



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office



Department
for International
Development

14 March 2018

Your references: ML.N0004.CM.8.2.18
ML.N0004.CM.20.2.18
Our reference: MIN/116711/2018

Caroline Lucas MP
House of Commons
London
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Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your emails of 8 February and 20 February about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs).

The Government remains deeply concerned about living conditions in Gaza. I visited Gaza in August 2017 and saw the extent of the issues there first hand.

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 (PA). However, recent reporting by the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) 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 availability of some medical supplies and services in the OPTs can be restricted by Israeli security procedures. A recent World Health Organisation report noted increasing restrictions, notably permit delays or denials, for patients referred for further care outside Gaza and the West Bank. We are monitoring OCHA's emergency indicators, which are worrying, but show some improvement since 2017.

We remain committed to supporting vulnerable Gazans. The UK has provided £1.9 million to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) to support approximately 1 million Gazans by providing clean water, rehabilitating sanitation facilities and promoting hygiene standards to stop the spread of disease.

Additionally, the UK is a long-term supporter of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which provides basic services to 1.3 million people in Gaza, including basic health care. We remain firmly committed to supporting UNRWA and have so far provided around £50 million in 2017/18 to assist UNRWA in delivering a basic education to around 500,000 children and health services for around 3 million Palestinian refugees across the region.

The long-lasting movement restrictions and the serious constraints imposed by the occupation of the OPTs impact the health of the population as well as the further development of quality health services, especially in Gaza. Free movement of patients and medical personnel is vital to the effectiveness of care. Ambulance and permit delays can lead to missed appointments and interrupted treatments, endangering the health and lives of patients.

We have frequent discussions with the Governments of Israel and Egypt about the need to take steps to improve conditions and ease restrictions on Gaza. Through our Embassy in Tel Aviv we have lobbied at the highest levels on easing restrictions on movement. The Foreign Secretary raised this with Prime Minister Netanyahu in August 2017. We continue to work closely with the Quartet and the EU to call on Israel to ease restrictions. We are also concerned about the closure of the Rafah crossing and strongly encourage Egypt to show maximum flexibility on re-opening the crossing.

We urge all relevant parties to reach a political agreement that alleviates the suffering of the Gazan people. We welcome the Egyptian-brokered reconciliation agreement of 12 October 2017 and the resumption of PA control at the border crossings with Israel in November 2017. We need a durable agreement that addresses the underlying causes of the conflict and transforms the situation in Gaza.

As you note, the Government has raised the issue of Palestinian children in Israeli military detention and we remain committed to working with Israel to secure improvements to its practices surrounding children in detention. I raised this issue personally with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK as recently as 27 February.

The Government is very concerned at the high numbers of Palestinians killed by the Israel Defense Forces in the West Bank and Gaza. The UK has repeatedly made clear to Israel our longstanding concerns about the manner in which the Israel Defense Forces police non-violent protests and the border areas, including their use of live ammunition. We encourage the Israeli authorities to carry out transparent investigations into the appropriateness of the use of live fire.

We do not hesitate to express disagreement with Israel whenever we feel it necessary. We believe that open and honest discussions, rather than imposing sanctions or supporting anti-Israeli boycotts, best supports our efforts to help progress in the peace process and achieve a negotiated solution.

See also
Alistair

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

All these issues are regularly the subject of inter-national and multi-lateral efforts in which we are prominent. I hope to go to a meeting to support towards this week, and a series of briefs in Washington discussing infrastructure in Gaza. But ultimately of course, the only ends that we get the settlement of the issue we all hope for.

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