



Foreign &
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Tareq Shrourou, Director
Claire Jeffwitz
Natalie Sedacca
Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights

by email: lphr@live.co.uk

Dear Mr. Shrourou, Ms. Jeffwitz and Ms. Sedacca,

Thank you for your letter of 5 July about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs).

The UK has been clear that 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.

During the Urgent Question on Khan Al Ahmar on 4 July, I undertook to investigate reports highlighting possible instances of the use of JCB bulldozers in demolitions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has looked into the matter and consulted other government departments.

We note the media reports and photographs that show JCB diggers around demolition sites. The reports that we are aware of show these diggers at the demolition site of Abu Nuwar. Officials from the British Consulate-General in Jerusalem are aware that JCB equipment has been used on site. They witnessed the presence of JCB equipment at Khan Al Ahmar when they visited on 4 July to demonstrate the international community's support for the village. From our enquiries, we understand that the demolitions are carried out by private contractors on behalf of the Israeli Civil Administration, so these private contractors would be the owners of any relevant equipment.

I assure you that the British Government is committed to encouraging and fostering respect for human rights among UK businesses, including the promotion of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. Where, and with whom, a company decides to trade is however a decision for each company to reach, taking account of the legal and regulatory environment including international human rights law.

As the previous Foreign Secretary made clear in his statement of 1 June, the UK is deeply concerned by the proposed demolition of the village of Khan al-Ahmar, which the UN has said could amount to 'forcible transfer', in violation of International Humanitarian Law. The previous Foreign Secretary called on Prime Minister Netanyahu to reconsider plans to demolish the community when they met in London on 6 June.

The UK has repeatedly raised its concerns with the Israeli authorities and others. Most recently I reiterated UK concerns about the proposed demolition of Khan al-Ahmar to the Israeli Ambassador on 9 July, and called on the Israeli authorities to reconsider these plans. On 31 July, the Foreign Secretary wrote a letter, alongside his French, German, Italian and Spanish counterparts, to Prime Minister Netanyahu, calling for Israel to reconsider plans to demolish the community.

Kind regards
Alistair Burt

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