



Foreign &  
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Office



Department  
for International  
Development

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Sir Mark Hendrick MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

*Dear Mark,*

Thank you for your email of 18 May to the Foreign Secretary, on behalf of your constituent, about  
Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I am replying as the Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East and North Africa.

The recent violence in Gaza and the West Bank has been shocking. The loss of life and the large number of injured Palestinians is tragic. We call on all sides to show restraint and abide by international law. Such violence is destructive to peace efforts.

We have been clear that the UK supports the Palestinians' right to peaceful protest. It is deplorable that extremist elements are exploiting these protests for their own violent purposes. We will not waver from our support for Israel's right to defend its borders. But the large volume of live fire is extremely concerning. We implore Israel to show greater restraint.

There is an urgent need to establish the facts of what happened, through an independent and transparent investigation, including why such a volume of live fire was used and what role Hamas played in events. Given the importance of accountability, we welcome Israel's commitment to investigate the conduct of operations. We urge that its findings be made public and, if wrongdoing is found, those responsible be held to account.

Ultimately, Hamas's ongoing decision to embrace violence and reject the Quartet Principles lies at the heart of the Gazan tragedy. The UK's position on Hamas is clear: Hamas must renounce violence, recognise Israel, and accept previously signed agreements. Hamas faces a fundamental decision about whether it is prepared to accept the Quartet Principles and join efforts for peace, or whether it will continue to use terror and anti-Semitic incitement, with all the terrible consequences for the people of Gaza and Israel.

Hamas's military wing has been proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the UK since 2001, and the UK retains a policy of no contact with Hamas in its entirety. Any peace agreement should ensure that Hamas permanently ends rocket fire and attacks against Israel, the Palestinian Authority resumes control of Gaza and restores effective and accountable governance, and Israel lifts its restrictions in order to ease the suffering of ordinary Gazans.

The British Government takes its defence exports responsibilities extremely seriously and operates some of the most robust export controls in the world. We only approve equipment which is for Israel's legitimate self-defence, when we are satisfied that this would be consistent with the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria and other relevant commitments. 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, or if there is a clear risk that it would provoke or prolong conflict.

The recent violence makes clear the urgent need for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We need a political process to move us closer to our goal of a two-state solution with a safe and secure Israel living alongside an independent and viable Palestinian State, which improves the economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza.

This conflict will only be resolved when violence is rejected and negotiations take place. The UK is doing all it can to support this goal.

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**THE RT HON. ALISTAIR BURT MP**  
**Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa**