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Humanitarian situation in Gaza and breaches in international humanitarian law

The House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee has been following developments in Gaza with extreme concern. Most recently, we held a private briefing with the Norwegian Refugee Council, which painted a bleak picture of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. After Israel reimposed a near-total blockade of Gaza and resumed hostilities, people in Gaza are once more facing starvation and death. There are particular concerns that the Israeli authorities may shut off the few remaining freshwater pipelines into Gaza, which would have devastating consequences, given the electricity supply to Gaza's desalination plants has already been cut off. No aid has reached Gaza in three weeks and stocks of all humanitarian supplies are running dangerously low.

In December, we wrote to the FCDO about the humanitarian access restrictions in Gaza (and limitations placed on the UN's Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees). This was before the start of the temporary ceasefire and Israel subsequently blocking the entry of all humanitarian aid. In January, the then Minister for Development told us that "The UK Government continues to press Israel at the highest level to underline that it must abide by its obligations under International Humanitarian Law as an occupying power and to meet its humanitarian obligations in Gaza. We are also in close contact with the United Nations as well as our like-minded international partners on this difficult issue. We will continue to press Israel, and work with the UN, to ensure continuity in the humanitarian response in Gaza, which is essential to sustain the terms of the ceasefire."

Could you please set out in detail what steps the UK Government is currently taking to bring pressure to bear on the Israeli authorities to facilitate the delivery of urgent and essential aid to the population of Gaza, and for Israel to abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law?

We would welcome a response to this letter within 10 working days.

I have also written in similar terms to the Prime Minister.

Lord de Mauley
Chairman, International Relations and Defence Committee