

Statement to Parliament: Foreign Secretary updates the House of Commons on the death of Jamal Khashoggi

Deputy Speaker, with your permission I will make a statement on the death of Jamal Khashoggi.

From the moment that he was reported missing after entering the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul on 2nd October, extremely disturbing reports emerged about his fate.

On Friday, we received confirmation that Mr Khashoggi had indeed suffered a violent death, and the Saudi foreign minister has since described it as murder.

The Government condemns his killing in the strongest possible terms. Today the thoughts and prayers of the whole House are with his fiancée, his family and his friends, who were left to worry for more than two weeks, only to have their worst fears confirmed.

After his disappearance, the Government made clear that Saudi Arabia must cooperate with Turkey and conduct a full and credible investigation. Anyone found responsible for any offence must be held fully accountable.

But on top of our concerns about the appalling brutality involved lie two other points. Firstly, Mr Khashoggi's horrific treatment was inflicted by people who work for a government with whom we have close relations.

And secondly, as well as being a critic of the Saudi government, he was also a journalist.

At the time of his death, Mr Khashoggi wrote for the Washington Post and had contributed to the Guardian. Because in this country we believe in freedom of expression and a free media, the protection of journalists who are simply doing their jobs is of paramount concern.

On 9th October, I conveyed this message to the Saudi Ambassador in person and to the Saudi Foreign Minister by telephone. I instructed the British Ambassador in Riyadh to emphasise our strength of feeling to the Saudi government at every level.

Last week my Right Honourable Friend the International Trade Secretary cancelled his attendance at a forthcoming conference in Riyadh. On 17th October I met Fred Ryan, the Chief Executive of the Washington Post, and I spoke again to the Saudi Foreign Minister this weekend.

On Friday, the Saudi government released the preliminary findings of their investigation. They later announced the arrest of 18 people and the sacking of two senior officials, which is an important start to the process of

accountability.

But I will say frankly to the House that the claim that Mr Khashoggi died in a fight does not amount to a credible explanation. There remains an urgent need to establish exactly what happened on 2nd October and thereafter.

The incident happened on Turkish soil, so it is right that the investigation is being led by the Government of Turkey.

They now need to establish who authorised the dispatch of 15 officials from Saudi Arabia to Turkey; when the government in Riyadh first learned of Mr Khashoggi's death; what became of the body; why there was a delay in allowing Turkish investigators to enter the Consulate; and why it took until 19th October to disclose that Mr Khashoggi had died 17 days earlier.

This matters because only after a full investigation will it be possible to apportion responsibility and ensure that any crimes are punished following proper due process.

Last week I spoke to both my French and German counterparts and the House will have noticed the strong statement jointly released yesterday by Britain, France and Germany.

The actions Britain and our allies take will depend on two things: firstly the credibility of the final explanation given by Saudi Arabia, and secondly on our confidence that such an appalling episode cannot – and will not – be repeated. We will of course wait for the final outcome of the investigation before making any decisions.

Honourable Members know that we have an important strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia involving defence and security cooperation which has saved lives on the streets of Britain. We also have a trading partnership that supports thousands of jobs.

But whilst we will be thoughtful and considered in our response, I have also been clear that if the appalling stories we are reading turn out to be true, they are fundamentally incompatible with our values and we will act accordingly.

Indeed such reports are also incompatible with Saudi Arabia's own stated goal of progress and renewal. That is why the extent to which Saudi Arabia is able to convince us that it remains committed to that progress will ultimately determine the response of the UK and its allies – and we will continue to convey our strength of feeling on the issue to every level of the Saudi leadership.

In his final column, published in the Washington Post after his death, Jamal Khashoggi lamented the lack of freedom of expression in the Arab world.

Let us make sure that the lessons learned and actions taken following his death at least progress and honour his life's work.

I commend this statement to the House.