



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office



Department  
for International  
Development

31 May 2018

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The Rt Hon. George Howarth MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

*Dear George,*

Thank you for your email of 16 May to the Foreign Secretary, on behalf of a number of your constituents, about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I am replying as the Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East and North Africa.

The recent violence in Gaza and the West Bank has been shocking. 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 raised the use of live ammunition against protestors in Gaza with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 17 May and the Foreign Secretary raised this matter with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 16 May. Lord Ahmad, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister for Human Rights, also raised this issue during his visit to Israel on 11 April with the Israeli Minister for Regional Co-operation and with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We urge Israel to show restraint and the Palestinians to ensure that protests are peaceful. However it is also plain that Hamas and its operatives exploited these protests for their own benefit. We have been clear that Israel has the right to secure itself against Hamas and other terrorist groups.

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 is independent and transparent, its findings are made public, and, if wrongdoing is found, that those responsible be held to account.

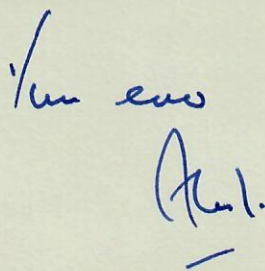
There is an urgent need to address the electricity crisis in Gaza, and we are closely monitoring the situation. We are aware that Israel has resumed supplying additional electricity to Gaza following an official request by the Palestinian Authority. However, recent reporting by the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs suggests this has not significantly improved the overall electricity availability, as the Gaza Power Plant is suffering from fuel shortages, extending outages to up to 18-20 hours per day. The UK will continue to urge all parties to take the necessary practical steps to improve conditions, including an increase in the availability of electricity as a matter of urgency.

The UK is supporting up to one million Gazans by addressing critical water, sanitation and hygiene needs through the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). The UK is also a long-term supporter of the UN Relief and Works Agency, which provides basic services to 1.3 million people in Gaza, including basic health care.

The British Government takes its defence exports responsibilities extremely seriously and operates some of the most robust export controls in the world. We only approve equipment which is for Israel's legitimate self-defence, when we are satisfied that this would be consistent with the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria and other relevant commitments. All applications for export licences are assessed on a case-by-case basis against strict criteria. We will not issue a licence if there is a clear risk that the equipment might be used for internal repression, or if there is a clear risk that it would provoke or prolong 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.

Recent events serve as a tragic reminder of the consequences of conflict. Together it is incumbent on all of us to redouble our efforts to realise to a two-state solution, which will ensure justice and peace for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alistair Burt'.

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