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Huw Merriman MP  
House of Commons  
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Dear Huw

Thank you for your correspondence dated 10 August 2020 to the Home Secretary regarding small boats attempting to cross the Channel carrying migrants to the UK. I am replying as the Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts. I am sorry for the delay in responding.

I wanted to respond to you directly because I feel so strongly about this issue myself, all the more so since the tragic events of last week which saw the loss of an entire family attempting one of these crossings.

Our country is better, stronger and richer, in every sense, for the contribution made by millions who have made their home here legally. Illegal migration undermines all of that. It undermines public confidence in the system, it puts immigration in a negative rather than positive light, and it makes it much harder to allow legal immigration if the whole system is undermined.

The Home Secretary and I are deeply concerned that people are entering the country in this dangerous way, often facilitated by ruthless criminals. We are determined to end these dangerous, illegal and unnecessary crossings, making them unviable, and reforming the asylum system to make it fairer to genuine refugees and firmer against those who are not.

Illegal migration is a complex issue with a long history. For decades we have seen people successfully use deception and evasion to arrive in our country, and then use our legal system – especially the asylum system – to remain in it. Their motives are often economic rather than humanitarian. Our asylum system is broken and the Home Secretary and I are determined to fix it.

Most Channel crossing attempts are facilitated by ruthless criminal gangs, profiting from migrants determined to come here. We are working with the National Crime Agency to go after those criminals, and every week sees arrests, prosecutions and convictions of those involved.

In August 2020, the Home Secretary appointed former Royal Marine Dan O'Mahoney as Clandestine Channel Threat Commander. His mission is to make Channel crossings unviable and prevent other forms of high-risk clandestine entry into the UK (such as hiding

in the backs of lorries). His close work with the French and other EU countries builds on existing co-operation. It includes tougher action, stronger enforcement measures, and seeking returns to embarkation point following interception at sea. This appointment underscores our joint determination to seize the issue and drive the eradication of these dangerous and unacceptable crossings.

These crossings are illegally facilitated by reckless and dangerous criminals. The crossings are also totally unnecessary as France is a safe country with a well-functioning asylum system. Anyone needing protection can and should claim asylum in France instead of making this dangerous journey. There is no reason not to do so and instead travel illegally and dangerously to the UK. Doing that must call into question the sincerity of these people's claims for international protection. But last week's tragedy also calls into question whether many of those undertaking these hazardous journeys truly understand the risks that they are taking, or the facility for claiming asylum that exists in all the safe European countries that they have passed through.

We want to be fair to those who are genuinely in need of international protection, and firm against those who are not, but allowing people to lodge a UK asylum claim from outside the UK – which is what a number of people have been advocating – will not dissuade those who know that their true circumstances do not merit our support. Nor will it provide a safer route to asylum than the routes which already exist. Those who are determined to come to the UK will continue to try. Unless we work to make these crossings unviable, the risk of another tragedy remains.

So we are working with the French to prevent these crossings. That includes patrols of the beaches – which we help fund – surveillance, including aerial assets to identify and intercept crossing attempts, and intelligence sharing. We have provided the French with resources and funding, and continue to work constructively with them to tackle the issue. We established a Joint Intelligence Cell in July, ensuring that intelligence about crossings drives forward swift investigative activity on both sides. This is already paying off. Over 5,000 crossing attempts have been stopped this year by the French authorities, and nearly half of all crossing attempts are stopped on or near French beaches. Returns are increasing: we have successfully returned over 100 people to France and other EU states so far this year, and are working to return over 1000 others.

However, we know we need to do more, and it serves both French and UK interests to work together to cut this route entirely. To do that we need to convince people that using it doesn't work, and that means returning people swiftly to the safe European countries they have just left. We do that wherever we can, but that action is often frustrated by legal interventions, often at the last minute, and often found to be without merit. These last-minute legal actions of questionable merit demonstrate that our asylum system is fundamentally broken. That is why we are planning the biggest overhaul of the UK asylum system in decades.

As the Home Secretary has set out, we will introduce a new system that is firm and fair, welcoming people through safe and legal routes but putting a stop to the abuse. We will stop those who come here illegally from making endless legal claims to remain and will address the moral, legal and practical problems with the asylum system. We plan to bring forward legislation to deliver on that commitment next year.

In the meantime, we are developing tactics on the water to physically prevent the entry of unauthorised migrants' boats to UK territorial waters. We are involving multiple agencies and cutting-edge technologies to explore safe and effective ways to stop these boats. We will be sharing those tactics with the French and continuing to strengthen our joint operational activity against these crossings.

We completely understand and share the enormous concern people feel at these crossings. We will take every step necessary – practical and legislative – to stop the crossings, control our borders, and return those who enter our country illegally.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Philp', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

**Chris Philp MP**  
**Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts**