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Dear Harry Catherall,

Thank you for your correspondence about Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). The Parliamentary Correspondence Team in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has been asked to reply. We have set out in this letter the UK's policy response to a range of linked issues and hope you will find this information helpful in understanding how the FCDO is seeking to influence positively the situation in the OPTs.

Israel has suffered the worst terror attack in its history at the hands of Hamas and Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The UK wants to see an immediate end to the fighting in Gaza, to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

Five vital steps are required for a sustainable peace: the release of all hostages; the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package; removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel; Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza; a political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution, where all citizens of both nations live in peace and security.

There must be a reduction in civilian casualties. All parties must act within International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Israel must take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes. Israel must also obey IHL; not only does that involve what the IDF does in terms of the way it prosecutes this war but, as the occupying power in Gaza, it has to make sure that humanitarian aid - food, water and shelter - is available. The FCDO regularly reviews advice about Israel's capability and commitment to IHL and we act in accordance with that advice, for example, when considering export licences.

On 26 January, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered its decision on the

provisional measures requested by South Africa in their case against Israel regarding alleged violations of the 1948 Genocide Convention. His Majesty's Government respects the role and independence of the ICJ, however, has considerable concerns about this case, which is not helpful in the goal of achieving a sustainable ceasefire. Israel has the right to defend itself against Hamas in line with IHL, as UK ministers have said from the outset. The Court's call for the immediate release of hostages and the need to get more aid into Gaza is a position we have long advocated.

We need a humanitarian pause now to allow humanitarian actors and Gazans to operate and move safely, and enable hostages to be released. We have set out very clearly five actions that Israel needs to take, including: an immediate humanitarian pause to get more aid in and the hostages out; increased capacity inside Gaza to fully enable the UN's operating requirements; increased access for aid through land routes and to fully open Ashdod Port; an expansion of the types of aid allowed into Gaza; and, the provision of electricity, water and telecommunications, to both the north and the south of Gaza.

The UK is playing a leadership role in alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian people. For example, we trebled our aid commitment this financial year and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air. On 25 March, the Royal Air Force airdropped 10 tonnes of food aid directly to civilians in Gaza. 150 further tonnes of UK aid arrived in Gaza on 13 March. The Foreign Secretary's Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Mark Bryson-Richardson, is also working intensively to address the blockages preventing more aid reaching Gaza.

The recent news that three British Nationals were amongst the aid workers killed in an airstrike on World Central Kitchen's humanitarian efforts in Gaza is deeply distressing. We are providing support for their families and the Foreign Secretary has spoken with his Israeli counterpart to underline that the deaths of these aid workers is completely unacceptable. Israel must provide a full, transparent explanation of what happened and make major changes to ensure the safety of aid workers on the ground.

We are appalled by allegations that United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned. We remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it, including through other UN agencies and British charities. Our decision to pause funding to UNRWA has had no impact on the UK's contribution to the humanitarian response.

As the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have both said, we are deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah where over half of Gaza's population are sheltering in the area, and the Rafah crossing is vital to ensure aid can reach the people who so desperately need it. We urge Israel to stop and think very seriously before it takes any further action.

We regularly review advice about Israel's compliance with IHL through continuous assessments supported by a detailed evidence base, including analysis of the conflict and reporting from NGOs, international bodies and partner countries, statements and reports by the Israeli Government and military representatives. We act consistently with advice on

these assessments, for example when considering export licences. We can and do respond quickly and flexibly to changing international circumstances. All licences are kept under careful review, and we are able to amend, suspend, refuse or revoke licences, as circumstances require.

The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Lord Ahmad, Minister of State for the Middle East, have reiterated these messages in contacts with Prime Minister Netanyahu and other senior Israeli political leaders, as well as through extensive programmes of visits to meet with leaders in Qatar, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Egypt and UAE in recent weeks. Throughout these discussions, the immediate priority has been a humanitarian pause in the fighting, which is the best route to secure the safe release of hostages and significantly step up the aid reaching Gaza. On 25 March, the international community took a significant step towards achieving that with United Nations Security Council resolution 2728, which reflected widespread international support for Britain's position and considerable efforts by our diplomats to secure a consensus.

We want that pause to lead to a sustainable ceasefire without a return to further fighting and that remains the focus of all our diplomatic efforts.

Yours sincerely,

**Ministerial and Treat Official Correspondence Team
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