



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



**Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon
Minister of State (Middle East,
North Africa, South Asia,
Commonwealth and the UN)**

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

King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

Tel: 020 7008 5000

**Email:
fcdo.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk**

www.gov.uk/fcdo

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Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your letter of 15 October to the Foreign Secretary on behalf of your constituents, about the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). I am replying as the Minister of State for the Middle East, responsible for human rights.

The UK condemns the terrorist acts perpetrated by Hamas against Israeli and international citizens. But we are clear: Hamas is the enemy, not the Palestinian people. Hamas is a terrorist organisation, which neither speaks for nor acts in the interests of the Palestinian people.

The UK is also clear that Hamas bears responsibility for these acts of terror and we support Israel's legitimate right to defend its citizens proportionately and act against terrorism. There is never justification for the brutal targeting of civilians. Terrorism will not prevail.

The Prime Minister spoke to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 12 October. He expressed condolences on behalf of the British people for all those killed, injured, or kidnapped in this unconscionable tragedy, the true scale and horror of which becomes clearer every passing day. He has engaged extensively, including with President Biden, King Abdullah of Jordan, President Sisi and President Abbas. The Foreign Secretary and I have been proactively engaging. He visited Israel on 11 October and we have reached out to our international counterparts, including with Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Morocco, Bahrain and Lebanon.

We want to see both Israelis and Palestinians living safe and secure in peaceful proximity, not under the threat of terrorism. Any civilian death resulting from the conflict is a tragedy. But Hamas deliberately murdered and kidnapped in Israel and now callously puts civilians in Gaza at risk. We have been clear that Hamas must immediately release all hostages.

This must be done in line with international humanitarian law but we also recognise that Israel faces an enemy that embeds itself behind civilians. We have called on Israel to take every possible precaution to avoid harming civilians. The Prime Minister echoed the words of President Biden in his statement in Parliament: as democracies “we are stronger and more secure when we act according to the rule of law”. Humanity, law, decency and the respect for human life is what sets us apart from the mindless violence of the terrorist.

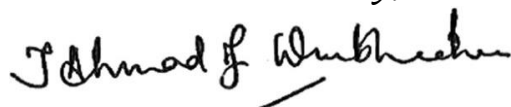
The UK’s position on international law is unwavering and we continue to make clear to all parties that all possible measures must be taken to ensure civilian casualties are minimised and to facilitate humanitarian aid to the civilians in Gaza. The Foreign Secretary emphasised these points during his recent visit to Israel. Israeli President Herzog has also said Israel will abide by international law. However, Israel’s attempt to minimise civilian casualties through warning them to leave northern Gaza has been complicated by Hamas telling the local population not to leave, putting innocent Palestinians at greater risk.

While the UK continues to call for unimpeded humanitarian access so that essential aid can reach civilian populations including food, water, fuel and medical supplies, the existing conflict is exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation. Before the recent escalation of hostilities, the UN estimated that sixty percent of people in Gaza already needed humanitarian assistance, including over 1.5m in need of food assistance and 1.6m in need of health and nutrition assistance.

The UK’s aid programme to the West Bank and Gaza helps provide essential basic healthcare, education, and protection services as well as life-saving humanitarian assistance. This year we have provided £27m in ODA to the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). This support is delivered through trusted partners, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. In all, more than eighty percent of our ODA spend this year will be used to meet humanitarian need, or to provide vital health, education, and protection services for Palestinian Refugees. All our aid undergoes rigorous oversight and no UK funding goes to Hamas or the Palestinian Authority.

On 16 October, the Prime Minister announced in a statement to the House of Commons a further £10 million in humanitarian aid funding for civilians in the OPTs in response to the escalating conflict. He also reiterated the UK’s condemnation of Hamas and called for humanitarian organisations to be allowed to deliver life-saving aid.

Yours sincerely,



LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON

Minister of State

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