

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

30th June 2010

Dear Foreign Secretary,

Thank you for arranging the response sent by the Near East Group (NEG) of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to my letter dated 1st June 2010.

We are writing again to raise concerns that we feel have not been sufficiently or satisfactorily dealt with in the response from the NEG and which, we hope, will this time receive a reply from your good offices.

Foreign Secretary, the letter reiterates the statement you made to the House on 2nd June in which you repeated the UN's call for a 'full, credible, impartial and independent investigation' into the events of 31st May.

We are a little surprised therefore, that the letter should welcome the announcement by the Israeli government to hold an internal inquiry headed by the former Supreme Court judge Yaakov Tirkel and comprising Lord Trimble as an international observer. The response from the NEG states this is 'an important step forward'.

We doubt that the sentiment will be shared by many not least the Turkish government which has already declared that it has no confidence in the internal inquiry or its likelihood of investigating impartially the events of 31st May. A view echoed by the member states of the South East European Cooperation Process in their joint declaration on 23rd June.

Foreign Secretary, more worrisome is the welcome the announcement has received from the British government in light of your statement supporting an 'independent' investigation and one that merits the respect of the international community. It is disingenuous to support the UN's call for a 'full, credible, impartial and independent investigation' and to then submit to Israel's insistence on an internal inquiry on the basis that further conclusions can be drawn once the conduct of the inquiry becomes clearer.

Foreign Secretary, we cannot concur with your assessment of the internal inquiry as an 'important step forward' and it seems to us false to invoke UN Security Council resolution 1860, on ending the blockade of Gaza, while simultaneously undermining the UN's support for an independent investigation. We would urge that the government should stand behind and fully support the original terms on which an inquiry was to be established as 'full, credible, impartial and *independent*' (emphasis added).

With any inquiry, the terms and references of its remit need to be satisfied before the inquiry gets underway if its conclusions are to be respected and reflected upon. Such was certainly the

case with the former Prime Minister's creation of the Iraq Inquiry under Sir John Chilcot, and is equally applicable, we would argue, in this case.

We would further contend that the inclusion of Lord David Trimble as an international observer on the inquiry panel is unlikely to bolster the credibility of the panel as currently conceived. As you may be aware Lord Trimble recently co-founded an international group of supporters sympathetic to Israel, the "Friends of Israel" group. It would strike us as particularly problematic that an international observer whose record shows a strong degree of partisanship towards Israel should have been selected for the inquiry.

The response from the Near East Group proceeds with welcoming the 'easing' of restrictions on Gaza as announced by the Israeli government on 20th June. This, again, is a violation of resolution 1860 which calls for the '*unimpeded provision* and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance, including of food, fuel and medical treatment' (emphasis added).

Foreign Secretary, it would seem rather futile to us that the government should make noise around the sums donated by Her Majesty's Government in international aid to the Palestinian territories when aid agencies have documented in disturbing detail the corrosive effects of the three year long Israeli blockade on Gaza in their report, 'Failing Gaza: no rebuilding, no recovery, no more excuses'.

Foreign Secretary, the response further notes the government's commitment to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and recognises that 'Israel's long term interests lie in creating an environment where Gaza's economy can flourish'. It goes on to state that the government 'will be strong supporters of those building the institutions of a future Palestinian state while actively exploring with our European partners the scope for further EU action'.

As we stated in our primary letter, the environment congenial to the flourishing of Gaza's economy will necessitate a rethink of the Quartet's current policy on not engaging with the elected government of Gaza; Hamas. It will also necessitate a sharp rethink of the 'West Bank first' policy which experts and aid agencies agree has hindered prospects for intra-Palestinian unity talks and an equitable distribution of international aid to Palestinians living in both the West Bank and Gaza.

Foreign Secretary, we reiterate our concerns on the lack of diplomatic and economic leverage exerted over Israel by the UK and its European partners in recent months as a prelude to positively influencing the Israeli government to incline towards peace talks, to lift the blockade on Gaza and to immediately suspend illegal settlement building in occupied East Jerusalem. While you claim that all Arab-Israeli conflict resolution actions will need to be buttressed by the initiatives of the Obama Administration, we would argue that it also requires the considered and conscientious intervention of the EU as a member of the Quartet.

To claim to be actively exploring scope for further EU action with our European partners without any tangible or demonstrable progress in this regard is to render hollow all promises of being committed to resolving the conflict in the interests of the region and in the national interests of the UK.

We welcome and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Mohammed Asif
CEO