





Foreign &
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Tareq Shrourou (Director) and Natalie Sedacca
Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights
c/o Bates Wells Braithwaite
10 Queen Street Place
London
EC4R 1BE

Dear Mr Shrourou and Ms Sedacca,

Thank you for your letter of 27 September about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs).

The Government is gravely concerned about continued demolition of Palestinian property by the Israeli authorities including proposals to demolish the Bedouin villages of Khan al-Ahmar and Susiya. The UK has repeatedly called on Israeli authorities to halt proposals to demolish these communities.

The UK position on demolitions in the OPTs is clear: they cause unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians; call into question Israel's commitment to a viable two-state solution; and are, in all but the most exceptional of cases, contrary to International Humanitarian Law (IHL). 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 of protected persons would be a breach of IHL and would have serious ramifications on Israel's international standing.

Demolitions in Khan al-Ahmar and Susiya are also a specific risk as they could pave the way for settlement building in E1, threatening the possibility of a two-state solution with East Jerusalem as a shared capital.

Prior to the Israeli high court hearing about Khan al-Ahmar scheduled for 25 September, our Embassy in Tel Aviv raised our grave concerns with the Israeli authorities. An official from our Consulate-General in Jerusalem most recently visited Khan al-Ahmar on 20 September highlighting our concerns and to show our continuing support for the village. The Foreign Secretary expressed our concern



about the proposals when he met Prime Minister Netanyahu in Israel on 8 March. I understand the Khan al-Ahmar and Susiya hearings have now been postponed.

As I mentioned in my letter of 25 September, the Government also gives practical support to the Bedouin communities and Palestinians facing demolition or eviction in Area C of the West Bank through our funding to the Norwegian Refugee Council legal aid programme. This helps residents challenge decisions in the Israeli legal system.

We also recognise that Palestinians face severe difficulty in securing building permissions for homes and infrastructure in East Jerusalem and Area C: between 2010 and 2014 98.5 per cent of Palestinian building applications in Area C were rejected. The British Government has provided funding to support the development of outline plans. We continue 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. The UK has also allocated £900,000 to support essential infrastructure for vulnerable Palestinians in Area C.

We firmly believe a just and lasting resolution that ends the occupation and delivers peace for both Israelis and Palestinians is long overdue. We will continue to press Israel and the Palestinians strongly on the need to refrain from taking actions which make peace more difficult.

Yours sincerely
Alistair Burt

THE RT HON ALISTAIR BURT MP
Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa