

The UK has not sold equipment such as tanks, aircraft, warships or artillery to Israel since this Government came to power in May 1997.

On 8 July 2002, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw announced in Parliament a clarification of the Government's policy on considering export licences for items to a foreign defence manufacturer, who incorporates them in a larger piece of equipment which it then exports to a third country. At the same time, the Foreign Secretary emphasised that the Government had considered its response to a number of export licence applications for the export of parts, subsystems and components to the US for incorporation into equipment destined for other countries. These included display units for incorporation into F16 aircraft scheduled for delivery to Israel in 2003. The UK content is less than one per cent in value, but the supply of the units, known as Head Up Display units, or HUDs, is part of a long-standing collaboration in this US programme. Any interruption to the supply of these components would have serious implications for the UK's defence relations with the US. The Government continues to be seriously concerned about the situation in Israel and the Occupied Territories, and as such our direct arms sales policy has not changed.

## 1.11 Iran

President Mohammad Khatami was re-elected in June 2001 with an increased majority, demonstrating continuing strong support from a large majority of the Iranian people for his reform programme which aims to establish an Islamic civil society based on the rule of law. The pace of progress has slowed since he was first elected in 1997 mostly as a result of the continuing struggle between the reformists and conservatives.

The conservative-dominated judiciary has closed down over 50 publications in the past two years, starting shortly after the election of a reformist majority in the Majles (Parliament) elections in February 2000, and imprisoned a number of journalists and editors. Nonetheless the remaining reformist newspapers continue to debate and criticise a wide range of issues, including a spate of public floggings in August and September 2001. A number of members of the Majles have been given prison sentences, mainly for critical remarks made in the Majles, although only one, Hoseyn Loqmanian, was actually imprisoned. The resulting uproar was resolved only when the Speaker of the Majles walked out, followed by a majority of the

other members, and refused to return until Mr. Loqmanian had been released. His pardon by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, defused the short-term confrontation, but the underlying issue of Parliamentary immunity remains in doubt.

President Khatami expressed his regret at the detention in spring 2001 of approximately 60 members of the religious nationalist Iran Freedom Movement on national security charges. Trials behind closed doors started in November and although at the time of going to print no verdict had been handed down, many of the defendants have been released on payment of large sums in bail.

The harsh sentences imposed in January 2001 on intellectuals and journalists who attended a conference in Berlin in August 2000 at which reform in Iran was discussed were reduced on appeal and charges of acting against national security were dropped in January 2002. However, some of the defendants remain in jail, notably the investigative journalist Akbar Ganji. A number of students remain in prison, following demonstrations in 1999 and others have been arrested since. Some said they were tortured while in prison.

In March 2002 the Majles approved a bill aimed at enforcing Article 38 of the Iranian constitution, which prohibits torture. The UK welcomes this move, as there have been many allegations of torture in prison before trial. The bill will have to be accepted by the Guardian Council before it becomes law.

The situation for women is complex. The Majles has made a number of attempts to address the continuing discrimination against women in Iran. Although the conservative-dominated Guardian Council, which vets proposed legislation for its compatibility with Islamic law, has rejected many of the proposed reforms, some restrictions on unmarried women studying abroad have been lifted. And women in Iran do have the right to vote and to drive and there are several female MPs, a female Vice-President (for Environmental Affairs) and some provincial deputy governors. In total, women make up over half of the students at Iranian universities. We welcome proposals made in December by the Iranian Cabinet to accede to the Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women. However, women are still discriminated against in law (for example, in the areas of inheritance, marriage and divorce) and proposed legislative reforms in this area continue to be blocked by the Guardian Council.

Despite appeals for clemency following their conviction on charges of espionage in Shiraz in 2000, fourteen people, including ten Jews, received prison sentences. Two of the Jews have now been released on completion of their sentences and

the others have a group cell, regular visits from their families and access to newspapers and kosher food. However, we remain concerned about the religious-based nature of the trial. The Foreign Secretary raised the matter together with other human rights issues during his visit to Tehran in September 2001.

The UK continues to have concerns about the treatment of other religious minorities, including Christians and Sunnis, and particularly those who, like the Baha'is, are not recognised by the constitution. We note that there has been some improvement in the situation of the Baha'is over the past year and that none are now under sentence of death. But they continue to suffer harassment and discrimination in areas such as education, employment, housing and travel.

In what seemed a potentially significant challenge to the impunity of the intelligence agencies, 15 intelligence officers were convicted in January 2001 for their involvement in the serial killings of intellectuals in 1998–1999. This represented a significant victory for President Khatami as it was the first time since the Iranian Revolution in 1979 that members of the security forces had been prosecuted for extra-judicial killings. The Supreme Leader also gave a public commitment that such actions would no longer be tolerated. But in August 2001 the Supreme Court overturned the verdicts and ordered that the case should be re-examined. Press reports in late May 2002 indicated that two death sentences were commuted and four unnamed individuals sentenced, but there has been no formal confirmation of this. Five of the interrogators have been jailed on charges of mistreating the accused. There are reports that in February 2002 a lawyer representing some of those who had been murdered was tried behind closed doors and sentenced by the Judicial Organisation of the Armed Forces to five years' imprisonment and 70 lashes on charges of disseminating confidential information.

Our policy of critical engagement with Iran aims to encourage the reform process and enables us to raise regularly, at the highest levels of the Iranian government, issues of concern, particularly human rights. Our EU partners do likewise and human rights are a key part of the EU-Iran political dialogue, the most recent meeting of which took place in February 2002.

The UK was pleased that the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly (see page 67 for more details) passed by a majority a resolution expressing concern about a wide range of issues. These include the growing number of executions and the use of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment in Iran. We welcome positive developments regarding children and the broad participation of the electorate in the presidential elections of 2001. A similar resolution was

regrettably defeated at the UN Commission on Human Rights (see page 70 for more details) in April 2002 in Geneva. As a result, there is no longer a Special Rapporteur for Iran. His mandate had allowed him to report on the human rights situation there, in support of those striving for progress in human rights. However, the Iranian authorities had prevented him from visiting since 1996. On a more positive note, Iran has indicated that it may accept visits by special rapporteurs with thematic responsibilities. At the time of going to print, the EU was considering conducting a dialogue on human rights with Iran.

## 1.12 Saudi Arabia

We continue to have concerns about the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia. These include the implementation of basic international human rights norms; aspects of the judicial system; corporal and capital punishment; torture; discrimination against women and non-Muslims and restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and worship. Islam is the only religion that can be practised publicly in Saudi Arabia. The open practice of any other religion is forbidden. In 2001, the Saudi authorities detained a number of non-Muslims for practising their religious beliefs.

The UK Government remains committed to improving human rights in Saudi Arabia through an active dialogue with the Saudi authorities. We regularly discuss human rights issues with the Saudi government, including at Ministerial level. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary raised the cases of a number of British nationals detained in Saudi Arabia in June 2001, and the Prime Minister repeated this when he visited Saudi Arabia in October 2001. We continue to raise these cases at the highest levels. When former FCO Minister Ben Bradshaw visited Saudi Arabia in March 2002 he raised the issue of religious freedom for non-Muslims. We have expressed our concern to the Saudi authorities about corporal punishment. We, with our EU partners, made our concerns clear to the Saudi authorities about capital punishment, including public executions. In 2001, the UK – along with other EU countries – objected to the wide-ranging Saudi reservation that Sharia law would overrule the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) when there was a contradiction between the two.

In May 2002, Saudi Arabia adopted new criminal justice procedures aimed at modernising the criminal justice system. Among other things, they provide for lawyers to represent