



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

28th May 2021

New Content

RE: ISRAEL, THE OPTs & THE HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH REPORT

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of the recent hostilities in the Middle East, specifically in relation to the Human Rights Watch Report; your comments upon which I have read with great interest. My thoughts are with all those affected, especially the families of those civilians killed.

The UK was clear from the outset in urging all parties to de-escalate. I welcome the announced ceasefire between Hamas and Israel, effective as of the 21st May. This is an essential step to ending the cycle of violence and loss of civilian life. The UK worked actively to urge the parties to work with mediators towards an immediate ceasefire, and fully supported Egyptian, Qatari and UN efforts to that end, working closely with the US.

I know that the UK repeatedly calls on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and is in close dialogue with Israel regarding various issues relating to the occupation. The UK regularly makes clear to the Israeli Government, for instance, our opposition to settlement expansion in the OPTs which causes unnecessary suffering to Palestinians, undermines the viability of the two-state solution, and, in most cases, are contrary to international law.

Israel and the OPTs remain a human rights priority for the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). As such, I am confident that ministers and British officials will continue to monitor all issues relating to the occupation and raise them with the relevant authorities, and via the appropriate multilateral fora, accordingly.

Regarding concerns about arms exports, I know the Government takes its export control responsibilities extremely seriously and operates one of the most robust export control regimes anywhere in the world. All export licence applications are rigorously assessed on a case-by-case basis against the *Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria*, based on the most up-to-date information and analysis available.

Licence decisions take account of prevailing circumstances at the time of application and include human rights and international humanitarian law considerations. Export licenses are not issued where to do so would be inconsistent with the consolidated criteria, including where there is a clear risk that the items might be used for a serious violation of international humanitarian law.



On the issue of bilateral trade, the UK does not recognise the OPTs and settlements there as part of Israel. The UK Government neither encourages, nor offers support to, individuals or companies who operate in settlements in the OPTs. Goods from settlements are not covered by the *UK-Israel Trade & Partnership Agreement* and do not receive preferential tariff treatment.

Finally, I note suggestions about the imposition of targeted sanctions. I do not, however, speculate on potential future designations, because to do so could undermine their impact. I know that the FCDO keeps all relevant evidence under constant review, and I remain in close contact with my ministerial colleagues on this matter.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you, then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,
Tom

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