



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

London SW1A 2AH

6 November 2015

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

Dear George,

Thank you for your letter of 22 October to the Foreign Secretary on behalf of a number of your constituents, about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). I am replying as Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East.

The UK Government understands, and shares, the deep frustration at the lack of progress towards a durable peace process. A just and lasting resolution that ends the occupation and delivers peace for both Israelis and Palestinians is long overdue.

As I said in my statement of 13 October, and as the Foreign Secretary said in his statement of 9 October, we are deeply concerned by the recent violence across the OPTs and Israel. We strongly condemn all acts of violence and all incitement to commit acts of violence. Since the start of the current violence we have spoken regularly to both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government, urging them to use their influence to de-escalate the tensions.

Israel, like all countries, has a legitimate right to self-defence, and the right to defend its citizens from attack. In doing so, it is vital that all actions are in line with International Humanitarian Law. Our position as a friend of Israel has enabled us to raise concerns where we have them.

I share your constituents' frustration at Israel's continued settlement construction which poses a significant and growing threat to the creation of a viable and contiguous Palestinian state. The UK's position on settlements is clear. They are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and take us further away from a two state solution. We will continue to raise our objections to settlements with the Israeli Government. On 10 September, during Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to the UK, the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary raised with him our concerns about Israel's approach to a number of issues, including settlement building and the need for a two state solution.

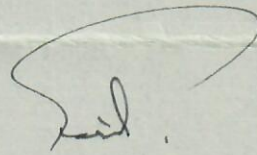
We understand the concerns of people who do not wish to purchase goods exported from Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It was in order to enable consumers to make a more fully informed decision concerning the products they buy that, in December 2009, the UK introduced voluntary guidelines to enable produce from Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories to be specifically labelled

as such. We continue to work on the issue of settlement produce with our EU partners.

However, our position on boycotts is clear. While we do not hesitate to express disagreement with Israel whenever we feel it necessary, we are firmly opposed to boycotts. We do not believe that imposing sanctions would help to achieve progress towards a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We continue to believe that only a negotiated two-state solution will resolve the conflict and end the occupation. 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.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Ellwood', is written over a horizontal crease in the paper.

TOBIAS ELLWOOD MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State