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Hélène Laverdière

Députée de Laurier-Sainte-Marie / Member of Parliament for Laurier-Sainte-Marie

July 31, 2017

Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Freeland,

You are well aware of the serious concerns Canadians have expressed over the sale of Canadian-made military assets, including Light Armoured Vehicles (or LAVs), to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and of human rights violations reportedly committed by Saudi forces.

In the spring of 2016, following reports that Saudi Arabia had used similar military vehicles in actions against their own population, I, along with my NDP caucus, demanded that the Liberal government conduct a thorough review of the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia and the potential consequences of Canadian military exports sold to the Saudi government. Unfortunately, the Liberal government refused. Recent evidence shows Canadian-made armoured vehicles were used in a conflict with Saudi citizens, a conflict which involves numerous human rights violations.

On April 13th 2016, then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Stéphane Dion attempted to assure Canadians that military equipment manufactured in Canada would not be used against civilians. In responding to my questions in Question Period, Minister Dion had this to say in the House of Commons:

"As for the export permits, the Minister of Foreign Affairs will grant them or deny them based on how the equipment is used. As long as the equipment is not used in any human rights abuses. Otherwise I will reverse my decision."

Based on this clear commitment, the Liberal government has an indisputable responsibility, beyond conducting a thorough review that fully respects our domestic and international commitments, to immediately reverse the decision to permit the exportation of these military goods. Current export regulations require an immediate review based on this new information. Delaying action would be completely unacceptable and would further risk Canada's reputation.

The Liberal government also blocked an NDP initiative to create a Parliamentary committee to oversee foreign arms sales. These actions contradict Liberal rhetoric regarding human rights on the international stage.

The Liberal government must also be cognizant that this situation may have consequences for Canadian workers. The government should be preparing contingency plans to ensure that Canadian workers are not adversely affected.

I know you personally believe in defending human rights around the world. However, the Liberal government made a monumental mistake in continuing to export Canadian weapons to Saudi Arabia following reports of human rights abuses there.

I urge you to take a strong stand by enacting what your government promised and call for an immediate reassessment of all Canadian military export authorizations to Saudi Arabia.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Hélène Laverdière". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly legible.

Hélène Laverdière
MP for Laurier—Sainte-Marie
NDP Critic for Foreign Affairs