

PO Box 2278
Ilford
Essex
IG1 9XT

The Rt. Hon. William Hague MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

T: 020 7330 8796
E: info@iengage.org.uk
W: www.iengage.org.uk

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Dear Foreign Secretary,

As we once again see large numbers of civilian deaths in Gaza due to massive Israeli bombardment, we write to raise questions on the statements made to date by Her Majesty's Government and, principally, points you articulated in an interview with Sky News' Dermot Murnaghan last Sunday.

In a statement released at the start of hostilities, and repeated on Sunday, you said Hamas "*bears the principal responsibility*" for the events we are currently witnessing and called for the cessation of rocket attacks against Israel.

With Palestinian casualties vastly outnumbering Israeli deaths, it would seem to us judicious and proper to seek a reciprocal cessation of aerial bombardment by Israel. Given that there are two protagonists in this conflict, should not the onus for an immediate ceasefire be placed on both Hamas *and* Israel? We are puzzled as to why the UK government continues to adopt a very one-sided stance in the Israel-Palestine conflict - a conflict we bear huge responsibility for due to our historical mistakes in the region, not least the Balfour Declaration.

It is undisputed that the people of Gaza have endured a blockade of the most extreme kind for over five years now crippling their access to foodstuffs and other necessities. Delegations of British and European politicians who have travelled to the region have attested to the degradation in living standards and quality of life experienced by ordinary Gazans.

Other recent developments which cannot be ignored in the wider context of events unfolding, is the decision by the Israeli government earlier this month to expand its settlement building programme on illegally occupied Palestinian Territories purportedly to deter the Palestinians from renewing their bid for statehood at the United Nations.

According to a diplomatic source cited by EU Observer, Israel's Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, "threatened to withhold Palestine's tax revenues, to cut off their electricity and water supplies and to flood the occupied territories with new settlements if they go ahead with the UN vote."

These developments, and Israel's extra-judicial killing of Ahmed Al-Jabari last week, form part of the cycle of provocation and counter-response which has long characterized this conflict. We would welcome a clarification on the claim that Hamas "*bears the principal responsibility*" in light of these preceding events.

In a statement issued last week, you said that Israelis "*have the right to live without fear of attack from Gaza*". Have not the Palestinians of Gaza also the right "*to live without fear of attack from Israel*"?

The Prime Minister of Turkey, Tayyip Erdogan, in reaction to these events has described Israel as a "terrorist state" saying "its acts are terrorist acts". Do you agree, Foreign Secretary, that Israel has indeed subjected the people of Gaza to terror and deserves the opprobrium we rightly reserve for those engaged in terrorism?

In response to our letters querying the Government's reticence in applying sanctions against Israel, we have repeatedly been counseled that sanctions are not the way to gain leverage in our negotiations with the Israelis. We note that our government appears to have no such reluctance in seeking out and applying ever more sanctions against Iran. Why does our government act with such unfairness in the region?

Foreign Secretary, you said that "*a ground invasion of Gaza would lose Israel a lot of the international support and sympathy that they have in this situation*".

There are many citizens, in the UK and around the world, who have witnessed with growing disillusionment the Quartet's neglect of Palestinian human rights. Since the moratorium on illegal settlement building ceased, Israel's continued building of illegal Jewish settlements in violation of international law has been met with nothing sterner than verbal criticism by world leaders. The suggestion that Israel has international support and sympathy in this situation is mind-boggling to Muslims all over the world. It is also at stark variance with those who believe that Israel is largely responsible for the lack of progress in the peace talks and for undermining the very prospect of two states with its ongoing programme of expansionist Jewish settlements. The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats only recently argued in favour of a one state solution for the simple reason that two states are further than ever from materializing.

In response to questions on the renewed UN bid for statehood by the Palestinians you argued that "*it would be a mistake*" and that such a move "*would be so divisive among all the people whose help they need to get the peace process going*".

A year on from the failed bid of 2011, the Palestinians have witnessed the signing of a new trade arrangement between Israel and the EU (Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of industrial products), the expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the alarming results of a poll which cites evidence of growing prejudice towards Palestinians by Israelis ('The new Israeli apartheid', The Independent, 23 October 2012).

It is our belief that Her Majesty's Government must take remedial steps to end the peace talks' impasse, a key step being support for the Palestinian bid for statehood. We ask, Foreign Secretary, whether the government will this time recognize the urgency of rescuing the two state solution and vote in favour?

Yours sincerely,

Shenaz Bunglawala