



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

The Rt Hon. James Cleverly MP
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Meg Hillier MP
House of Commons
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Our ref: MC2021/13854
Your ref: MH67334

25 August 2021

Dear Meg,

Thank you for your correspondence of 26 May to the Foreign Secretary, on behalf of a number of your constituents, about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). I am replying as the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa.

May I offer my sincerest apologies for the delay in responding to your correspondence.

The UK welcomed the announcement of a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza on 20 May, which was an important step to ending the cycle of violence and loss of civilian life. The UK offers our condolences to the families of those civilians killed. As the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have made clear, this cycle of violence must stop.

During the recent conflict, the UK urged the parties to engage with mediators. We fully supported Egyptian, Qatari and UN efforts towards a ceasefire, working closely with the US. The Foreign Secretary delivered messages of de-escalation in his calls to former Israeli Foreign Minister Ashkenazi on 11 and 16 May, and to Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayyeh on 12 May. I engaged the Israeli Ambassador and the Palestinian Head of Mission in London to urge them to push for calm. The Foreign Secretary and Ministers also coordinated closely with regional and European partners.

Following the ceasefire announcement, the Foreign Secretary visited Israel and the OPTs on 25 and 26 May for talks with senior leaders. The Foreign Secretary met former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and reiterated the UK's firm commitment to the two-state solution. The Foreign Secretary made clear that the UK would continue to work with the parties, and other actors, to encourage a durable ceasefire and to urge them to address the drivers of conflict.

Access in and out of Gaza, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law, remains essential for humanitarian purposes and those, including Palestinians, travelling for medical purposes. The United Kingdom has urged Israel to ensure regularised access and we welcome coordination thus far on this issue.

The UK has also provided £3.2 million of UK aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). The funding will help provide food, water, and emergency shelter to Palestinians affected by the recent escalation in violence in Gaza.

The UK's opposition to demolition of Palestinian property and the evictions of Palestinians from their homes is long-standing and well known. The practice causes unnecessary suffering to Palestinians and is harmful to efforts to promote peace. UK funded legal aid is providing protection from eviction or demolition to Palestinians in 96% of ongoing cases. This means that families can remain in their homes while legal proceedings progress, though we recognise that prospects in the longer term are less positive. The UK continues to urge the Government of Israel to permanently end its settlement expansion and settlement activity in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The British Government has made its position on boycotts/sanctions clear. While we do not hesitate to express disagreement with Israel whenever we feel it necessary, we are firmly opposed to boycotts/sanctions. We believe that imposing sanctions or boycotts on Israel or supporting anti-Israeli boycotts would not support our efforts to progress the peace process and achieve a negotiated solution.

The situation on the ground demonstrates the urgent need to make progress towards peace. The UK remains committed to the two-state solution as the best way to bring peace and stability to the region.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'James Cleverly', written in a cursive style.

**The Rt Hon. James Cleverly MP
Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa**