



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

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Mr Tareq Shrourou
Director, Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights
c/o Mansfield Chambers
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London, WC2A 1LG

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25 September 2014

Dear Mr Shrourou,

Thank you for your letter of 9 July to the Foreign Secretary about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). I have been asked to reply.

The Government shares your concerns about the crisis in Gaza. Mr Ellwood, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East, welcomed the agreement of 26 August by all parties to a ceasefire. He paid tribute to the Government of Egypt for their work to secure this important step. The ceasefire provides a critical and welcome window of opportunity for reaching a comprehensive agreement that tackles the underlying causes of the conflict. This should ensure that: Hamas and other militant groups permanently end rocket fire and other attacks against Israel; the Palestinian Authority resumes control of Gaza and restores effective and accountable governance; and that Israel lifts its restrictions in order to ease the suffering of ordinary Palestinians and allows the Gazan economy to grow. There should be international monitoring and verification to ensure full implementation of a comprehensive agreement.

The conflict has taken a terrible toll and a permanent end to the violence is required. We have been shocked by attacks on UN schools in Gaza that have resulted in the deaths of innocent children. We have condemned Hamas' rocket fire, and recognise Israel's right to take proportionate action to defend itself. However, we have also urged Israel to do everything it can to avoid civilian casualties, and to exercise restraint in line with humanitarian law. This cycle of violence must be brought to an end.

When Mr Ellwood met Israel's Ambassador here at the FCO on 4 August, he raised our concerns about the scale of the situation in Gaza, particularly in relation to numbers of children and civilians killed.

The Government is pressing for urgent measures to relieve the humanitarian suffering of those in Gaza. That is why we have provided £19.1 million in UK aid in response to this crisis. In August the Department for International Development (DFID) announced they would be providing an additional £2 million to the Disasters

Emergency Committee and £2 million in new funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency's Flash Appeal. This will help the UN provide a package of essential goods to the thousands of families sheltering in schools. In total, we have now pledged £6 million to UNRWA's appeal.

Furthermore, during the crisis DFID activated the Rapid Response Facility for Gaza. This means pre-approved partners with a proven ability to operate in Gaza will now have access to a total of £3 million in new funding to provide rapid and direct emergency humanitarian assistance. We are providing £3 million to the World Food Programme to provide food vouchers. This boost will provide emergency food vouchers for more than 300,000 people for one month, and we are also providing £2 million in medical aid. Finally, we have brought forward £3m in funding to the International Committee of the Red Cross to help them repair water infrastructure, deliver emergency medical services and protect the civilian population. But we are clear that a political solution is required to the current crisis in Gaza if we are to avoid this suffering happening again. I can assure you all UK effort is focused to that end.

The Government deeply regrets the recent loss of civilian life in Gaza. We are pressing Israel to demonstrate accountability for its actions during the conflict. The Israel Defence Forces have launched a number of internal processes to investigate specific cases of engagement, and the Israeli State Comptroller has launched an investigation into the Government's conduct. We will watch these closely. But there will also be international procedures which must examine the actions of both Hamas and Israel. Both sides should cooperate with the Commission of Inquiry set up by the UN Human Rights Council, which must itself be independent and balanced in its approach.

The Middle East Peace Process continues to be one of the UK's principle foreign policy priorities. The current events in Gaza only reinforce the need to take steps towards a lasting peace. The Israeli and Palestinian people deserve a just and durable peace that ends the conflict once and for all and the only way to achieve this is through negotiations. The UK stands ready to do all it can to support this goal.

Yours sincerely,

B. Griffiths

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