



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

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Sarah Champion MP
Chair, International Development Committee
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Dear Sarah,

I'm writing to outline the Government's priorities for the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), both in Gaza and the West Bank, ahead of your visit on 20-22 November. Your visit is a welcome opportunity to share our assessment and the work of FCDO officials on the ground in support of government priorities, and I am pleased that we are able to facilitate your programme in the OPTs and Jordan. My officials stand ready to support your visit in any way they can, and I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you on your return, ahead of my visit to the OPTs later in November.

As you are aware, the humanitarian situation in the OPTs remains an urgent priority for this Government. In particular, we are acutely aware that the situation in Gaza has reached extreme levels of need, with access to nutrition and sanitation, adequate shelter, and medical treatment drastically impacted by Israel's ongoing military offensive. I recently met with a number of UK and regionally-based NGOs involved in delivering aid to hear their experiences over the past year: it was sobering to hear their accounts of the dire operating environment in Gaza. Many had lost colleagues and are living in constant fear of losing more. The volume of supplies entering Gaza remains wholly inadequate to mitigate needs, particularly in the north. The destruction of medical facilities has intensified civilian suffering, leaving many critically ill and wounded people, including children, without access to healthcare, ambulances or search and rescue services. Reports that medical personnel and civilians have been detained in large numbers are deeply troubling. Collectively, these developments represent a stark deterioration in the humanitarian situation, which this Government remains committed to tackling alongside our partners.

The situation in the West Bank, whilst not as catastrophic as Gaza, is rapidly deteriorating. Some 200,000 Palestinians have lost their employment since October 7, and an uptick in Israeli incursions and settler violence has left 430 Palestinians dead this year and restricted access to vital services, including healthcare.

Our diplomatic efforts to resolve this are aimed at: (i) putting pressure on Israel to change its approach to humanitarian aid access and protection of civilians; and (ii) bolstering support for the UN, its partners and other trusted humanitarian actors to deliver the humanitarian response. We have been lobbying the Government of Israel hard to make urgent improvements in five key areas:

1. Immediate winterisation campaign

As winter approaches, it is critical that humanitarian actors are able to surge the provision of essential items including food, medical and shelter items, water, fuel, and items critical for infrastructure repair. It is also important that evacuation orders are rescinded as swiftly as possible, so that families can return home and displaced populations move out of coastal areas ahead of the winter.

UK Action: The UK is working with international partners to press the importance of a campaign on winterisation. The Foreign Secretary's Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the OPTs Mark Bryson-Richardson is driving forward coordination on this at official level, and raised the issue of winterisation with Israel's Minister for Strategic Affairs, Ron Dermer on 22 October.

2. Increasing the volume and types of goods reaching Gaza

The flow of aid into Gaza is at a record low – October saw the lowest monthly number of trucks enter since the conflict began. Israel must urgently increase the quantity of goods entering Gaza, including by removing restrictions on truck loading, enabling all routes, opening all crossing points, streamlining processes at Ashdod, increasing the flow of aid from Jordan and Egypt, and allowing the commercial import of goods from Israel, the West Bank and neighbouring countries. We are also calling on Israel to significantly reduce the restrictions on “dual use” items; and ensure a much wider range of goods are allowed into Gaza, including educational and psychosocial materials, hygiene and sanitary products, and medical equipment.

UK Action: As well as engaging closely with the US on their efforts to improve aid access, we continue to highlight this messaging in high-profile fora: in his speech in Berlin on 18 October the Prime Minister underlined that the world will not tolerate any more excuses on humanitarian assistance. The Foreign Secretary and wider FCDO team continue to raise aid access with Israeli counterparts at every opportunity. The Prime Minister stressed this in a call with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu on 19 October; the Foreign Secretary reiterated this in his call with the then Foreign Minister Katz on 27 October. During his visit to Egypt on 16 October, Minister for the Middle East Hamish Falconer MP drew attention to supplies at Al-Arish denied entry by Israel. My own upcoming visit to the OPTs is an opportunity to continue this effort.

3. Effective and safe aid distribution in Gaza

The aid distribution system is under profound strain in Gaza and, in the north, UN partners report it is close to collapse. Urgent issues include the security of humanitarian sites and movements, repair of roads, increasing aid warehousing and staging areas, bringing in necessary safety, communications and logistical equipment; and continuous access to northern Gaza from southern Gaza.

