



Foreign, Commonwealth  
& Development Office



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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP  
House of Commons  
London  
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23 January 2024

*Dear George,*

Thank you for your correspondence of 11 January to the Foreign Secretary on behalf of your constituent about the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). I am replying as the Minister of State for the Middle East.

Israel has endured the worst terrorist attack in its history at the hands of Hamas. We support Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas, but it must comply with International Humanitarian Law (IHL). We continue to call for IHL to be respected and civilians to be protected and we regularly review advice about Israel's capability and commitment to IHL. Ultimately, it is for courts to decide on matters of genocide, not for states. We of course respect the role and independence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

No-one wants to see this conflict go on a moment longer than necessary. This means achieving a sustainable ceasefire - one that will last and prevent another generation of children living under the constant threat of war - with Hamas no longer in power in Gaza, able to threaten Israel with rocket attacks and other forms of terrorism. A ceasefire will not last if hostages are still being held. Ahead of a permanent ceasefire, we want to see immediate and sustained agreements to be reached. This will allow for hostages to leave and vitally more medical and humanitarian aid to enter Gaza - helping to create the conditions for a durable peace. There is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support to Gaza. Our focus must be on practical solutions that save lives and end this conflict.

The UK trebled our aid commitment this financial year and is doing everything it can to get more aid in and open more crossings. The current levels are woefully inadequate and are deepening the humanitarian crisis. Israel must take immediate steps, working with other partners including the UN and Egypt, to significantly increase the flow of unhindered aid into Gaza including allowing prolonged humanitarian pauses, opening more routes into Gaza and restoring and sustaining water, fuel and electricity. We have supported the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza, with 750 metric tons of life-saving food aid arriving in the first delivery.

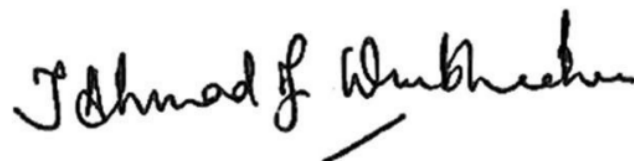
International Humanitarian Law (IHL) must be respected and civilians protected. Israel must act within IHL and we want to see Israel to limit its operations to military targets and avoid killing and injuring civilians and destroying homes.

The UK played a leading role in securing the passage of Security Council resolution 2720, which set out the urgent demand for expanded humanitarian access. The Foreign Secretary continues to discuss and press for the action that needs to be taken to increase aid to Gaza in both his and my regular calls with his Israeli, Egyptian, Jordanian, Lebanese, US and Palestinian Authority counterparts. The Foreign Secretary has appointed Mark Bryson-Richardson as his Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. He is based in the region and is working intensively to address the blockages preventing more aid reaching Gaza.

I spoke to the UN General Assembly in New York in October and delivered the UK intervention at a Security Council meeting on Gaza in November and again in January 2024, where I called for humanitarian pauses to get hostages out and aid in and set out our engagement to push for: a scaled-up humanitarian response, progress on a two-state solution and meaningful action on settler violence. I have held discussions to try to resolve this crisis with representatives from the UN, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, UAE, the Palestinian Authority, Bahrain, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference; travelling to New York, Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon Qatar, Jordan, and Egypt, to take this action forward.

For a peaceful solution, four things must happen. There must be: a Palestinian-led government in Gaza and the West Bank; a concrete plan to help reform and support the Palestinian Authority; a massive reconstruction plan for Gaza; and the political horizon towards delivering a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine.

*Yours sincerely,*

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

**LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON**  
Minister of State

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