



Foreign, Commonwealth  
& Development Office

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Meg Hillier MP  
House of Commons  
London  
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Your ref: MH67929

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*Dear Meg,*

Thank you for your correspondence of 27 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.

The UK welcomes the announcement of a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza on 20 May, which is 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. The UK worked actively to urge the parties to work with mediators towards an immediate ceasefire. We fully supported Egyptian, Qatari and UN efforts, working closely with the US. Hamas must now end all attacks on Israel. It is also important for Israel to facilitate rapid humanitarian access in and out of Gaza. The UK will provide £3.2 million of new UK aid to the UN agency for Palestine refugees, UNRWA, responding to the UNRWA's emergency flash appeal, launched on 19 May. The funding will help provide food, water, and emergency shelter to Palestinians affected by the recent escalation in violence in Gaza.

The Foreign Secretary visited Israel and the OPTs on 25 and 26 May for talks with senior leaders as the Israel-Gaza ceasefire maintains calm in the region. During his visit the Foreign Secretary met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and reiterated the UK's firm commitment to the two-state solution as the best way to deliver Palestinian self-determination and ensure Israel's status as a Jewish, democratic state. Throughout the escalation of violence the UK worked with regional partners to promote an urgent de-escalation. The Foreign Secretary delivered a message of de-escalation in his calls to Israeli Foreign Minister Ashkenazi on 11 and 16 May, and with Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayyeh on 12 May.

The Foreign Secretary and Ministers have also engaged regional partners, including with Egypt, Jordan and Turkey. I have spoken to the Israeli Ambassador and to the Palestinian Head of Mission in London to urge them to continue to de-escalate and ensure calm is maintained.

As the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have made clear, this cycle of violence must stop, and every effort must be made to avoid loss of life.

The UK is clear that the violence against peaceful worshippers at the al-Aqsa mosque was unacceptable. Attacks against peaceful worshippers of any faith must stop. The Status Quo in Jerusalem is important at all times, especially during religious festivals such as Ramadan. We encourage all parties to maintain calm, avoid provocation and uphold the Status Quo to ensure the safety and the security of the Al Haram Al Sharif / Temple Mount and all who worship there. We urge all sides to refrain from any kind of provocation. The restoration of peace and security is in everyone's interests.

The Government takes its arms export responsibilities very seriously and aims to operate one of the most robust arms export control regimes in the world. We consider all our export applications thoroughly against a strict risk assessment framework and keep all licences under careful and continual review as standard. Regarding UK arms exports to Israel, the Government continues to monitor closely the situation in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank, and if extant licences are found to be no longer consistent with the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria, those licences will be revoked.

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 UK is strongly opposed to the Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions Movement against Israel. We are strongly against boycotts which divide people and reduce understanding.

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 read 'James Cleverly', is positioned above the typed name.

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Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa**