



Foreign &
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Office



Department
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Development

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Tareq Shourou and Aleisha Ebrahimi-Tsamis
Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights
10 Queen Street Place
London
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Dear Mr. Shourou & Ms. Ebrahimi-Tsamis,

Thank you for your letter of 19 December to the Foreign Secretary about Laith Abu Zayed. I am replying as the Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East and North Africa.

We are aware of the travel ban imposed on Laith Abu Zayed and have been monitoring the situation closely. We were very sorry to hear that Mr Abu Zayed's mother passed away on 24 December and send our condolences to Mr Abu Zayed and his family.

We remain deeply concerned about restrictions on freedom of movement within the West Bank, including to and from East Jerusalem. It remains difficult for Palestinians to enter East Jerusalem for work, education, medical treatment, or religious worship. Through our Embassy in Tel Aviv we have lobbied the Israeli authorities on the issue of movement and access. We did so most recently on 17 December. We continue to work closely with the Quartet and EU partners to call on Israel to ease restrictions on access.

Israel retains a strong civil society. However over the past couple of years there has been a steady increase in pressure against certain Non-Governmental Organisations, particularly those critical of Israel's conduct in its occupation of the Palestinian Territories. This includes rhetoric and restriction of their activities. We raised the issue of shrinking civil society space with the Israeli authorities on 16 December. We continue to make clear that a strong, vibrant civil society is in Israel's own interest. As a friend of Israel, we would be concerned by any developments that may undermine this commitment.

We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation.

*Yours sincerely,
Andrew Murrison,*

**The Rt Hon. Dr Andrew Murrison MP
Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa**