



Strasbourg, 23 May 2012

Dear Secretary of State,

I refer to my letter dated 26 October 2011 in the framework of the inquiry I am conducting for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe concerning the circumstances around a tragic incident in the Mediterranean Sea in March / April 2011 that led to the death of 63 boat people after their appeals for rescue were allegedly ignored. I attach for your convenience a summary of this incident along with a copy of my earlier letter to you.

As you are certainly aware, I have completed my report on this issue and the Parliamentary Assembly has adopted a Resolution on the matter in April this year. Under Rule 49.1 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly I remain in charge of the follow-up to my report for a term of one year after the adoption of the text by the Assembly.

The United Kingdom is the only Council of Europe member state approached in the framework of my inquiry that has not replied to my letter and I would therefore like to reiterate my questions.

First of all, I would be most grateful if you could provide me with any relevant information you or your authorities may have relating to the incident and the role of any British military vessels. In addition I would be grateful if you could provide relevant information concerning the precise position of all British military vessels, be they under national or NATO command, present in the Mediterranean Sea between 27 March and 10 April 2011.

Of particular interest is the area around LAT 33°58.2'N – LONG 012°55.8'E in a 40 nautical miles radius on the dates 27 to 29 March 2011, as well as the following areas

- 13°26'7.629"E 33°26'42.403"N
- 13°30'55.127"E 33°24'59.576"N
- 13°32'17.269"E 33°27'3.822"N

on each of the following 4 days:

- 3 April 2011
- 4 April 2011
- 5 April 2011
- 6 April 2011

Furthermore, as you are certainly aware, the survivors remember having been approached by a helicopter, some of them say the word 'ARMY' was written on its side.

The Rt Hon Philip HAMMOND MP
Secretary of State for Defence of the United Kingdom

.../...

Could you please indicate to me if helicopters with the word "Army" written on it participated in the Operation Unified Protector? If so, I would be grateful if you could provide me with the logs of the(se) helicopter(s) for the 27 March 2011, including its(their) loading or uploading of materials and goods.

I understand the sensitivity of providing military information, but I hope your authorities will be able to provide me with full information on this matter.

For your further information I am providing the link to my report and the Assembly Resolution:

For the report:

<http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Doc/XrefViewPDF.asp?FileID=18095&Language=EN>,

For the Parliamentary Assembly Resolution:

<http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/Doc/XrefViewPDF.asp?FileID=18234&Language=EN>

I would like to thank you in advance for considering this request and I naturally remain at your disposal for any further information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tineke Strik', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Tineke Strik
Rapporteur

Summary of the incidents

A rubber boat, around 12 meters long with 72 persons on board, was left to drift in the Mediterranean between 26 March 2011 and 10 April 2011. When it was washed up on the Libyan coast near Zlitan, there were only 11 survivors and two of these persons subsequently died.

On 26 March 2011, Father Mussie Zerai (an Eritrean Priest living in Rome) received a satellite call from the boat in distress. He followed up immediately informing the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Rome. The boat was located by the Satellite provider Thuraya, and the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Rome issued a distress call on 27 March 2011 to all ships transiting in the Sicily Channel. The call indicated that a boat with approximately 68 persons on board (there were in fact 72 persons on board) was in distress giving its exact location (LAT 33°58.2'N – LONG 012°55.8'E).

This call was repeated every 4 hours between 27 March 2011 and 7 April 2011.

The testimony of the nine survivors are coherent and consistent on several points of major concern.

Firstly, shortly after Father Zerai informed the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Rome, one helicopter appeared and circled around the boat before leaving. Shortly after this, another (or possibly the same) helicopter circled above the boat and then used a rope in order to lower down some water and biscuits. The persons on board the helicopter indicated to those on the boat in distress that they should wait. The helicopter then left. Neither the helicopter nor any vessel returned.

The boat then drifted until about the 10th day of the trip (around the 5th April). The survivors are adamant that a large military vessel (light grey in colour) sailed into the immediate vicinity of the boat. It was so close that the survivors could clearly see people in military uniforms on the vessel's deck. Some of these persons were watching the rubber boat through binoculars, others were taking photos of it. The survivors recalled having seen a helicopter or helicopters on the military vessel's deck. The military vessel did not take any steps to rescue the persons on board the boat in distress.

