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Thank you for your letter of 14 February about the UK Government's decision to ban khat and for your support of this decision. I am sorry for the unacceptable delay in replying.

I announced plans to control khat on 3 July 2013. The legislation was subsequently drafted and laid before the UK Parliament for its consideration in autumn. You may be aware that the parliamentary process has now been completed. We are pressing ahead for the legislation to come into force later this month. The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 will be amended to make the production, possession, supply, importation and exportation of khat illegal activities in the UK.

I understand that you were concerned about the recommendations made by the Home Affairs Select Committee in its khat report and any impact on the direction of our policies. I can assure you that there are no plans to regulate the khat trade in the UK, for similar reasons to those which you have cited in your letter – described below. You will be able to download a copy of my response to the Committee at:

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmhaff/1160/1160.pdf

The decision to control khat was informed through extensive consultation, not only with our statutory body of experts on drug issues, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, but also on the views of local communities and other countries where khat is an issue of concern. I believe that the conclusions drawn by our experts were reasonable, based on all available evidence at the

time and a comprehensive scientific review. Nevertheless, as the Dutch experience has shown, the prevalence of khat use in some of our communities is associated with health and social harms affecting vulnerable users and their families – including dependence, family breakdown, unemployment and the lack of integration.

After the khat ban came into force in the Netherlands, I also became particularly concerned about the increasing risk of the UK becoming a single, regional khat trafficking hub to the Netherlands and other EU countries where this drug is banned.

I am pleased to learn that the ban of khat has had the intended effect to disrupt its distribution in the Netherlands. The banning of khat in the UK will further contribute to the interception of prohibited shipments and the prosecution of international khat traffickers who operate under cover of the UK's khat trade. Despite the limited powers available to them until the UK khat ban comes into force, UK law enforcement continue to monitor imports and assist other countries to intercept suspected khat shipments.

However, it is important that we do not rely solely on a legislative approach. While the UK supports the international community's effort against the trafficking of khat through smuggling routes which will vary, we also need to raise awareness of the risks associated with khat and reduce local demand. This is why the UK Government is adopting a co-ordinated approach to support targeted health and prevention approaches based on local community needs, for both khat users and their families, before and after the UK khat ban comes into force. We have also developed a proportionate policing response. I understand that our policing lead arranged a visit with Dutch counterparts to learn from their experience of the khat ban in community policing.

We further need to reduce the risks posed by potential links between the international khat trafficking trade and the economies of producer countries. The UK is engaged with the Kenyan Government who are concerned about the potential impact on khat farmers. We are also providing assistance in Kenya through aid to development projects like the Kenyan Market Access programme to enable low-income households to participate in value added markets – including work on improving productivity, livestock and aquaculture.

I understand that you are keen to learn about new developments in the UK's position on khat. Therefore I have asked my officials to inform your office as soon as the date of coming into force of the UK khat ban can be announced.

Yours sincerely

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP