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**From Her Majesty's Government in response to representations on illegal bird trapping in the Sovereign Base Areas to the UK Prime Minister, Rt Hon Theresa May MP.**

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP has asked me to respond to you, regarding the many postcards received from members of the Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) on the subject of illegal bird trapping in the Sovereign Base Areas (SBA) on the island of Cyprus. Your campaign correspondence called on the UK government to take action in response to bird poaching in the SBA and sought assurances that perpetrators are being brought to justice. The addresses of some of the many representations could not be easily identified; therefore, we have agreed with Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS) they will place this letter on their website. Please accept this as a full reply to your correspondence from the UK government.

The practice of trapping birds in the SBA is an issue the SBA Administration has been taking very seriously. Whilst this problem is not unique to the SBA, they are aware of problems faced at Cape Pyla near Dhekelia, because it is one of the principal sites on the island for migrating birds. During the last two years the SBA Police have arrested 62 poachers and conducted 55 major mist netting clearance operations, resulting in the seizure of 1,330 mist-nets and 857 lime sticks. This has impacted on bird trapping activity and bird trapping intervention will continue.

In addition to this continuing enforcement activity the SBA Administration has also taken significant steps during the autumn migration of 2015, and again in 2016, to remove the invasive acacia bushes and associated irrigation used by the bird trappers. As you may know, acacia is planted and used by trappers to attract birds towards their mist nets. Since November 2014, the SBA has directly removed 61 acres of acacia from the range, at a cost in excess of €400K.

Notwithstanding the success and progress made over the last few years, policing this area is very difficult, encompassing as it does over 13,000 acres of open land with unrestricted access to the public. The SBA Administration's efforts are further complicated by continuing demand for illegally trapped birds elsewhere on the island and by those who see trapping and hunting as traditional ways of life. Within the SBAs there are no restaurants selling ambelopoulia (a dish in Cyprus made from songbirds), but the demand appears to be significant elsewhere and this is not something the SBA Administration can directly control. However, where possible the Administration will continue to deploy robust enforcement measures and work with others to continue to prevent bird trapping in the SBA.

The SBA Administration's enforcement and removal actions have met with strong resistance from the local community and have resulted in protests (from bird trappers) in the summer and winter of 2016. Most recently, during an acacia clearance operation on 19 October 2016 the cutting of the bushes was interrupted when 50-60 local residents came out in force during the night to disrupt the work. The protesters blocked in military vehicles with their own cars and prevented their safe departure for a number of hours until the situation was resolved. SBA property near the military base has also been damaged and protest graffiti sprayed on signs. SBA Police officers employed

by the base have also been attacked and threatened. Nevertheless, the SBA Administration's commitment to continuing their efforts to tackle bird-trapping within the SBA remains undiminished.

As part of their enforcement activity the SBA Police continues to work closely with the RSPB and BirdLife of Cyprus to tackle trapping including measures to boost cooperation by undertaking more joint patrols. The SBA Administration has also participated with Non-governmental organisations to endorse a Strategic Action Plan to counter illegal bird trapping, which brings various measures together to tackle the problem. The plan is currently being considered by the Republic of Cyprus. The offer of collaborative activities has also been extended to CABS.

One of the top priorities in 2015 for the NGOs was for the designation of Cape Pyla as a Special Area of Conservation. This was achieved by the SBA Administration in December 2015. As a result of the designation, the SBA Administration has taken on an obligation to maintain the site at a favourable conservation status. An Environmental Management Plan will be drawn up for the area, which will include a provision for the removal of all invasive acacia in the coming years so that natural habitats can be restored.

In addition to enforcement operations, the SBA Police also invest significant time in wider educational programmes in the areas around and in the SBA. They work in partnership with the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) Game Fund and BirdLife to promote the protection of wildlife and assist in changing the Cypriot culture towards wildlife in the local communities to reduce demand for songbirds and to educate communities about the effects of illegal bird and wildlife trapping. In 2014 the SBA Administration opened a new Environmental Education Centre in Akrotiri within the SBA. This centre offers educational programmes to school children on the importance of migratory birds and their protection.

I hope this correspondence assures you of the seriousness with which the SBA Administration takes this illegal activity, and of the efforts they are progressing to tackle it. This remains one of the SBA Administration's highest priorities, and they remain committed to working with all relevant organisations to do all they can to further reduce bird trapping within the Sovereign Base Areas.

Yours sincerely,

**Joint Forces Command**