



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

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Rt Hon Sir Tony Baldry MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Sir Tony,

Thank you for your letter of 24 July to the Foreign Secretary, on behalf of your constituents, about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). I am replying as the Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East.

I share your concerns about the current crisis in Gaza. The conflict is taking a terrible toll. We are shocked by recent attacks on UN schools in Gaza that have resulted in the deaths of innocent children. The UK condemns Hamas' rocket fire, and recognises Israel's right to take proportionate action to defend itself. However, we have also urged Israel to do everything it can to avoid civilian casualties, and to exercise restraint in line with humanitarian law. This cycle of violence must be brought to an end. That is why the Prime Minister has made clear that we need to see an immediate unconditional ceasefire that stops the bloodshed.

I welcome the agreement of 26 August by all parties to a ceasefire. I pay tribute to the Government of Egypt for their work to secure this important step. The ceasefire provides a critical and welcome window of opportunity for reaching a comprehensive agreement that tackles the underlying causes of the conflict. This should ensure that: Hamas and other militant groups permanently end rocket fire and other attacks against Israel; the Palestinian Authority resumes control of Gaza and restores effective and accountable governance; and that Israel lifts its restrictions in order to ease the suffering of ordinary Palestinians and allows the Gazan economy to grow. There should be international monitoring and verification to ensure full implementation of a comprehensive agreement.

When I met Israel's Ambassador here at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office on 4 August, I raised our concerns about the scale of the situation in Gaza, particularly in relation to numbers of children and civilians killed.

We are pressing for urgent measures to relieve the humanitarian suffering of those in Gaza. That is why we have provided £19.1 million in UK aid in response to this crisis. On 8 August DfID announced they would be providing an additional £2 million to the Disasters Emergency Committee and on 4 August the Secretary of State for International Development announced £2 million in new funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency's Flash Appeal. This will help the UN provide a package of essential goods to the thousands of families sheltering in schools. In total, we have now pledged £6 million to UNRWA's appeal.

Furthermore, on 1 August DFID activated the Rapid Response Facility for Gaza. This means pre-approved partners with a proven ability to operate in Gaza will now have access to a total of £3 million in new funding to provide rapid and direct emergency humanitarian assistance. We are providing £3 million to the World Food Programme to provide food vouchers. This boost will provide emergency food vouchers for more than 300,000 people for one month, and we are also providing £2 million in medical aid. Finally, we have brought forward £3m in funding to the International Committee of the Red Cross to help them repair water infrastructure, deliver emergency medical services and protect the civilian population. But we are clear that a political solution is required to the current crisis in Gaza if we are to avoid this suffering happening again. I can assure you all UK effort is focused to that end.

Tobias Ellwood

TOBIAS ELLWOOD MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State