UK Action: The UK is engaging closely with the Government of Israel to press for meaningful improvements in aid access in both Gaza and the West Bank. We spearheaded international efforts to secure a humanitarian pause to allow the first phase of polio vaccinations across Gaza and called for all eligible children in Gaza to have access to a second vaccine. The second phase of polio vaccinations for northern Gaza began on 2 November, and coverage of the second dose of polio vaccines across northern Gaza is now estimated at 88% (against a goal of 90%).

4. Protection of the civilian population

Levels of civilian suffering in Gaza are intolerable; reports of continued destruction of health infrastructure, health workers coming under fire, and civilians being killed, injured or detained in large numbers are gravely concerning. It is unacceptable that North Gaza governorate now has no fully functioning hospitals after strikes on Kamal Adwan hospital resumed last week. A breakdown of law and order across Gaza is leading to reports of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, including of children. We are seeking immediate action to minimise harms to civilians and civilian infrastructure, ensure that no forced evacuation from northern to southern Gaza takes place, enable the injured and chronically ill to move within and leave Gaza to receive medical care, enable the import of medical supplies and provision of education, and allow the UN and partners to implement protection programmes for children, survivors of gender-based violence and vulnerable groups.

UK Action: The UK continues to highlight civilian protection issues, including most recently through Minister Falconer expressing our grave concern to Israel's Ambassador to the UK about renewed strikes on and denial of access to Kamal Adwan hospital in North Gaza, which harmed patients and children and destroyed vital medical supplies. The Government continues to raise issues of International Humanitarian Law compliance with the Israeli Government and at the UN. You will also have seen our decision on 2 September to suspend certain arms export licences to Israel. The FCDO's International Humanitarian Law assessments will continue.

5. Enabling the UN and its Agencies, including UNRWA, to deliver their mandate in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

UNRWA is the backbone of humanitarian delivery in Gaza, as well as providing essential services in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Legislation recently adopted by Israel's Knesset has severe implications for the entire humanitarian response in Gaza and wider services in the OPTs. Israel must ensure UNRWA can fulfil its mandate in the OPTs, as well as enabling the wider UN system and its partners to deliver assistance safely and effectively. To this end Israel must ensure the rapid processing of visa requests for the UN and humanitarian organisations, including NGOs.

UK Action: This Government has been unequivocal in our support to UNRWA and our rejection of attempts to undermine or degrade its essential role in Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank, including through public statements by the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and myself. On 5 November, the Minister for the Middle East spoke to the Israeli Ambassador to the UK to underline UNRWA's key role in delivering lifesaving aid to those most in need. At the UN, we continue to highlight the importance of support for UNRWA, as I emphasised to Parliament on 29 October. We will continue to press the importance of UNRWA through our Presidency of the UN Security Council this month, and we are working closely with partners in New York to ensure that Council deliberations result in meaningful outcomes.

In parallel to our urgent advocacy and lobbying on humanitarian access issues, we are one of the largest funders of the Gaza humanitarian response, working through trusted partners to deliver essential supplies and services including food, healthcare and sanitation. We continue to identify opportunities where the UK can add significant value to humanitarian efforts, as demonstrated by our series of funding announcements in August, September and October - including £6 million towards UNICEF's work to support vulnerable families in Gaza, £4.5 million in joint UK-Kuwait assistance for UNICEF to deliver lifesaving aid in Gaza and Yemen, and £1 million to support Egyptian authorities and WHO to care for medically evacuated Palestinians in Egypt. We also resumed our funding to UNRWA, committing £21m for this year. This is on top of existing partnerships with key agencies including the World Food Programme, OCHA and UK-MED. UK-MED, for which additional funding was announced in July, is supporting two field hospitals and has treated over 250,000 Gazans. We are keeping our policy on medical evacuations under review, to ensure we are targeting our resources to most effectively help sick and wounded Palestinians. Most recently we announced the UK will match up to £10 million of public donations to the Disasters Emergency Committee's Middle East humanitarian appeal. All our partnerships are able to flex to respond in the West Bank, as needs there increase.

The most effective means to ensure Palestinians receive the assistance they so desperately need is for Israel to fulfil its commitment to flood Gaza with aid, including by meeting the terms set out in US Secretaries Blinken and Austin's letter to their counterparts. The people of Gaza can no longer wait for a resolution to this conflict. This has been a priority since day one of this Government – now more than ever, we need to see an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, the protection of civilians, much more aid entering Gaza, and a path to long-term peace and stability. We remain steadfast in our commitment to these goals alongside our partners.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Anneliese Dodds". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Rt Hon. Anneliese Dodds MP
Minister of State for International Development