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Tareq Shourou and Natalie Sedacca  
Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights  
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10 Queen Street Place  
London  
EC4R 1BE

*Dear Director and Ms Sedacca,*

Thank you for your letter of 14 December 2017 about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs).

As you will know, it has long been the Government's view that Israel's presence in the OPTs is governed by the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, to which Israel is a state party. We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law, and we have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation, including settlements and demolitions.

We are gravely concerned by continued demolition of Palestinian property by the Israeli authorities. Demolitions and evictions of Palestinians from their homes cause unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians; call into question Israel's commitment to a viable two-state solution; and, in all but the most exceptional cases, are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. Officials from our Consulate General in Jerusalem visited some of the communities at risk of demolition in November 2017, including the villages that you mention in your letter, Ein al-Hilweh, Umm al-Jamal and Jabal al-Baba.

We have repeatedly made clear to the Israeli authorities our serious concern at the increase in demolitions of Palestinian properties in Area C of the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. We call on the Government of Israel to cease the policy of demolitions and provide a transparent route to construction for Palestinians in Area C. Our Embassy in Tel Aviv raised our concerns about the risk of forcible transfer and

demolitions facing communities in Area C with the Israeli authorities in a joint demarche alongside European partners on 2 November 2017.

As you mentioned, the British Government supports Bedouin communities and Palestinians facing demolition or eviction in Area C through our funding to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) legal aid programme. This helps residents to challenge decisions in the Israeli legal system. Of those cases provided with legal representation through British funding to the NRC, 97% have resulted in suspension of demolitions and evictions, allowing Palestinians to remain in their homes.

We are also gravely concerned that Palestinians continue to face severe difficulty in securing building permissions for homes and infrastructure in East Jerusalem and Area C. Between 2014 and the summer of 2016, just 1.3% of building permits requested by Palestinians in Area C were granted. Between 2010 and 2015, only 8% of all building permits in Jerusalem were given in Palestinian neighbourhoods. Practically, this leaves Palestinians with little option but to build without permission, placing their homes at risk of demolition on the grounds they do not have a permit.

We continue to urge the Government of Israel to develop improved mechanisms for zoning, planning and granting permits in Area C for the benefit of the Palestinian population, including by facilitating local Palestinian participation in such mechanisms. The UK has also allocated £900,000 to support essential infrastructure for vulnerable Palestinians in Area C.

We press the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to refrain from actions which make peace more difficult. Settlement construction and demolitions are significant barriers to achieving this goal, as are terrorism, incitement to violence, and the refusal by some to acknowledge Israel's right to exist. We do not underestimate the challenges, but if both parties show bold leadership, peace is possible. The UK is ready to do all it can to support this goal.

*Yours sincerely*  
*Alistair Burt*

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