



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



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Rt Hon. Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
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Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your correspondence of 3 May to the Foreign Secretary, on behalf of a number of your constituents, about the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I am replying as the Minister of State for the Middle East.

Israel suffered the worst terror attack in its history at the hands of Hamas and Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. We want to see an immediate end to the fighting in Gaza to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life. We welcome United Nations Security Council resolution 2728, which reflected widespread international support for Britain's position and considerable efforts by our diplomats to secure a consensus, but we need to see this implemented.

All parties must act within International Humanitarian Law (IHL), which is why we continue to call for IHL to be respected and civilians to be protected. A shocking number of Palestinian civilians including women and children have been killed and we want to see Israel protecting civilians and their property. Israel is the occupying power in Gaza, it is responsible and that has consequences, including when we look at if Israel is compliant with IHL, which is why we keep advice on Israel's adherence to IHL under review. The humanitarian crisis must be ended and whilst there has been a public commitment from Israel to 'flood' Gaza with aid – this must be turned into a reality. This is **not** happening. We need an immediate stop in fighting to allow humanitarian actors and

Palestinians in Gaza to operate and move safely and enable all hostages to be released. We have set out very clearly five steps that Israel needs to take, including: An immediate stop in fighting to get more aid in and the hostages out; increased capacity inside Gaza to fully enable the UN's operating requirements; increased access for aid through land routes and to fully open Ashdod Port; an expansion of the types of aid allowed into Gaza; and, the provision of electricity, water and telecommunications, to both the north and the south of Gaza.

Palestinians are now facing a devastating and growing humanitarian catastrophe. The territory is at the brink of famine. The UK is playing a key role in alleviating that suffering. For example, we trebled our aid commitment this financial year and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air. As of 9 May, the UK has participated in 12 airdrops into Gaza. On 17 April, we announced the UK is providing £3 million of additional funding for equipment to support UN and aid agencies to get more aid into Gaza, including trucks, forklifts, generators, fuel stores and lighting towers. On 6 April, the UK announced a £9.7 million package of military and civilian support to set up a maritime aid corridor to Gaza, including the deployment of a Navy ship. A field hospital, provided by UK Aid funding to UK-Med, is up and running in Gaza and the facility, has already treated thousands of patients. Israel has now committed to significant steps to increase the amount of aid getting to Gaza.

A military offensive in Rafah is a shocking prospect. Over half of Gaza's population, including 600,000 children, are sheltering in the area, and the Rafah crossing is vital to ensure aid can reach the people who so desperately need it - with its closing, already hospitals are running out of fuel. We are clear that we would not support a major operation in Rafah unless there is a very clear plan for how to protect people and save lives. We have not seen that plan. The fastest way to end the conflict is to secure a deal which gets the hostages out and allows for a stop in the fighting in Gaza. We must then work with our international partners to turn that stop into a sustainable, permanent ceasefire.

The Government takes its defence export responsibilities extremely seriously and operates some of the most robust export controls in the world. The Foreign Secretary has reviewed the most recent advice about the situation in Gaza and Israel, and his latest assessment leaves our position on export licences unchanged. As ever, the Foreign Secretary will keep the position under review. Our position is in line with many of our partners who, have also not taken the decision to suspend existing arms export licences to Israel.

We believe UNRWA play a pivotal role in Gaza and neighbouring countries. Allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in the events that took place on 7 October in Israel are appalling, which is why we took decisive action to pause future funding to the organisation. The Prime Minister has been clear that the UK will set out its position on future funding to UNRWA following careful consideration of Catherine Colonna's final report, UNRWA's response and the ongoing UN Office for Internal Oversight Services investigation into these allegations.

Five vital elements are required for a lasting peace: the release of all hostages; the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package; removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel; Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza; and a political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution, of Israel and Palestine living in peace and security. The Foreign Secretary has already spoken with the new Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority Mohammad Mustafa, and offered the UK's support as his government implements much-needed reforms. The Palestinian Authority must in parallel take necessary steps on reform, including on education and welfare, and setting out a credible and irreversible pathway to democratic governance and elections.

The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and I have reiterated these messages in contacts with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mustafa, including during the Foreign Secretary's visit on 17 April, as well as with leaders in Qatar, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates in recent weeks. Throughout these discussions, as I have outlined, the immediate priority must be a stop in the fighting, which is the best route to secure the safe release of hostages and significantly step up the lifesaving aid reaching Gaza. We want to see this cessation lead to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to further fighting and that remains the primary focus of all our diplomatic efforts.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name.

LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON

Minister of State

Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict