



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



**Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon
Minister of State (Middle East,
North Africa, South Asia,
Commonwealth and the UN)**

**Prime Minister's Special
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01 March 2024

Cllr Chris Read
Leader of the Council
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Riverside House
Main Street
Rotherham
S60 1AE

Dear Chris,

Thank you for your letter of 19 February to the Prime Minister on behalf of the residents of Rotherham, about the situation in Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). I am replying as the Minister of State for the Middle East.

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. We want 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.

There must be a reduction in civilian casualties. All parties must act within International Humanitarian Law (IHL). We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes.

Israel must obey International Humanitarian Law; 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. We regularly review 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. We respect the role and independence of the ICJ and ask Israel to comply with the decision of the Court. We welcome the Court's call for the immediate release of hostages, to get more aid into Gaza, and its reminder that all parties to the conflict are bound by International Humanitarian Law. During his visit to Israel in January, the Foreign Secretary was clear we want to see an immediate stop which is necessary for all these things. We then want to build towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to fighting.

There is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support to Gaza - 9 out of 10 people in Gaza are living on less than a meal a day. Our focus must be on practical solutions that save lives. We trebled our aid commitment this financial year and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in and open more crossings. Israel must take steps, working with other partners including the UN and Egypt, to significantly increase the flow of aid into Gaza, opening more routes into Gaza and restoring and sustaining water, fuel, and electricity. The Foreign Secretary discussed the urgency of getting significantly more aid into Gaza to alleviate the desperate situation there with Prime Minister Netanyahu during his visit to Israel last month. His 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.

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 are pausing any **future** funding of UNRWA, in line with the United States, Germany, Australia, Italy, Canada, Finland, Switzerland and the Netherlands. 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 future funding to UNRWA has no impact on the UK's contribution to the humanitarian response.

We are getting on with aid delivery through funding multiple implementing partners, including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme and Egyptian Red Crescent Society to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter, and security needs in Gaza. We have supported and will continue to support the United Nations World Food Programme to deliver a new humanitarian land corridor from Jordan into Gaza. 750 tonnes of life-saving food aid arrived in the first delivery in December and a second delivery of 315 tonnes was made last month. We have and will continue to support the Egyptian Red Crescent Society. It has a long standing and trusted role as auxiliary to the Egyptian authorities in the humanitarian field. We have worked closely with our Jordanian partners to airlift four tonnes of essential medicines, fuel, and food directly to the Tal Al-Hawa Hospital in northern Gaza. We expect thousands of patients to benefit.

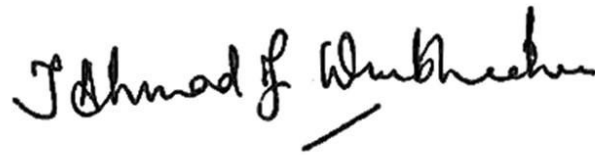
As the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have both said, we are deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah where over half of Gaza's population are sheltering in the area, and the Rafah crossing is vital to ensure aid can reach the people who so desperately need it. We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

The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and I 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, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon in recent weeks. I have held discussions to try to resolve this crisis with representatives from the UN, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, UAE, the Palestinian Authority, Bahrain, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the Organisation of the Islamic

Conference; travelling to New York, Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Qatar, Jordan, UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia to take this action forward.

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.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON

Minister of State

Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict