10 DOWNING STREET
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THE PRIME MINISTER

25 November 2021

Dear Emmanuel,

Yesterday's appalling tragedy in the Channel has shocked people across France and the United Kingdom. I know your thoughts, like mine, are with the families of those men, women and children who lost their lives at sea. I pay tribute to the work of your emergency services who have been dealing with this devastating situation. I also pay tribute to you, the French government and other authorities across France, who have been working on this challenging issue for so long.

We spoke yesterday evening and agreed to intensive talks between our ministers and officials. I am confident following our conversation that you recognise, like I do, the urgency of the situation we are both facing. I have also seen the statement by your Prime Minister today and a read out of a call between the Home Secretary and your Interior Minister, which has agreed a number of positive steps and areas for further cooperation.

In particular, I welcome the fact that the Home Secretary will be invited to Calais this Sunday to meet her counterparts from France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany. I stand ready to upgrade this meeting to a Leaders' Level Summit or to arrange further bilateral discussion with you or with colleagues.

As I set out in a letter to you this summer, I have long been profoundly concerned that any morning we could wake to the news of a serious tragedy involving widespread loss of life in the Channel, including of women and children. I noted that the British and French public would rightly ask whether we had done everything possible to prevent such a catastrophe.

Such a catastrophe has now happened. I recognise that in both our countries, frontline law enforcement teams and immigration officials are working day and night but I agree with your words that unless we increase our efforts today, other tragedies will happen. This morning, further boats have arrived with yet more lives put at risk.

I write to offer my support and solidarity as well as specific ideas for saving lives and tackling the traffickers that sit behind these crossings, in a spirit of partnership and cooperation with you and our neighbours across Europe. Britain and France have a joint moral commitment to save lives but also legal obligations, including through the United Nations' Migrant Smuggling Protocol and the Convention on the Trafficking in Human Beings.

In my letter in June, I outlined areas where I believed we could do more to work together. We have made some progress since then, including with the agreement reached between the Home Office and your Interior Ministry this summer. Although we have made some progress and stopped over 20,000 crossings, far too many have seen their lives put at risk. We must go further and faster, together.

As we discussed last night, I am open to any new creative ideas to help eliminate this terrible trade in human beings and to protect lives. Our model for future steps should be the exceptional creativity our countries showed in the past through the creation of the Juxtaposed Controls. These new ideas would build on the strength of our bilateral security and intelligence relationship and would recognise the scale of organised criminality both our countries are fighting.

To redouble our efforts, I would like us to consider:

- joint or reciprocal maritime patrol operations in each other's territorial waters;
- deploying more advanced technology including ground sensors and radar;
- reciprocal airborne surveillance by manned and unmanned aircraft, perhaps flying under joint insignia; and
- deepening the work of our Joint Intelligence Cell with better real time intelligence sharing to deliver arrests and prosecutions on both sides of the Channel.

But I am also now formally requesting that we make urgent progress towards one of my previous proposals by establishing joint patrols wherever this can be most effective. This could include French gendarmes and UK Border Force working together, perhaps under one single command structure or the joint deployment of private security contractors. We are ready to begin such patrols from the start of next week, and to scale up thereafter.

In addition to our bilateral work, my ministers and officials are ready to work multilaterally and with the EU to address our shared challenges. France will soon be taking the presidency of the Council of the European Union. I am glad you have committed to make reaching a systematic returns agreement between the UK and the EU a priority for your presidency, especially given the EU's own legal obligations to address migrant smuggling. The EU has readmissions agreements with countries including Belarus and the Russian Federation; I hope such an agreement can be rapidly reached with the United Kingdom too.

Pending such a readmissions agreement at EU level, I propose that we put in place a bilateral readmissions agreement to allow all illegal migrants who cross the Channel to be returned. This would have an immediate effect and would significantly reduce – if not stop – the crossings, saving lives by fundamentally breaking the business model of the criminal gangs. My officials will share draft text with counterparts.

As you would expect, we will also be bringing forward measures domestically to further our work to tackle illegal migration and human trafficking. I will make sure your officials are kept updated on these. Our New Plan For Immigration includes far-reaching reforms to our asylum system, designed to deter illegal entry into the UK, break the business model of people smuggling networks and remove more easily those with no right to be here. This builds on our work to make sure that our criminal justice system effectively prosecutes people smugglers.

I remain confident that our two great countries can rise to this challenge and build on our deep security cooperation to address illegal migration and human trafficking at our shared border as well as upstream across the Continent of Europe, in the Mediterranean and beyond.

I am copying this letter to the President of the European Council.

With my best wishes,

His Excellency Monsieur le President Emmanuel Macron