



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



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Rt Hon. Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
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14 July 2023

Dear George,

Thank you for your correspondence of 4 July 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 is committed to making progress towards a Two-State Solution based on 1967 borders with Jerusalem the shared capital. In this response, I aim to address each of the points you raised.

The UK has also long opposed the demolition of Palestinian property, including homes, schools and health facilities, as well as the evictions of Palestinians from their homes. We are clear that in all but the most exceptional of circumstances, demolitions and forced evictions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. The practice causes unnecessary suffering to Palestinians and is harmful to efforts to promote peace. The UK regularly raises our opposition to settlements, demolitions and evictions in the OPTs with the Government of Israel and highlight this through direct visits. Officials from the British Consulate General Jerusalem regularly visit areas at risk of demolition and eviction, and attend related court hearings.

We strongly condemn all forms of violence and incitement. Israel must abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law, including the principles of proportionality, distinction and necessity. The British Embassy in Tel Aviv regularly raises the importance of regularised access to healthcare with the Israeli authorities.

Israel, as the occupying power, has a duty to ensure and maintain public health to the fullest extent possible. During my call on 4 July with the Israeli chargé d'affaires in London, I urged Israel to safeguard access to healthcare and take proactive steps to guarantee the safety of civilians during Israeli operations in the West Bank. The Foreign Secretary also emphasised the importance of the proactive protection of civilians during his call with Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen on 5 July. The wounded and ill in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories should be able to access the urgent medical care they need.

The UK is a strong supporter of the ICC and we respect the independence of the Court and its officials. We do not consider that the ICC has jurisdiction in this instance as the UK does not currently recognise Palestinian statehood.

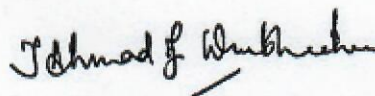
During my visit to Israel and the OPTs on 10-13 January, I met Israeli and Palestinian officials, including Israeli Foreign Minister Cohen, Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayyeh and Palestinian Foreign Minister Malki, and made clear the UK's support for a Two-State Solution, the urgent need to reduce tensions and to avoid any unilateral actions that make peace more difficult. During my visit, I also visited a school in Masafer Yatta where I saw the situation on the ground.

The Foreign Secretary and I met Israeli Foreign Minister, Eli Cohen, during his recent visit to London on 21 March 2023. We discussed our strong bilateral relationship and also the vital importance of de-escalating the rising tension in the West Bank. I also discussed the Middle East Peace Process with the Palestinian Foreign Minister, Dr Riad Malki, in London on 5 May.

The Prime Minister met the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, during his visit to London on 24 March. The Prime Minister welcomed opportunities to strengthen the close partnership between the UK and Israel. He also made clear the importance of de-escalating tensions in the West Bank, and the need to uphold the democratic values that underpin our relationship, including in the proposed judicial reforms in Israel. The Foreign Secretary also spoke to Israeli Foreign Minister, Eli Cohen, on 26 June and 5 July to express his opposition to the expansion of settlements and to encourage Israel to tackle settler violence.

The recent cycle of violence and loss of life and 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 and importantly between Israelis and Palestinians.

Yours sincerely,



LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON

Minister of State

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