

Rt. Hon. Ben Wallace  
Secretary of State for Defence  
Ministry of Defence  
Whitehall  
SW1A 1HB

27<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

**RE: Protection of Civilians Week - time to address UK policy on civilian harm mitigation, transparency, and oversight**

On the occasion of UN Protection of Civilians Week, the undersigned civil society organisations are writing to you to develop a constructive dialogue and request a meeting with you to discuss the UK's policy on civilian harm mitigation, transparency and oversight. As some of our closest allies have begun to reform their approach to civilian harm in military operations, we believe there is an urgent need for the UK to learn from developing practice on this issue.

Revelations published in the New York Times in 2021 about critical failures by Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) to prevent, respond to, and be held accountable for civilian harm caused in Iraq and Syria add to the strong evidence base of civilian harm from CJTF-OIR operations built up by researchers, humanitarian agencies, and international organisations over the years. This public disquiet partly spurred, as you will know, the US Secretary of State of Defense to direct the Department of Defense (DoD) to improve policies on data collection, reporting and acknowledgement of civilian harm, improvements which aim to overhaul processes and create a Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan (CHMRAP), as well as a civilian protection 'center of excellence.'

Given the important role of UK forces in combined operations as part of CJTF-OIR, these developments clearly have substantial implications for the UK's own approach to civilian harm.

All states participating in CJTF-OIR, including the US and UK, should ensure that all instances of reported civilian harm are investigated and accounted for. We urge for constructive dialogue around the hundreds of civilian-harm claims from local communities that indicate that large-scale civilian harm occurred as a direct result of CJTF-OIR operations.

We believe that the UK for its part has an opportunity to be a global leader on civilian protection issues. We would like to discuss the following with you:

- Engagement with civil society on these issues and involvement of civil society in implementing improvements
- Implications from the reviews of US practice and the CHMRAP for the UK's own approach to civilian harm mitigation and response
- How the UK could contribute to developing the knowledge base on civilian harm mitigation and response

- How civilian protection concerns are included in UK support for partner forces, lessons learnt from civilian harm incidents and standards set for best practice.
- How the UK can play a leading role in ensuring historic instances of civilian harm allegations resulting from CJTF-OIR actions are properly accounted for.
- How the UK can lead the strengthening of NATO's Protection of Civilian preparedness.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Action On Armed Violence (AOAV)  
 Airwars  
 Amnesty International UK  
 Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights (CIVIC)  
 Center for Civilians in Conflict  
 Crisis Action  
 Every Casualty Counts  
 Iraq Body Count  
 Reprieve  
 Save the Children  
 War Child

