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Dear

Thank you for your email of 23 March to Joan Ryan regarding a recent Adjournment Debate on the enforcement of the Hunting Act 2004. Your email has been passed to me for a reply.

Before addressing the specific points raised, I feel it is important that I reiterate some of the key points that Joan Ryan made during the debate.

The Government and police are *committed to tackling criminality whatever form it takes*. No-one is above the law - we cannot pick and choose what laws we obey in a democratic society. I am confident that the police are showing appropriate leadership in tackling those who commit hunting offences. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has issued guidance on enforcement of the ban, and the police have shown that they are prepared to learn from and build on the lessons that individual cases have thrown up. For example, the ACPO lead on hunting issued a reminder to his colleagues in October 2006 about their obligations under the Director of Public Prosecutions' guidance on charging following concerns raised by anti-hunting groups in respect of a particular case.

Another crucial point made by Joan Ryan in the debate which I want to stress - given that it is particularly relevant to a number of the specific points raised in your email - is that it is crucial for those who have evidence or experience of criminal activity *to pass it on to the police*, whether it relates to specific hunting offences, or intimidation and harassment of one group by another. If the police are not notified of specific incidents then their capability to act on them will clearly be impaired.

Turning to the specific points you have raised, evidence put forward by the hunts themselves suggests that many of them have turned to trail and/or drag hunting as an alternative to live quarry hunting. The Government welcomes this, provided that the hunts are genuinely intending to stay within the law, and not trying to use the practice as a subterfuge for engaging in illegal hunting activities. I understand that the League Against Cruel Sports and others have concerns that this is not in fact the case and that the hunts are breaking the law on a regular basis. Again it is vital that any information to support these concerns is passed on to the police.

On the issue raised about resources, it is a central tenet of policing in this country that the Chief Constable has operational independence for the direction and control of the force. The Home Secretary will set direction through national policy, objectives and targets. However it would be inappropriate for this *strategic* direction to bore down to the level of the resources that chief officers should dedicate to tackling specific offences.

The Government remains committed to enforcing the hunting ban and welcomes opportunities like the adjournment debate in keeping both Government and police alive to current issues and concerns around hunting.

Yours sincerely

Mohammed Rahman.
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