



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



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Caroline Lucas MP
House of Commons
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21 February 2024

Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your correspondence of 15 February to the Foreign Secretary about the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I am replying as the Minister of State for the Middle East.

I share your views over the dire humanitarian prospects of a military offensive in Rafah. As the Foreign Secretary has said, we want Israel to stop and consider the serious repercussions of a military offensive before it takes any further action. Over half of the population of Gaza are taking shelter in the area, many of whom have already been displaced multiple times. The displaced Palestinians literally have nowhere to go. The Rafah crossing itself is vital to ensure that aid can reach those in Gaza who so desperately need it. We do not underestimate the devastating humanitarian impacts that a full ground offensive, if enacted, would have in these circumstances.

The civilian cost and number killed by Israel is shocking and we continue to urge Israel that it must limit its operations to military targets, protect civilians, homes, shelters, schools and hospitals. Above all, to protect civilians in Rafah and elsewhere in Gaza, the priority must be to secure an immediate stop and cessation in the fighting, which is the best way to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire. We are urging Israel – as well as those with influence on Hamas – to negotiate an immediate deal and to prevent further bloodshed.

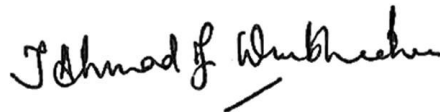
The UK trebled our aid commitment this financial year and is doing everything it can to get more aid in and open more crossings. The current levels are woefully inadequate. Israel must take immediate steps, working with other partners including the UN and Egypt, to significantly increase the flow of unhindered aid into Gaza including allowing prolonged humanitarian pauses, opening more routes into Gaza and restoring and sustaining water, fuel and electricity. We have supported the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza, with 750 metric tons of life-saving food aid arriving in the first delivery.

Israel has endured the worst terrorist attack in its history at the hands of Hamas. International Humanitarian Law (IHL) must be respected and civilians protected. Israel must act within IHL. We keep under continuous review whether they are abiding by their obligations.

The Government takes its defence export responsibilities extremely seriously and operates some of the most robust export controls in the world. All applications for export licences are assessed on a case-by-case basis against strict criteria. We will not issue a licence if there is a clear risk that the equipment might be used for internal repression. We continue to monitor very closely the situation in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank; if extant licences are found to be no longer consistent with the Criteria, those licences will be revoked.

For a peaceful solution, four things must happen. There must be: a Palestinian-led government in Gaza and the West Bank; a concrete plan to help reform and support the Palestinian Authority; a massive reconstruction plan for Gaza; and the political horizon towards delivering a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON

Minister of State

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