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NICK HARVEY MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE ARMED FORCES

MSU/4/3/3/dh

2 May 2012

Dear Ms Strik,

Thank you for your letter to the Defence Secretary regarding the Council of Europe's investigations concerning the loss of lives on a vessel in the Mediterranean Sea.

I would first like to apologise for the delay in our response. This was caused through our misunderstanding. Despite writing to us last October, your letter was only received in mid-February and, having already channelled national information through NATO, we believed that our input had been incorporated into NATO's response that was published on 8 February.

I would like to emphasise the importance with which the United Kingdom takes its responsibilities. We also wholly support the need for transparency. All of our military vessels operating at sea are fully aware of their obligations under maritime law to render assistance to those in distress. To help with your investigation, we have checked our national records for the position of our ships in the region against the dates, times and locations specified for the vessel in your letter. Our records show that no UK military assets either saw or made contact with the stricken vessel in question. This is irrespective of whether these assets were under national, NATO or other command and control arrangements at the time.

We remain fully supportive of your investigation in the hope and expectation that lessons can be learned from this tragic incident.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Harvey
NICK HARVEY MP

Ms Strik
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