



Foreign, Commonwealth  
& Development Office

The Rt Hon the Lord Cameron of  
Chipping Norton  
Secretary of State for Foreign,  
Commonwealth and Development Affairs

King Charles Street  
London  
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Alicia Kearns MP  
The Chair  
Foreign Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

15 February 2024

*Dear Alicia,*

Thank you for your letter, regarding the worrying situation in Rafah.

I share your deep concern about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah. As you highlight, over half of the population of Gaza are taking shelter in the area, many of whom have been displaced multiple times already. The Rafah crossing itself is also vital to ensure that aid can reach those in Gaza who so desperately need it. We do not underestimate the devastating humanitarian impacts that a full ground offensive, if enacted, would have in these circumstances, which is why I have been vocal about the Government's concern.

We are, of course, aware of the targeted hostage rescue that has already taken place in Rafah and I am relieved that two more hostages have been freed. Despite this, and as I have said, we want Israel to stop and think seriously about the repercussions of a military offensive before it takes any further action. Too many civilians have been killed in this conflict already and I stressed this personally to Prime Minister Netanyahu on my recent visit. As you know, we continue to urge Israel to ensure that it limits its operations to military targets and take all possible steps to avoid harming civilians and destroying homes. In the case of a potential Rafah offensive, it is difficult to see how this could be achieved – civilians in Rafah are not able to cross into Egypt, neither are they able to return northwards.

We continue to do all we can to get more aid into Gaza. I have reiterated with Prime Minister Netanyahu the need for Israel to open more crossing points; for Nitzana and Kerem Shalom to be open for longer; and for Israel to support the UN to distribute aid effectively. We remain focused on practical solutions that save lives.

Above all, to protect civilians in Rafah and elsewhere in Gaza, the priority must be to secure an immediate pause in the fighting, which is the best way to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to fighting.

We are closely engaged in lobbying Israel – as well as those with influence on Hamas – to negotiate an immediate humanitarian pause, and to protect civilians.

You are asking all the right questions and we will, of course, keep this developing situation under careful review. I am also aware that our Political Director, Christian Turner, is going to update you personally on the situation in Rafah, and I hope that is helpful.

Tom,

David



## Foreign Affairs Committee

From the Chair  
**Alicia Kearns MP**

The Rt Hon Lord Cameron  
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs  
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office  
SW1A 2AH

*[by email]*

13 February 2024

Dear Foreign Secretary,

### **Concern over Israeli Rafah offensive**

I am writing to express my serious concern with the Israeli air strikes on Rafah carried out this weekend, and future offensives in Rafah. As you said yourself, over a million people are sheltering in Rafah. Rafah was the last Israeli designated 'safe zone'; displaced Gazans have nowhere else to go. A full ground offensive in Rafah will likely lead to an extremely high number of civilians being killed, injured and left missing under rubble. The risk of atrocity crimes is great.

Israel has committed to organise a resettlement of civilians out of Rafah city. However, there is as yet no sign of such an operation having been arranged, and it is difficult to see how Israel—or anyone—can in a short time effect such an enormous population transfer, involving over a million people, the overwhelming majority of whom arrived in Rafah from further north in Gaza following explicit advice from the IDF to take refuge there.

The UK should be doing its utmost to ensure the safety of those in Rafah. In this vein, I ask the following questions:

- What reassurances have you received regarding the safety measures being put in place to protect Gazans in Rafah? President Biden called for a "credible and executable plan" to protect Gazans should a Rafah offensive occur, what evidence has Israel provided of such a plan?
- Are you confident measures will be sufficient to protect those sheltering in Rafah? Without such sufficient safety measures, what is the Government's position regarding the planned offensive? Does the Government perceive the Rafah operation to be in line with the ICJ interim order?
- What is your understanding of what the designation of 'safe zone' means in terms of military operations and civilian safety?
- Rafah is the only open crossing for the little humanitarian aid entering Gaza. What assurances has Israel given you regarding the continuation of aid deliveries into Gaza? Will aid deliveries continue through the Rafah crossing? If so, how can this be practically implemented during an on-going offensive?



## Foreign Affairs Committee

I reiterate the words of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: "Israel must comply with the legally binding orders issued by the International Court of Justice, and with the full span of international humanitarian law." Equally the UK must meet its obligations. Can you provide assurances that the UK is meeting its legal and ethical obligations to support international law, to prevent mass atrocities, and to protect populations in this conflict?

As you are aware, I have written to you several times raising increasing concerns with Israeli operations in Gaza whether it be compliance with international humanitarian law while using UK strategic exports, to the air strike on the Medical Aid for Palestinians compound, and now the risk of atrocity crimes should an offensive in Rafah ensue.

The escalation in response, and the jeopardy this puts the people of Gaza and foreign nationals in must be recognised and urgently addressed. Given this, I would welcome an early response, and no later than 16 February 2024. I may publish our correspondence.

Yours,

**ALICIA KEARNS**