



Foreign &
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Tareq Shrourou
Chair, Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights
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27 December 2012

Dear Tareq,

Thank you for your letter of 20 November to the Foreign Secretary about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I have been asked to reply to you.

I would like to reassure you that the UK in no way seeks to take sides in the long standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As friends of both we feel able to deliver the frank messages that both sides need to hear.

We were deeply saddened by the loss of civilian life on both sides in the recent Gaza conflict. The British Government worked intensively to urge all sides to co-operate with Egyptian-led efforts to reach a ceasefire and welcomed the agreement reached on 22 November to end the hostilities.

We made clear that Hamas bore principal responsibility for starting the conflict. We have consistently condemned indiscriminate rocket attacks into Israel which are contrary to international humanitarian law and do nothing to help the people of Gaza. At the same time, we made clear that Israel too had responsibilities. We called on Israel to seek every opportunity to de-escalate their military response, and to observe international humanitarian law and avoid civilian casualties.

The priority now must be to address the underlying causes of the conflict, including more open access to and from Gaza for people and goods, and an end to the smuggling of weapons. It is important that momentum towards finding a solution to the problems of Gaza is maintained. We are also working with humanitarian agencies to address the needs of the civilian population of Gaza.

Above all, the conflict has shown the urgent need for a return to negotiations on a two state solution to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The UK will work urgently with the United States, our other international partners and with the Israelis and Palestinians to restart the peace process before the window for a two state solution closes.

The UK remains strongly committed to fostering conditions in which the next generation of Palestinians and Israelis can live in peace.

Yours sincerely,

B.J. Griffiths

Barry Griffiths