



Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP
Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

16 February 2018

Dear Minister Burt,

Re: Government voting on Israel/Palestine resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council

We write pursuant to the 37th UN Human Rights Council session to request that the UK government reconsiders and changes its position, as stated last year at the 34th session, that it will in future adopt a policy of voting against resolutions addressing accountability, settlements, human rights, and self-determination in the context of Israel's prolonged military occupation of Palestinian territory. We are deeply concerned that implementing this position would be entirely incompatible with the UK's long-standing stated commitment to promote the rule of law and human rights in international fora.

We note the Government's basis for this new policy position is its view that the Human Rights Council takes a biased position on Israel. We further note the comparison made to the absence of Syria as a permanent agenda item as purported justification for the new position. We do clearly acknowledge that serious and protracted violations of international humanitarian and human rights law occur in many parts of the world, including Syria. However, it cannot reasonably follow from this that paying attention to serious violations of international law amounts to 'bias'. Instead, a far more desirable approach from a human rights perspective to the concern expressed by the Government would be to use its influence as a prominent member of the Human Rights Council to urge the inclusion of other prolonged and serious human rights crises, such as the situation in Syria, as permanent agenda items.

In our assessment, it would set a very troubling precedent for the UK to implement a policy of voting against resolutions on serious human rights issues that are grounded in fundamental principles of international humanitarian and human rights law. It could be taken to indicate a selective approach to violations of international law. It would further lack coherence with principled positions it has taken in international fora on critical issues in regard to Israel's occupation, for example, its vote for Security Council resolution 2334, and the helpful recommendations made by the UK at the Universal Periodic Review of Israel last month. We therefore call upon the Government to reconsider and change its position in this regard.

We would be grateful for your careful consideration of the above and for your written reply.

Yours sincerely,

Tareq Shrourou (Director) and Natalie Sedacca
Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights