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*\*In Memoriam (1935–2019)*

24 July 2019

Rt Hon Boris Johnson  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of Human Rights Watch, I am writing to urge you to maintain a focus on human rights in your government's domestic and foreign policy and to ensure that rights protections are not downgraded during your administration. Below we identify five priority areas of human rights concern.

### Protecting Human Rights During and After Brexit

Many human rights protections currently enjoyed by UK citizens derive from EU law, including employment rights, equality and privacy. Many are set out in the Charter on Fundamental Rights, and have been strengthened by the EU Court of Justice rulings. We urge you to ensure these rights are fully maintained as enforceable rights in UK law after Brexit, particularly since the Charter on Fundamental Rights will not then be part of UK law.

We are concerned about human rights implications of the UK leaving the European Union without a deal. In our assessment, such a departure carries considerable risks for human rights on people living in the UK and the rights of UK citizens living in other EU states. We welcome the assurances of the UK government on protecting the rights of EU citizens but note that people report practical difficulties securing residence rights, and the fact that UK citizens overseas are having to rely on country-by-country assurances.

We note the concerns by senior police officers about the risks of no-deal for the security situation in Northern Ireland, which we believe could consequently harm people's rights. We are concerned about the potential

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impact of disruptions to the supply of medicine on people's right to health. And we remain concerned that no-deal Brexit could trigger a resurgence of the hate crimes targeting perceived foreigners that we saw in the wake of the 2016 referendum. We therefore urge you to take all steps needed to avoid no-deal Brexit.

### **Ensuring Children and Families in the UK Have Adequate Food**

Recent Human Rights Watch research has found that children and families in the UK are going hungry, amid rising reliance on food banks and record numbers of children living in poverty. Changes to the welfare system and spending cuts since 2010 have played a significant role in this hidden crisis. Our findings echo studies by the Child Poverty Action Group, the Trussell Trust and the Institute of Fiscal Studies.

We urge your government to take immediate steps to ensure the right to food by reviewing the rollout of Universal Credit and its impact on children and families, systematically measuring the link between welfare changes and reliance on food aid, and fully ending the two-child cap on welfare payments.

### **Protecting Women and Girls from Violence**

We urge you to make protecting women and girls from violence a priority for your government at home and abroad. In 2011, David Cameron signed the Istanbul Convention—an important mechanism to protect women and girls from violence. Yet the UK government has still not ratified it. We encourage you to make ratifying the treaty a priority for your government. While we welcome the recent introduction of the Domestic Abuse bill, further work is needed to ensure the final law adequately recognizes the gendered nature of domestic and other violence against women, provides clear protections for migrant women, and ensures support for essential specialist services for survivors of violence.

The UK has been a global leader through the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative. We hope that your government will redouble efforts to ensure survivors of conflict-related sexual violence have access to comprehensive medical, psychosocial and legal services and that perpetrators of such crimes are brought to account.

### **Prioritising Rights in UK Foreign and Trade Policy**

The United Kingdom's stake in the rules-based international order requires respect for human rights and the rule of law. Human Rights Watch is concerned that the imperatives of trade and geo-politics mean that human rights risk being marginalized by the UK government. This risk is particularly acute given the need to reach new or continuity trade agreements with many countries after Brexit.

We urge you to ensure that human rights clauses in current EU trade deals are preserved when the UK enters into agreements to continue those terms, and that human rights clauses are included in new agreements. In that regard, we would suggest you appoint a senior advisor on human rights and trade to ensure human rights clauses are monitored and enforced. We also urge you to speak out on behalf of jailed human rights defenders, journalists and peaceful activists no matter the diplomatic or trade cost.

### **Halting UK Arms Exports to Saudi Arabia**

Human Rights Watch urges your government to definitively halt all UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia. Human Rights Watch has documented serious violations of the laws of war, including potential war crimes, committed by the Saudi-led coalition during its war in Yemen. We have identified at least 90 specific coalition strikes that we judge to have been unlawful, including attacks on schools, hospitals, mosques, markets and homes.

Continued exports contravene the UK's own export licence criteria and may make UK complicit in the abuses. Following the ruling by the Court of Appeal that the UK should reconsider existing licences and the agreement of the UK to halt new licences, we urge your government to take a definitive decision to halt all arms exports, including those under existing licenses, until such time as the Saudi-led coalition ends its violations in Yemen, credibly investigates abuses, and holds those responsible to account.

We recognise that there are many challenges facing the UK government at present. Human rights are a compass to ensure that the UK preserves its values and protects people as it rises to meet those challenges.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these and other pressing human rights issues with you or your officials.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'B. Ward', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Benjamin Ward  
UK Director (Acting)  
Human Rights Watch