egypt and Saudi Arabia, according to the [shipowner](#). As the Bahri Yanbu is known to be transporting arms exclusively for the Saudi Ministry of Defence, which is engaged in a military intervention tainted by allegations of war crimes in Yemen, we, representatives of 17 humanitarian and human rights NGOs, express our deepest concerns about the fact that this cargo ship is stopping in France.

We urge you to inform us of the nature of the material to be loaded onto the Bahri Yanbu in Cherbourg and, in the event that it is armament, to inform us of the guarantees given to France that they will not be used unlawfully against Yemeni civilians.

In accordance with the Arms Trade Treaty that it has ratified, France is obligated to prohibit arms exports when there is a risk that they will be used to commit war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law. However, despite the systematic violations by the coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE in Yemen and the risk that French arms could contribute to them, France continues to transfer arms to these two countries. Whether it be air attacks against civilian targets (hospitals, schools, school buses, weddings, funerals, etc.) or the air and sea blockade that suffocates civilian populations, these violations - and those committed by all parties to the conflict - have been widely documented by the United Nations and by our organizations.

France continues to proclaim its commitment to international humanitarian law and multilateralism, reaffirmed again last month by the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian. But by continuing to transfer arms to systematically abusive forces, the French government is contradicting its own commitment and violating its international obligations, as pointed out by the UN experts on Yemen.

Last year, the Bahri Yanbu had already come to load arms all over Europe. Faced with the mobilization of civil society and trade unions, it had had to give up calling at the port of Le Havre. The secrecy surrounding its arrival in Cherbourg, scheduled for tomorrow, illustrates once again the opacity surrounding arms exports by France.

Since 2016, 12 European countries, including Belgium, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, have announced measures to suspend or limit arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates because of serious violations by the Saudi Arabia-UAE-led coalition in Yemen. This is not the case of France, which merely assures that the government mechanism for authorizing arms transfers has been strengthened, without indicating what the strengthened controls consist of or how they ensure that French arms will not be used to commit violations against civilians in Yemen.

7 out of 10 French people want France to suspend its arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for their role in the war in Yemen, according to a YouGov poll conducted in March 2019. And more than 250,000 people have signed petitions calling for an end to French arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which some of our organizations handed over to government officials last November.

In this context :

- We urge you to provide information on the stop the Saudi cargo ship Bahri Yanbu plans to make in France and the nature of its cargo, and if necessary, to suspend the shipment.
- We reiterate our call for France to cease its arms transfers to Saudi Arabia so as not to be complicit in serious violations.
- We also urge you to ensure greater transparency in the arms trade, in particular by allowing effective parliamentary control, at a time when the National Assembly's fact-finding mission on arms export control is about to present its recommendations.

We are at your disposal to organize a meeting in the coming days.

Best regards,

Signatory organisations

1. Action contre la Faim (ACF)
2. Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture (ACAT)
3. Alliance internationale pour la défense des droits et des libertés (AIDL)
4. Avaaz
5. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
6. Fédération internationale pour les droits humains (FIDH)
7. Handicap International
8. Human Rights Watch
9. Ligue des droits de l'homme
10. L'Observatoire des armements
11. Médecins du Monde
12. Oxfam France
13. Première Urgence Internationale
14. Salam For Yemen
15. Solidarités International
16. SumofUs
17. Yemen Solidarity Network