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Tareq Shrourou
Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights
c/o Bates Wells Braithwaite
10 Queen Street Place
London
EC4R 1BE

Tareq Shrourou,

Thank you for your letter of 23 October about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

There is an urgent need to address the terrible situation in Gaza. I visited Gaza on 21 August and saw the extent of this first hand. The electricity crisis is having a serious impact on the humanitarian situation, disrupting basic services and undermining already vulnerable livelihoods. Ultimately, Hamas's decision to embrace violence and reject the Quartet Principles lies at the heart of the Gazan tragedy. We need a durable agreement that addresses the underlying causes of the conflict and transforms the situation in Gaza.

We continue to believe that the best solution to the electricity crisis is a political agreement and we are encouraging all parties to agree sustainable solutions to increase electricity supply and alleviate the suffering of the Gazan people. We call upon all parties to work together to resolve the crisis and ease the suffering of ordinary people in Gaza.

The current situation demonstrates the need to urgently fix the structural problems of energy and water in Gaza; and for clear commitments to ease restrictions and stimulate the private sector, job creation and trade for Gaza in the long term. We are encouraged by commitments that Israel made in the UN General Assembly in 2016 to improve infrastructure in Gaza and the West Bank. This included the construction of the 161 power line to Gaza, and transfer to the Palestinian Authority (PA) of responsibility for managing electricity infrastructure in the West Bank. The British Government frequently stresses with all relevant parties the importance of the quick implementation of these commitments, and we will continue to monitor this.

Our Embassy in Tel Aviv and our Consulate-General in Jerusalem frequently urge the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to take steps to improve conditions in Gaza. We stress to the Israeli authorities the damage that their restrictions are doing to the living standards of ordinary Palestinians in Gaza, and that supporting legal trade for Gazans is firmly in Israel's long-term interests. We have carried out demarches to this effect, urging Israel to go further in easing movement and access restrictions on Gaza. We have also called on Egypt to show maximum flexibility on opening the Rafah crossing.

In Gaza, the UK is supporting basic service delivery including vital health and education provision through the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). Support to UNRWA provides basic services to 1.3 million people in Gaza. The UK is supporting approximately 1 million Gazans by addressing critical water, sanitation and hygiene needs through the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The UK is also supporting humanitarian access, reconstruction efforts, and economic development programmes to help create jobs.

The UK is closely monitoring the reconciliation efforts between Fatah and Hamas. We welcome the PA's return to Gaza. We encourage all those involved in the reconciliation process to: engage in good faith; allow the PA to fully resume its government functions in Gaza; and ensure compliance with the Quartet Principles (to renounce violence, recognise Israel, and abide by previous diplomatic agreements).

The UK will continue to urge the parties to prioritise progress towards a durable solution for Gaza, and to take practical steps to ensure Gaza's reconstruction and economic recovery.

Yours sincerely
Alistair Burt

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