



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

The Rt Hon. James Cleverly MP
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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
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Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 15 February to the Foreign Secretary on behalf of your constituent, [REDACTED], about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). I am replying as the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa.

I raised the issue of demolitions with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 29 October 2020, and issued a statement outlining the UK's position on the demolition of structures in Humsa Al-Baqai'a on 6 November 2020. I also tweeted our call for these demolitions to stop on 5 February 2021. Officials from the British Consulate General Jerusalem visited Humsa Al-Baqai'a on 6 November 2020 and 4 February 2021 to reiterate UK support for the community. The UK provides funding to the West Bank Protection Consortium, which is coordinating with the Palestinian Red Cross and the United Nations to provide emergency shelter to the community of Humsa Al-Baqai'a, and determine the community's long-term needs. The UK is focused on preventing demolitions and evictions from happening in the first place through our legal aid programme, which supports Palestinians facing demolition or home eviction. We continue to urge the Government of Israel to develop improved mechanisms for zoning, planning and permitting in Area C for the benefit of the Palestinian population, including by facilitating local Palestinian participation in such processes.

The UK's position is that settlements are illegal under international law and are damaging to renewed efforts to launch peace negotiations. For this reason, the settlements are not covered by the UK-Israel Trade and Partnership Agreement, which now governs our trade. We also support clear and transparent labelling of settlement products to ensure that consumers are able to make informed choices before they buy.

We routinely update our guidance to British businesses on the Overseas Business Risk website. We advise British businesses to bear in mind the British Government's view on the illegality of settlements under international law when considering their investments and activities in the region. When approached by businesses, we set out the UK's clear position on Israeli settlements, and share with them our online guidance. Ultimately it is the decision of an individual or company whether to operate in settlements in the OPTs. The British Government neither encourages nor offers support to such activity.

We consistently call for an immediate end to all actions that undermine the viability of the two-state solution, including terrorism, anti-Semitic incitement, settlement expansion, and the demolition of Palestinian property in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Steps to transform the situation in Gaza are also needed. We are encouraging both sides to maintain calm and avoid taking actions which make peace more difficult to achieve. We are also in close consultation with international partners about how to encourage the parties to reverse negative trends on the ground, including through a regional approach to peace, and encouraging meaningful bilateral negotiations.

The UK's longstanding position on the Middle East Peace Process is clear: we support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state; based on 1967 lines with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Cleverly', is centered on the page.

The Rt Hon. James Cleverly MP
Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa