



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



**Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon
Minister of State (Middle East,
North Africa, South Asia,
Commonwealth and the UN)**

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

King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

Tel: 020 7008 5000

**Email:
fcdo.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk**

www.gov.uk/fcdo

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

Our ref: MC2023/13587

20 July 2023

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your correspondence of 11 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 as shared capital. In this response, I aim to address each of the points you raised.

The UK recognises Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, but all security operations must be in line with International Humanitarian Law. We regularly raise with the Israeli authorities the issue of the high numbers of Palestinians killed and injured by Israeli Defence Forces in the West Bank and Gaza. We encourage them to carry out swift, transparent and thorough investigations and, if wrongdoing is found, that those responsible be held to account. We will continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population, particularly the need to protect children.

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

The UK Government has made its position on boycotts/sanctions clear. While we do not hesitate to express disagreement with Israel whenever we feel it necessary, we are firmly opposed to boycotts/sanctions. We believe that open and honest discussions, rather than imposing sanctions or supporting anti-Israeli boycotts, best supports our efforts to help progress towards a negotiated solution.

The crisis in Ukraine is not comparable to the situation in Israel and the OPTs. We do not recognise the OPTs, including the settlements, as part of Israel, and are clear in opposing unilateral actions. Any move to annex territory unilaterally, without an agreement negotiated by the parties, would be contrary to international law. We have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation and repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law.

The UK's position on settlements is clear. They are illegal under international law and damaging to renewed efforts to launch peace negotiations. We urge Israel to halt settlement expansion immediately.

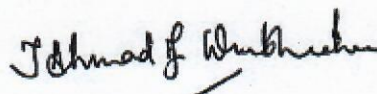
During my visit to Israel and the OPTs on 10-13 January, I met with Israeli and Palestinian officials, including Israeli Foreign Minister Cohen, Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayyeh and Palestinian Foreign Minister Malki, and made clear the UK's support for a two-state solution, the urgent need to reduce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

The 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 Palestinian Foreign Minister 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 Foreign Secretary also set out his continued support for the two state solution with Palestinian Prime Minister, Mohammed Shtayyeh on 5 July.

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,



LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON

Minister of State

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