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West Bank village Susiya

From: **AINAGCorrespondence@fco.gov.uk**

Sent: 30 July 2015 12:41:43

To: **lphr@live.co.uk**

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30 July 2015

Dear Mr Shrourou,

Thank you for your email of 7 July to the Foreign Secretary about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). The Near East Department in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has been asked to reply.

The Government shares your concerns, during Tobias Ellwood's, the FCO Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East, visit to the region in October 2014, he made clear the UK's deep concern about proposals to relocate Bedouin communities in the E1 area, and to build settlements which would put in serious jeopardy the prospect of a viable Palestinian state. He also emphasised the importance of these communities being treated in accordance with international humanitarian law. As he said in the House of Commons on 3 March "*we have discouraged the growth of settlements in that area. Were the plans to go ahead, we would have a break between the Hebron and Bethlehem conurbations, and that would effectively end the Middle East peace process.*" Also officials from the British Consulate General in Jerusalem have recently visited the Nuweima, Mikhuas, Abu Shusheh and Abu Nwar Bedouin communities, to highlight the UK's continuing support.

In May we raised our serious concerns about the potential forcible transfer of the Bedouin in E1 and other parts of Area C and the Israeli Supreme Court's ruling approving the demolition of the West Bank village Susiya with the Head of Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories' (COGAT), Civil Administration division. On 28 May we raised these concerns with senior officials from the Israeli National Security Council. On 21 June the UK's Ambassador in Tel Aviv raised planning issues in Area C and the Bedouin community in E1 with the Israeli National Security Advisor. On 22 July the British Consul General to Jerusalem, along with other Heads of EU Missions, visited Susiya to again highlight our serious concern.

Demolitions cause unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians; are harmful to the peace process; and are, in all but the most exceptional of cases, contrary to international humanitarian law. The Fourth Geneva Convention is clear that the destruction of any real or personal property in Occupied Territory is not justified unless it is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations. We also make clear to Israel that forcible transfer would be a breach of international humanitarian law and would have serious ramifications on Israel's international standing.

The UK's position on Israeli settlements is clear: they are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and take us further away from a two state solution. We will continue to urge the Government of Israel to reverse its policy over illegal settlements. Let me assure you that we will continue to raise our concerns with Israel regarding the effects of Israeli settlements. The Foreign Secretary did this on 16 July, during his visit to Israel. He made it clear to Prime Minister Netanyahu that actions that diminish trust and make the prospect of peace more remote need to be avoided and that settlement announcements do real harm.

The Government continues to urge the Government of Israel to develop improved mechanisms for zoning, planning and permitting in Area C for the benefit of the Palestinian population, including by facilitating local Palestinian participation in such processes. We are providing £1.1 million of technical assistance to support Palestinian villages currently threatened with demolition action to meet the requirements of the Israeli planning system.

In addition we continue to support Bedouin communities and Palestinians in Area C facing demolition or eviction through support to the Norwegian Refugee Council legal aid programme and Rabbis for Human Rights. This funding helps individuals challenge decisions in the Israeli legal system. We are also funding the International Peace and Cooperation Centre (IPCC), an independent Palestinian non-profit organisation, to support long-term planning for Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The UK's priority remains the achievement of a two state solution. Israeli and Palestinian leaders must now decide whether they want to seize or squander the opportunity for peace. We will continue to work closely with international partners to promote an environment conducive to peace. However, both parties must show real leadership, including the willingness to make the tough compromises required towards peace, otherwise there is an increasing risk of violence and instability in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

On behalf of the

Near East Department

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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