



Foreign, Commonwealth  
& Development Office



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

Our ref: MC2023/02871

24 February 2023

*Dear George,*

Thank you for your correspondence of 9 February to the Foreign Secretary on behalf of your constituent, , about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). I am replying as the Minister of State for the Middle East.

The UK continues to engage with the Israeli government on human rights issues in the context of the occupation, including the treatment of children. We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation. We also continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population, in particular the need to protect children.

In our dialogue with the Israeli authorities we have recognised their legitimate need to deploy security measures. However, we encourage them to deploy these in a way which minimises tension. In instances where there have been accusations of excessive use of force, we have advocated swift, transparent investigations.

During my visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 10-13 January, I met with Israeli and Palestinian officials including Israeli Foreign Minister Cohen, Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayyeh and Palestinian Foreign Minister Malki, and made clear the UK's support for a Two-State Solution, the urgent need to reduce tensions and to avoid any unilateral actions that make peace more difficult.

The British Embassy in Tel Aviv regularly raises the importance of regularised access to healthcare with the Israeli authorities. We recognise that under International Humanitarian Law, Israel, as the occupying power, has a duty of ensuring and maintaining public health to the fullest extent of the means available to it. The wounded and ill in Gaza and the West Bank should be able to access the urgent medical care they need.

The UK continues to monitor closely the ongoing humanitarian situation in Gaza, further exacerbated by recent conflict and damages to civilian infrastructure. The UK is providing life-saving aid to Palestinian refugees in Gaza and across the region. In 2021 we provided over £27m in support to UNRWA, including £4.9m to their flash appeal following the Gaza conflict in May. In FY 2022/2023, the UK provided UNRWA with £18.7m, including £13m for UNRWA's Programme Budget for spend in OPTs, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria; £2m for work in Gaza and £3.7m for food assistance – both under UNRWA's OPTs Emergency Appeal. Our annual contribution to their programme budget helps UNRWA provide education to over 533,000 children a year (half of them girls), and access to health services for 3.5m Palestinian refugees.

We urge access into and out of Gaza, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law, for humanitarian actors, reconstruction materials, and those, including Palestinians, travelling for medical purposes. We are in close contact with UN agencies and key partners on the ground to assess the situation and will monitor closely. Officials from our Embassy in Tel Aviv and our Consulate-General in Jerusalem frequently urge the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to take steps to improve conditions in Gaza, including easing movement and access restrictions.

We must continue to address immediate humanitarian needs in Gaza, and work towards a longer-term solution for recovery and reconstruction. The situation on the ground demonstrates the urgent need to make progress towards peace. The UK remains committed to the Two-State Solution as the best way to bring peace and stability to the region.

*Yours sincerely,*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'pp L. Ahmad', with a horizontal line underneath.

**LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON**

Minister of State

Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict