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*Tareq Shrourou,*

Thank you for your letter of 2 May regarding Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs).

The recent violence in Gaza has been shocking. Like you, I am deeply concerned by the situation there, and the possibility of further violence. The loss of life and the large number of injured Palestinians is tragic. We call on all sides to show restraint and abide by international law. Such violence is destructive to peace efforts.

I visited Israel and the OPTs at the end of May. In Gaza, I saw first-hand the desperate, sad and complex situation there. The people of Gaza are in urgent need. I discussed Gaza with Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Hotovsky and Israeli Minister for Regional Cooperation Hanegbi, stressing the need for an independent investigation into recent events, and encouraging urgent action to improve the situation in Gaza. We have raised concerns about Israel's use of live ammunition, and have been clear that Palestinians have the right to peaceful protest. We have also been clear that Israel has the right to protect itself, as it is plain that Hamas and its operatives have been exploiting the recent protests for their own benefit.

The UK supports an investigation which establishes the facts about the recent violence in Gaza. Given the importance of accountability, we urge that any investigation be independent and transparent, that its findings be made public, and, if wrongdoing is found, that those responsible be held to account.

The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary both raised concerns about the situation in Gaza during their meetings with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 6 June.

We have also rightly spoken out about the recent mortar and rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel. Indiscriminate attacks against civilians are unacceptable and unjustifiable. The UK fully supports Israel's right to self-defence and to defend its citizens from such acts of terror. The perpetual cycle of violence does not serve anyone's interests, and must end. Ultimately, the ongoing decision by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad to embrace violence and reject the Quartet principles lies at the heart of the Gaza situation. Hamas and other terrorist groups must cease all actions that are violent or provocative, or that put civilian lives at risk.

The UK remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza. When I was in Gaza, I was able to announce that the British Government is providing a new package of lifesaving support. The funding will support work by the International Committee of the Red Cross to keep hospitals in Gaza open and functioning at a time when the healthcare system is under huge strain.

On the issue of harm caused to children during the border protests, the UK has publicly raised the particular importance of protecting minors at the UN Security Council.

As you have noted, the UK supports an investigation which establishes the facts about the recent violence in Gaza. Given the importance of accountability, we urge that any investigation be independent and transparent, that its findings be made public, and, if wrongdoing is found, that those responsible be held to account.

The recent violence makes clear the urgent need for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. The British Government is committed to making progress towards a two-state solution. We believe that negotiations will only succeed when they are conducted between the two parties, supported by the international community. We press the parties to refrain from actions that make peace more difficult.

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*

*A. Burt*

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