



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office



Department
for International
Development

14 July 2020

Our reference: MC2020/09203

The Rt Hon. Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear George

Thank you for your email of 13 May to the Foreign Secretary on behalf of your constituent,

about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). I am replying as the Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East and North Africa.

As we made clear at the UN Security Council remote meeting on the Middle East Peace Process on 24 June, we are concerned by reports that the new Israeli Government coalition has reached an agreement which may pave the way for annexation of parts of the West Bank. The UK position is clear: any unilateral moves toward annexation of parts of the West Bank by Israel would be damaging to renewed efforts to restart peace negotiations, and contrary to international law. The Prime Minister also reiterated our opposition to the unilateral annexation of territory during a call with Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, on 6 July.

Your constituent also raises the issue of Israeli settlements. As I made clear in my statement on 24 February, settlements are illegal under international law and damaging to renewed efforts to launch peace negotiations.

The UK does not regard the OPTs, including the settlements, as part of Israel and Israeli settlements are not covered by the EU-Israel Association Agreement, which governs our current trade with Israel, nor by the UK-Israel Trade and Partnership Agreement, which will govern our trade when the EU agreement no longer applies.

There are currently no plans for UK legislation to ban the import of products from illegal settlements. We do, however, support clear and transparent labelling of

settlement products to ensure that individual 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. Ultimately it will be 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 firmly believe a just and lasting resolution that ends the occupation and delivers peace for both Israelis and Palestinians is long overdue. We will continue to press Israel and the Palestinians strongly on the need to refrain from taking actions which make peace more difficult. The best way to make progress towards peace is through bilateral negotiations which take account of the legitimate concerns of both sides.

The UK continues to support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state; based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states, and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several fluid, connected strokes that form a cursive name.

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