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Reverend Alistair Cumming

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Dear Reverend Alistair Cumming,

Thank you for your correspondence about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). The Parliamentary Correspondence Team in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has been asked to reply. We have set out in this letter the UK's policy response to a range of linked issues and hope you will find this information helpful in understanding how the FCDO is seeking to influence positively the situation in the OPTs.

The death and destruction in Gaza is intolerable. Since the election, the UK government has led international calls for an immediate ceasefire. The fighting must stop, Hamas must release the hostages and Israel must ensure much more aid can enter Gaza. A deal is on the table, and we are urging both sides to show flexibility.

Humanitarian aid is a moral necessity in the face of such a catastrophe and the UK will continue to make significant funding available, working through trusted international partners to ensure that UK support reaches civilians on the ground. The Foreign Secretary announced on 19 July that we will reverse the last Government's suspension of funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, releasing £21 million for Gaza, the region and UNRWA reform.

The UN has taken seriously the appalling allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel. Following the independent review by Catherine Colonna and the subsequent action plan UNRWA has provided setting out detailed management reforms, the government is confident that UNRWA is taking action to ensure it meets the highest standards of neutrality. The decision to resume funding brings the UK into line with partners such as Germany, the EU, Sweden, Japan, France and other donors. UK funding will go towards UNRWA's flash appeal for Gaza and the West Bank, which focuses its resources on emergency food, shelter and other support for 3 million people, as well as its wider work supporting 6 million Palestinian refugees across the region.

The UK has also provided £6 million in funding for UNICEF's work to support vulnerable families in Gaza, helping tens of thousands of Gazans access food and water, as well as health, education and wellbeing services. We have also announced an additional £5.5 million to UK NGO UK-Med so it can continue delivering emergency medical care in Gaza to those most in need. The UK continues to press Israel to take all possible steps to avoid civilian casualties; to allow the free passage and facilitation of unfettered aid into Gaza; and to respect and enable the humanitarian operations of UN agencies and NGOs acting in Gaza.

The government continues to call for the immediate release of the hostages so cruelly taken by Hamas on 7 October. The deal on the table is the best way to get the remaining hostages out and end the suffering they and their families have endured.

The Government is absolutely clear on the fundamental importance of the international rule of law and respects the independence of the International Criminal Court. We respect the ICC Pre-Trial Chamber's decision in 2021 that the Court's territorial jurisdiction extends to the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

We received the Advisory Opinion issued by the ICJ on Friday 19th July, and are considering it carefully before responding. The issues raised are by their nature complex and require proper consideration. The UK respects the independence of the ICJ, and the government is absolutely clear on the fundamental importance of the international rule of law. It has taken the Court five months to produce its Opinion, and we will comment further when we have considered it carefully.

On 2 September, the Foreign Secretary announced the suspension of around 30 arms exports licences, from a total of approximately 350, to Israel, as required under the Export Control Act 2002. The suspended licences were for equipment where we assess there is a clear risk that the items could be used in breach of International Humanitarian Law in the current conflict in Gaza. The Foreign Secretary has committed to keeping our position under review. Alongside our allies, we have repeatedly communicated to the Israeli Government our concerns regarding the humanitarian situation in Gaza, but found that those concerns have not been addressed. The UK remains fully committed to Israel's security and its right to self-defence, in accordance with international law.

Reports of mistreatment of Palestinians detained by Israel are extremely concerning. The Foreign Secretary has repeatedly called for Israel to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access to detainees in accordance with International Humanitarian Law including the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Regarding Settlements, the UK's position is clear. Settlements are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace, and are harmful to a two-state solution. Settlement expansion and settler violence have reached record levels. The Israeli Government have seized more of the West Bank in 2024 than in any of the past 20 years. That is completely unacceptable. The UK strongly condemns inciteful remarks such as those made by Israel's National Security Minister Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Smotrich. The UK will challenge those who undermine a two-state solution. We have sanctioned people and groups for perpetrating, supporting and inciting human rights abuses against Palestinian communities in the West Bank and we will look at all options to take tougher

action.

The UK is concerned by the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) ongoing military operation in the occupied West Bank. We recognise Israel's need to defend itself against security threats, but we are very worried by the methods Israel has employed and by reports of civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. We continue to call on Israeli authorities to exercise restraint, adhere to international law, and clamp down on the actions of those who seek to inflame tensions.

Israel is a close friend and strategic partner of the UK, a relationship built on decades of cooperation. It is a key partner across UK priorities, including trade and investment, security, and science and technology. We cooperate across a wide range of issues for our mutual benefit. The UK government continues to use our range of diplomatic tools and bilateral dialogues with Israel to discuss issues of concern, including in relation to the Israel/Gaza conflict.

As we look for a pathway out of the wider crisis, we are conscious of this conflict's complexities and are determined to listen to all sides. Our overarching goal is clear: a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, alongside a safe and secure Israel. There is no way out of this crisis without a route to both Palestinians and Israelis enjoying security, justice and opportunity in lands that they can call their own. We want a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution: a safe, secure Israel alongside a viable, sovereign Palestinian state. We are committed to recognising a Palestinian state as a contribution to a peace process, at a time that is most conducive to that process.

In pursuit of these objectives, the Foreign Secretary has visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories twice in his first two months in office, meeting with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, as well as families of hostages, victims of violence and members of the humanitarian community. The Prime Minister last spoke to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on 20 August and with President Abbas of the Palestinian Authority on Sunday 7 July.

The situation in the Middle East continues to evolve rapidly. But please rest assured that the Foreign Secretary and his entire Ministerial team will continue to do all they can to secure lasting peace in the region.

Yours sincerely,

Parliamentary Correspondence Team
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office