



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



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

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Professor Neve Gordon
Vice President
British Society for Middle Eastern Studies
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Dear Professor Gordon,

Thank you for your letter of 30 January to the Prime Minister and the Foreign, Defence and Education Secretaries about the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I am replying as the Minister of State for the Middle East.

Israel has endured the worst terrorist attack in its history at the hands of Hamas. We support Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas, but it must comply with International Humanitarian Law. We keep under continuous review whether they are abiding by their obligations.

No-one wants to see this conflict go on a moment longer than necessary. This means achieving a sustainable ceasefire - one that will last and prevent another generation of children living under the constant threat of war - with Hamas no longer in power in Gaza, able to threaten Israel with rocket attacks and other forms of terrorism. A ceasefire will not last if hostages are still being held. Ahead of a permanent ceasefire, we want to see immediate and sustained agreements to be reached. This will allow for hostages to leave and - vitally - more medical and humanitarian aid to enter Gaza; helping to create the conditions for a durable peace. There is a desperate need for increased humanitarian

support to Gaza. Our focus must be on practical solutions that save lives and end this conflict.

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 and are deepening the humanitarian crisis. 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.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) must be respected and civilians protected. Israel must act within IHL and we want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes.

On 26 January the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered its decision on the provisional measures requested by South Africa in their case against Israel regarding alleged violations of the 1948 Genocide Convention. We respect the role and independence of the ICJ and ask Israel to comply with the decision of the court. As we have made clear, Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas, whilst adhering to International Humanitarian Law.

We welcome the Court's call for the immediate release of hostages, to get more aid into Gaza, and its reminder that all parties to the conflict are bound by International Humanitarian Law. During his visit to Israel in January, the Foreign Secretary was clear we want to see an immediate pause which is necessary for all these things. We then want to build towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to fighting.

The UK is a founding member and key donor to Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises, which is supporting education preparedness work in Gaza. We continue to support the wider delivery of education in Gaza, including through NGOs, UN partners, the World Bank, and the Global Partnership for Education.

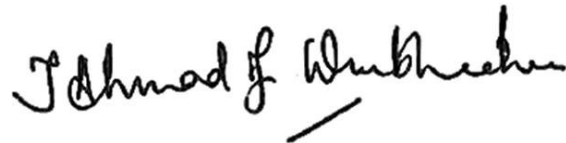
The UK has supported UNRWA since its establishment 75 years ago. We know how critical a role the agency plays in the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Gaza and across the region in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. We were nevertheless appalled by the allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel and I have been in direct touch with UNRWA Commissioner-General Lazzarini, to raise these concerns and to outline the UK's position.

We remain absolutely committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it, and the pause in UNRWA funding has no impact on the UK's contribution to the humanitarian response. We are getting on with aid delivery through funding multiple implementing partners, including other UN agencies and international and UK NGOs. Our commitment to trebling aid to Gaza this year still stands and we are providing £70 million in humanitarian assistance to support partners including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme and the Egyptian Red Crescent Society, to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza.

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. We do not believe that imposing a blanket arms embargo on Israel would lead to progress in the peace process.

These are the vital steps to a sustainable peace: the release of all hostages; the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package; removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel; Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza; and a political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name "Wimbledon".

LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON

Minister of State

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