

Office of the Deputy Ambassador
Embassy of Israel
London



משרד סגן השגרירה
שגרירות ישראל
לונדון

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18 August 2022

Tensions on Temple Mount and the death of Shireen Abu Akleh

Dear Sir George Howarth,

Thank you for your letters of 6th May 2022 and 18th May 2022 regarding the tensions at Temple Mount and the death of Shireen Abu Akleh, respectively.

Firstly, please accept my sincere apologies for the Embassy's delayed reply to your correspondence. We certainly do appreciate Members of Parliament writing to the Embassy and we aim to give written replies with the most up to date, relevant and accurate information.

With your permission, it is in this order that I will respond to your questions and queries on the two matters by starting with the tensions at Temple Mount.

Since its founding, Israel has always been committed to the freedom of worship for all religions in Jerusalem and throughout the country. This is an ingrained value which is stated in Israel's Declaration of Independence.

During the holiday season, as the holy festivals of Ramadan, Easter and Passover overlapped, Israel facilitated and safeguarded prayer for over one million worshippers in Jerusalem. Unfortunately, this facilitation was met with violence.

During Ramadan, a few hundred Palestinian extremists, including supporters of Hamas, which is recognised by the UK as a terrorist organisation, violently took over the Al-Aqsa Mosque where they instigated riots, threw rocks, fireworks and Molotov cocktails, thus desecrating the holy site. In spite



of this violence, as well as the spate of terror attacks that Israel had been experiencing, which left nineteen innocent citizens in Israel dead, more than one million Muslims were still able to pray on Temple Mount during Ramadan. This shows the clear importance that freedom of worship and religion have within Israel.

Following these events, we have seen media outlets and social media platforms flooded with false narratives about the events, in which Israel is demonised. This enables the cycle of misinformation to continue as Israel is portrayed as evil, leading to further incitement and violence.

With regards to the death of Shireen Abu Akleh, I would like to begin by noting that it was a truly tragic event.

Freedom of press, freedom of speech and safeguarding journalists are an integral part of Israel's core values and is what helps Israel to be a thriving liberal democracy in the Middle East. As such, the claim that the IDF intentionally targets journalists or civilians is not only untrue but is an attempt to demonise the state of Israel.

Following Ms. Abu Akleh's death, Israel immediately offered to conduct a joint investigation with the Palestinians in order to establish the facts surrounding her death. Sadly, this offer was rejected. Israel was conducting its own investigation into Ms. Abu Akleh's death, the interim report of which found that a professional ballistics test was needed to determine how Shireen was shot. Sadly, once again, the Palestinians have rejected offers to jointly examine the bullet. Indeed, since Ms. Abu Akleh's death, false narratives and misinformation demonising Israel have unfortunately been widely shared on social media. Alarming, the effect of which allows for Israel hatred and incitement to proliferate around the world.

The United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority (USSC) received the bullet that was alleged to have killed Shireen Abu Akleh from Palestinian authorities on 2nd July, in order to conduct a professional and impartial ballistic examination in Israel. After an extremely detailed forensic analysis, independent, third-party examiners could not reach a definitive conclusion regarding the origin of the bullet because ballistic experts determined the bullet was too badly damaged.

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Following these findings, the Chief of the General Staff, LTG Aviv Kohavi, ordered to continue to examine and investigate the incident while using all available means, committed to transparency and seeking out the truth.

Regarding the violence at Ms. Abu Akleh's funeral procession, Israel Police stated that they had prepared to facilitate a calm and dignified funeral for Shireen, having coordinated funeral arrangements with her family. Unfortunately, hundreds of rioters tried to sabotage and disrupt the ceremony as they sought to harm Israeli police. Israeli police responded.

I hope this letter answers the queries a number of your constituents have raised with you, and I remain available should you have any further questions on these matters.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Oren Marmorstein'.

Oren Marmorstein

Deputy Ambassador of Israel to the UK