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Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2012

Dear Foreign Secretary,

We are writing in regards to the decision taken at the EU-Israel Association Council on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012 to upgrade bilateral relations under the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

According to newspaper reports the decision was unanimously agreed by EU foreign ministers despite early discussions on the upgrade being suspended after Israel's brutal assault on Gaza in December 2008-January 2009.

It would seem to us incredulous that the EU, and the British Government, would agree to the upgrade in relations in almost 60 areas of co-operation when in recent months, the same have voiced increasing alarm and concern at the continuation of Israel's building of illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and at the rise in settler violence against Palestinian civilians.

The EU's statement on the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the EU-Israel Association Council states the union's pre-requisite that **"the viability of a two-state solution is maintained"** (emphasis in original).

It goes on to state that the terms of the association agreement *"must be based on the shared values of both parties, and particularly on democracy and respect for human rights, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms, good governance and international humanitarian law"* and that *"The upgrade needs also to be, and to be seen, in the context of the broad range of our common interests and objectives. These notably include the resolution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict through the implementation of the two-state solution, the promotion of peace, prosperity and stability in the Middle East and the search for joint answers to challenges which could threaten these goals."*

The EU has previously argued its position on the closure of the Gaza Strip describing it as 'unacceptable and counterproductive' and yet the Union has chosen to respond to Israel's intransigence to its recommendation for the 'full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access' by upgrading trade relations.

Such a move is unhelpful and will do little to convince human rights activists of the EU's benign intent if it is unwilling to use the economic tools at its disposal to match its verbal condemnation of Israel's violation of international law with concrete action.

The failure of the EU in this regard is not an opinion we hold in isolation. It is the view expressed by the Former European Leaders' Group in an open letter to the EU President Hermann van Rompuy and to the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Catherine Ashton, in February 2010. The letter decries the EU's failure to live up to its commitments and criticises its actions as undermining its credibility.

It is estimated that the EU represents 60% of Israel's external trade and it is of particular concern to us that while declarations of condemnation at the stalling of the peace process, of the Gaza blockade, and of growing illegal settlement activity by EU leaders, and the British Government, have been loud and unequivocal, the will to match words with actions is as weak as ever.

The Government does, in its aid and development strategy for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, recognise the impact of that conflict in British Muslims and the risk of radicalisation. It would seem to us somewhat contradictory for Her Majesty's Government to recognise the roots of a problem and yet do little, when the opportunity for action arises, to address those causes through punitive considerations.

In our letter of February 2012 we observed the Government's eagerness in advocating sanctions against Iran whilst choosing to remain silent on the question of sanctions against Israel.

We restate here a sentence from that letter: There is among British Muslims an abiding perception of an unstinting inconsistency and of double standards in our relations with states in the Middle East region.

The decision taken at the EU-Israel Association Council meeting last month, and the British Government's support of it, will do little to quell that perception.

Yours sincerely,

Shenaz Bunglawala