



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Lord David Cameron
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
King Charles Street
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Our Ref: BC48629

20 February 2024

Re: Gaza

I am writing to you on behalf of the hundreds of constituents in Enfield Southgate who have contacted me about the situation in Gaza, and to urge you to call for an immediate ceasefire to stop the killing of innocent civilians.

The situation in Gaza is a humanitarian catastrophe. I have been horrified by the extreme scale of the devastation and destruction. More than 28,000 people have been killed. Half of them were children. Entire cities have been razed to the ground, with 85% of the population displaced. People are facing desperation and hunger, with the risk of famine growing. Health infrastructure is barely functioning and disease is spreading rapidly, with unimaginable conditions in Gaza's hospitals. Israeli civilians too have been killed, and the appalling attacks by Hamas on October 7th, the taking of hostages and the firing of rockets at civilian targets in Israel are horrific. Hostages must be released immediately, and civilians must be protected from harm wherever they are.

In waves of mass displacement, millions of Palestinians have fled to Rafah - a so-called "safe zone" - for safety and shelter. Among them are at least 600,000 children, according to UNICEF. It is now Gaza's most overcrowded area. People have found shelter in houses and hospitals, while many more huddle in makeshift shelters and tents, and thousands sleep on the streets.

Now, they have nowhere left to go.

With this backdrop, Israel's planned ground offensive on Rafah would be cataclysmic. It cannot go ahead. I am urging you to press the Israeli Government to stop this from happening, and to push for an immediate and permanent ceasefire to protect civilians.

In October last year, I wrote to your predecessor calling on him to work with our international partners to promote a negotiated ceasefire. Since then, tens of thousands more Palestinians have been killed. The situation is now grave, with an extreme humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza. More aid has to reach those in need and the fighting must stop.

It is no longer enough to call for international humanitarian law to be respected. We need an immediate ceasefire to protect civilian life and infrastructure, for humanitarian aid to reach those in urgent need, and for the safe release and return of all hostages.

As you know, it is in this terrible context that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued a ruling last month. The ICJ ordered six provisional measures, including ordering with immediate effect that Israel does not commit any act constituting the crime of genocide, and that it must act to punish and prevent the incitement of genocide. Israel must also ensure the provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance to the civilian population. The ICJ also ordered Hamas to immediately release hostages.

I welcome and support these measures. I also believe the UK's capacity to be an honest, credible and consistent diplomatic interlocutor relies on a consistent approach to the application of international law. Since this ruling was made in January, what steps has the UK Government taken to insist that all measures ordered by the ICJ are implemented in full? With the ongoing bombardment of civilian life, and with aid unable to reach Gazans in need, what evidence is there that the Israeli government is listening to concerns raised by the UK and the international community?

I am also deeply disturbed by the withdrawal of funding from UNRWA, which has offered a lifeline to the Palestinian people in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon since 1950. When visiting the region previously I have seen the important work UNRWA does. Allegations that UNRWA staff have taken part in terrorism are extremely serious. Every effort should be made to investigate, and I am pleased that UNRWA has suspended those accused. However, to cut funding from the organisation that provides the majority of social welfare to the people of Gaza, at a time of extreme suffering for the civilian population amounts to collective punishment. With the UN reporting that the majority of the population of Gaza is facing famine, I urge you to restore the UK's funding commitments to UNRWA with immediate effect, and ensure that the UK plays its part in helping humanitarian aid reach Gazans in desperate need.

On settler violence and human rights abuses in the West Bank, I welcome the measures your department has taken recently including introducing sanctions against a number of extremist Israeli settlers. As you know, there has been an unprecedented rise in violence against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, with at least 507 Palestinians killed in the West Bank last year, including 81 children. You recently, and rightly, said that *"Israel must also take stronger action and put a stop to settler violence. Too often, we see commitments made and undertakings given, but not followed through."* So what further steps will the UK Government be taking to put pressure on Israel with regards to illegal settlement expansion, settler violence, evictions and demolitions, and further human rights abuses in the West Bank and East Jerusalem?

I have also been contacted by many constituents about UK arms sales to Israel. With the ICJ's interim measures, there is serious concern that arms and military equipment transferred to Israel could be used in, or to facilitate, breaches in international humanitarian law. Given the ICJ rulings and the imminent prospect of a ground offensive in Rafah, what recent assessment have you made of UK arms exports to Israel? Has your department considered banning sales of arms and security equipment to Israel?

Finally, I welcome the statements attributed to you recently on Palestinian statehood. We must support progress towards a negotiated settlement based on two states: a

safe and secure Israel, and an independent and sovereign Palestine. This, now, feels more remote than ever. But the UK has a historic responsibility to both Israelis and Palestinians. There needs to be a political solution so that the long-term hope of peace and stability can be achieved. For the UK Government's part, this must include an acceptance of the need to recognise Palestine as a state - as around 140 other countries have done. Please can you confirm your position on Palestinian statehood, and if you agree with me that lasting peace will be impossible until both Israelis and Palestinians enjoy security, dignity and human rights?

I urge you once again to push for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, to protect innocent civilians and avoid further destruction in Gaza.

I look forward to hearing from you urgently about these important matters.

Yours sincerely,

Bambos Charalambous MP