

4 May 2016

Our reference: MIN/96611/2016

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



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

Thank you for your email of 20 April 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 in the Middle East.

The UK position on demolitions in the OPTs is clear: demolitions cause unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians; are harmful to the peace process; and are, in all but the most exceptional of cases, contrary to international humanitarian law. As your constituent may be aware, the Fourth Geneva Convention is clear that the destruction of any real or personal property in Occupied Territory is not justified unless it is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations. The Fourth Geneva Convention also makes clear that individual or mass forcible transfer of protected persons from occupied territory is prohibited.

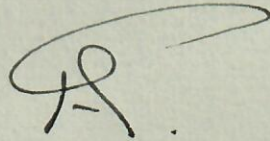
We are concerned by reports that there has been large increase in demolitions since the start of 2016, compared with the monthly average in 2015. We are also concerned at the increase in the demolition of structures funded partly or fully by international donors. Our Embassy in Tel Aviv has raised our concerns on demolitions with the Israeli authorities and urged them to provide a legal route for Palestinians to obtain building permits, most recently on 21 April.

I can assure you that the UK Government is a strong supporter of international justice and is committed to upholding the Geneva Conventions. It is our longstanding position that Israel has legal obligations as an Occupying Power with respect to the OPTs under applicable international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. We have a regular dialogue with the Government of Israel with regard to the implementation of those obligations and raise our serious concerns regarding such issues of international humanitarian law in the OPTs.

We will continue to support Bedouin communities and Palestinians in Area C facing demolition or eviction through our support to Rabbis for Human Rights and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) legal aid programme. This helps individuals challenge decisions in the Israeli legal system. The NRC has successfully suspended demolitions and evictions so that Palestinians can remain in their homes in 97% of the cases they represent.

Your constituents also refer to proposals to demolish a Bedouin village within Israel. We have been encouraging the Israeli authorities and Bedouin communities to find a satisfactory solution to this issue, respecting the equality of all of Israel's citizens in a way which avoids forced relocations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'T' and 'E' followed by a horizontal line and a small dot.

TOBIAS ELLWOOD MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State