

24 September 2015

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



Foreign &  
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Office

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*David George*

Thank you for your letter of 1 September to the Foreign Secretary on behalf of a number of your constituents, about Gaza. I am replying as Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East.

I share your constituents' concerns about the situation in Gaza. As the Prime Minister said, we were all deeply saddened by the violence seen. The civilian suffering which it has caused, particularly to innocent children, was appalling. We are continuing to press for urgent measures to relieve the humanitarian suffering of those in Gaza. At the Gaza reconstruction conference in Cairo in October 2014, the UK pledged £20 million for reconstruction and development in Gaza. We have fully disbursed our pledge and will exceed it over the coming months, as we disburse residual funds to help businesses back to work. This is in addition to our earlier provision of £19.1 million in UK aid in response to this crisis.

We are also supporting the temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) to facilitate the import of construction materials into Gaza. Over 94,000 people have now been able to buy materials to repair homes that were damaged during the conflict. However, it is concerning that none of the homes that were completely destroyed have been rebuilt yet. In this regard, we welcome the July 2015 agreement between the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities on the new Residential Stream of the GRM, to allow imports of building materials into Gaza for the reconstruction of homes that were completely destroyed. The UK is calling on all donors to disburse their Cairo pledges without delay so that the pace of reconstruction can increase.

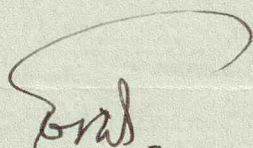
There remains an urgent need for all the parties to reach an agreement that addresses the underlying causes of conflict in Gaza and to take the necessary steps to ensure Gaza's reconstruction and economic recovery. Any agreement should ensure that Hamas and other militant groups permanently end rocket and other attacks against Israel; the Palestinian Authority resumes control of Gaza and restores effective governance; and that Israel lifts its restrictions to ease the suffering of ordinary Palestinians. On 10 September, during Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's visit to the UK, the Prime Minister emphasised the importance of improving daily life for the people of Gaza. I discussed Gaza with the Israeli Interior Minister and Vice Prime Minister during a meeting on 23 June as did Baroness Anelay during her meeting with him on 30 July. The Foreign Secretary during his



recent visit to the region in July, urged the Israeli Government to ease restrictions on Gaza and to prioritise reaching a durable solution for Gaza. We are also urging Egypt to show maximum flexibility in opening the Rafah crossing.

The UK will continue to press the parties to make progress towards peace, maintain calm, refrain from taking actions which could make the resumption of negotiations more difficult and focus once again on finding common ground. We do not underestimate the challenges, but if both parties show bold leadership, peace is possible. The UK is ready to do all it can to support this goal.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tobias Ellwood', with a large, sweeping flourish above the name.

**TOBIAS ELLWOOD MP**  
**Parliamentary Under Secretary of State**